

THE EXPERIENCE OF POVERTY IN A RURAL COMMUNITY: BROUGHTON, NORTH LINCOLNSHIRE, 1760–1835

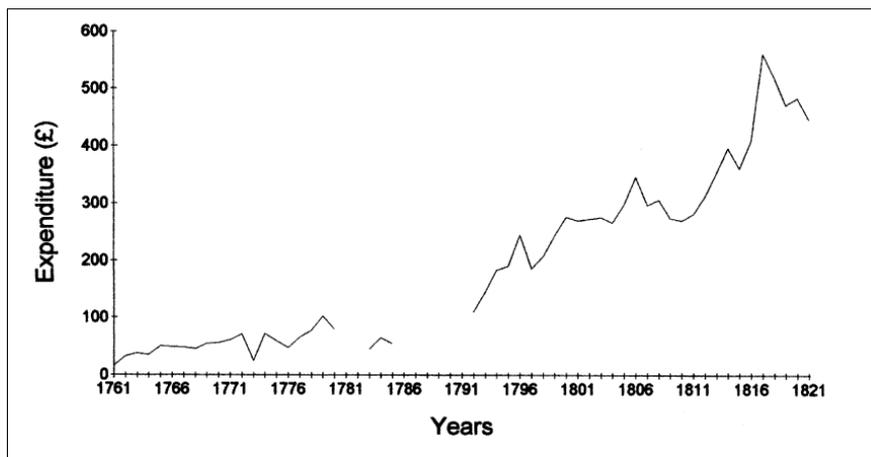
Richard Dyson

Richard Dyson is employed in the motor industry in Oxford. He is currently studying part-time for a PhD at Oxford Brookes University, researching urban poverty in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

Introduction

The Elizabethan Poor Law Acts of 1597 to 1601 codified a national system of relief for the poor that lasted over two centuries until the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834.¹ Each parish in England and Wales was obliged to provide relief for those in poverty who were regarded as deserving of support, chiefly the old, sick and children, provide work for those who were unemployed, and punish those who were unwilling to work. A local rate was to be levied to finance relief and parish officers were appointed to administer the system. Further legislation in 1662 (drawing on previous legislative concern in this area) restricted relief to those who possessed a settlement from the parish concerned; with a few exceptions, settlement was usually gained by parentage (or birth in the case of illegitimate children), marriage for women, apprenticeship, or one year's farm or domestic service.² The old poor law, as it came to be known, had a profound effect on English society, influencing the poor and ratepayers alike, and over the last 20 years historians have written extensively about its effects and about the nature and extent of poverty in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.³ Lincolnshire, however, has been largely neglected by historians, and very little work on the poor law in the county has been produced.⁴ This article will attempt to add to our understanding of this topic. It will concentrate on the last 75 years of the old poor law, 1760–1835, a period that saw much social and economic change with, for instance, the impact of the agricultural revolution and the French wars. A case study will be made of one parish in a relatively neglected part of the county, Broughton in north-west Lincolnshire. Broughton possesses detailed overseers' accounts for the period 1761–1780 and vestry minutes for the 1830s, and these, together with a complete set of parish registers and supporting evidence such as settlement examinations, will allow the identification of trends in poverty over time.⁵ Two main themes will be examined. First, who were the poor in this period: were relief lists dominated by the elderly and women or were other groups, such as married men with families, also represented? Second, how generous was the relief system of the time: was it the main basis of

Figure 1 Broughton relief expenditure 1761-1821.



Note: No data available for years 1781–1782 and 1786–1791.

support for the poor or did they have to seek other means to maintain themselves such as self-help and charity?

Broughton is a large parish, having an area of 7,880 acres in 1831, and lies on the western side of the river Ancholme, just north of the town of Brigg, on a mixture of clay and sandy soils.⁶ The land was not particularly fertile at this time; despite periodic attempts to drain the Ancholme valley, there was still much flooding there while the upland sandy soils contained mainly woods and rabbit warrens. Most of the inhabitants, nevertheless, worked on the land: in 1811, 125 out of 169 families in the village were employed in agriculture.⁷ Much of the arable land in Broughton had been enclosed in the seventeenth century but significant areas of open carr (meadow) and dry commons on sandy soil still existed in 1841 and final enclosure did not take place until 1849.⁸ There were few owner-occupiers, most of the farms were leasehold; in 1786, the date of the first surviving land tax assessment, 49 per cent of land by taxable value was owned by Charles Pelham, the future Lord Yarborough, and 25 per cent was owned by Thomas Shirley. In 1830 the second Lord Yarborough and the successor to Thomas Shirley, Ellys Anderson Stephens, owned similar taxable proportions.⁹ In common with much of rural England, the population of Broughton rose over the period: from an estimated 425 inhabitants in 1721, numbers increased to 729 in 1801 and 915 by 1831.¹⁰ With its mixture of good and bad soil types, a mainly agricultural workforce working on leasehold farms and a rising population, Broughton was similar to other villages in north-west Lincolnshire in this period.¹¹ No single parish is ever completely representative, but Broughton can be considered as reasonably typical of other settlements in the area.

Defining exactly who was poor in Broughton at this time is a difficult process, for poverty is a relative concept and definitions can vary. It could be argued

Table 1 Average numbers of paupers on relief, Broughton, selected years.

Year	1761–80	1803	1813–15
Workhouse	0	8	8
Casual relief	4	30	26
Pensioners	8	22	16
Total	12	60	50

Sources: LAO, Broughton by Brigg Par. 10/3, Parish account book 1761–1781: *Parliamentary Papers*, 1803–4, VIII, 284–85; *Parliamentary Papers*, XIX, 254–55.

that everybody from an agricultural labourer downwards was ‘poor’ to some extent.¹² For the purposes of this paper, however, a narrower definition of poverty is adopted; the poor will be defined as those who were in receipt of some form of relief from the parish, either pensions or casual relief. This definition is by necessity restrictive, excluding those, for example, who received charitable aid or did not have to pay poor rates. People may also have applied for poor relief and have been turned down, thus not featuring in the records. Some categorisation is, nevertheless, necessary so that we can interpret and compare data.

Expenditure and numbers on relief

The amount spent on poor relief in Broughton rose throughout the period, in common with the rest of the country.¹³ Figure 1 shows the average annual expenditure, including administration, for each decade, from 1761 to 1820 (records unfortunately cease after this date).

From an average of £41 per year in the 1760s poor relief expenditure gradually increased to an average of £67 per year by the 1770s. The figures show that there was an apparent fall in expenditure in the 1780s, but data for only three years is available for this decade and it is more likely that there was a continuation of the upward trend. Expenditure certainly rose again from the 1790s onwards, increasing every decade and reaching an average of £415 per year by the period 1811–1820. The peak year for relief was 1817, when £561 was spent. Evidence about how many people received relief is less plentiful, the only figures available are from the 1761–1780 overseers’ accounts and parliamentary surveys from 1803 and 1818.¹⁴ The 1830 vestry minutes unfortunately do not show how many people were in receipt of relief at any one time. The existing data nevertheless shows a significant rise in numbers, as Table 1 illustrates.

This increase both in poor law expenditure and the numbers of people receiving relief, even allowing for population increase, suggests that the level of poverty in Broughton grew over the period, a trend that was common

throughout the country. Nevertheless, the amount of people being relieved still remained small in comparison with the village population. Estimating the total numbers of people dependent on relief is difficult; poor law accounts normally record payments to one member of a particular family only and so dependants, such as children, are not always included. It is possible, however, to make a rough estimate of the total numbers reliant on relief by using a multiplier to allow for other family members and here a nominal figure of 1.8 has been used, representing a typical pauper household size of the time.¹⁵ Estimating Broughton's population at 600 in the 1770s, only about 4 per cent of its inhabitants were dependent on relief at this time. In 1803 the proportion had increased to some 15 per cent of the population, and in the period 1813–1815 it averaged 12 per cent, but the poor still formed only a minority. Many parishes in the vicinity actually had a smaller proportion of their population receiving poor relief. Out of a sample of ten nearby parishes, again allowing for dependants, the average proportion of those receiving relief in 1803 was 8 per cent, and in 1813–1815, 11 per cent.¹⁶ In some southern counties in 1803 it has been estimated that up to 40 per cent of people were dependent on poor relief.¹⁷ Poverty, to reiterate, is a relative concept, and we are only dealing here with those who received parish support; but nevertheless its scale in Broughton and the immediate area, as measured in these terms, must not be over-emphasised.

Recipients of relief

Who were these recipients of relief? Using the Broughton parish registers, a partial family reconstitution of the people who received regular relief was undertaken (those receiving casual relief cannot be included as the 1830 vestry minutes record only a few occasional payments which are almost certainly an underestimate). Individual paupers were linked with their baptism, marriage and burial records, if known, to establish their ages and familial background. Even if people were not born in the parish it was often possible to estimate their ages if they had been married there by using a standard average age at marriage.¹⁸ By this means it was possible to identify around 85 per cent of the paupers named in the records and establish their approximate ages. The numbers involved are nevertheless still small: 35 people for the 1761–1780 accounts and 45 for the 1830–1835 vestry minutes. One must, therefore, be cautious in interpreting these figures and any conclusions can only be tentative. Table 2 gives details of pensioners for the period 1761–1780 by sex and age.

The Broughton relief lists, in common with most English parishes of the period, were dominated by certain groups of people: the elderly (both male and female), younger women and children.¹⁹ Together these groups accounted for 28 people or 80 per cent of the sample of 35 (the ages of five individuals could not be traced). Five of the younger women were widows between the ages of 20 and 39. Typical was Mary Leaning, who with three young children became a pensioner in 1771 when her husband, a labourer, died. There were also six single women, four of whom had illegitimate children. Elizabeth Dial for instance received a pension of 1s. per week for five years after the birth of

Table 2 Age groups of Broughton pensioners 1761–1780.

Ages	Widows	Spinsters	Men	Children
60-plus	7	0	5	-
40–59	0	1	1	-
20–39	5	5	1	-
Under 20	-	-	-	5
Unknown	0	4	1	0
Total	12	10	8	5

Sources: LAO, Broughton by Brigg Par. 10/3, Parish account book 1761–1781; Broughton parish registers.

her illegitimate child in 1769. Five children also received pensions separately or had their board and lodging paid for. Hannah Hollingworth, who was orphaned at the age of four in 1763, was given board and lodging, together with regular payments for clothing, for the next seven years. The largest group, however, was the elderly, defined as those over 60, with 12 individuals receiving regular relief. Thomas Sleight for instance, a married labourer, first appeared in the overseers' accounts in 1772, when he was in his early 60s, receiving £1 2d. for clothing. In 1776 he was given a pension of 3s. a week which was later reduced to 2s. a week after the death of his wife in 1777. Sleight continued to receive this pension, with occasional payments for clothing and 'washing', until his death in 1780. It is noteworthy that only two of the recipients of regular relief were married men under the age of 60. One of these, John Hare, received a pension in the two years prior to his death in 1780 at the age of 47 and may have suffered from ill-health. The other, Amos Hare, was the only married man with a family to receive relief, having a total of 12 children (six dying before the age of five) from 1754 to 1777. Amos Hare, however, only received a pension for short periods, in 1767 and 1771, the rest of the time he was left to fend for himself apart from occasional small cash payments.

Turning to those who received regular relief from 1830 to 1835, a slightly different picture emerges. Table 3 gives details of the pensioners for this period. The elderly, younger women and children had fallen as a proportion of the total, comprising 29 people or 64 per cent of the sample of 45 (the ages of seven individuals could not be traced). There were 14 individuals over 60 years, 14 women below this age (of whom five were widows and five were unmarried mothers) and one child. The number of men below the age of 60 had though increased when compared to the 1761–1780 figures, with 9 individuals or 20 per cent of the total, seven of these nine being married with children. William Foster for instance, a labourer aged 31 with a wife and three young children, was granted a pension of 5s. per week in December 1832.

Table 3 Age groups of Broughton pensioners 1830–1835.

Ages	Widows	Spinsters	Men	Children
60-plus	6	2	6	-
40–59	4	5	3	-
20–39	1	4	6	-
Under 20	-	-	-	1
Unknown	1	3	3	0
Total	12	14	18	1

Sources: LAO, Broughton by Brigg Par. 10/5, Select vestry minutes 1830–1835; Broughton parish registers.

Another labourer with a wife and three children, William Thompson, received a pension of 10s. per week in 1831 and in January 1832, '....applied for further relief and work was found for his family'.²⁰ This increase in the early nineteenth century in the number of men under 60 receiving regular relief, especially those with families, has also been seen in other studies of the period.²¹ Growing rural unemployment may have been one factor. The late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries witnessed significant social and economic change in rural Lincolnshire. Broughton experienced no parliamentary enclosure during this period, with its often adverse consequences, but its population did increase and this, coupled with a lack of alternative work opportunities, may have led to labour surpluses and unemployment. At the same time real wages remained static or increased only slightly, and what work there was became increasingly seasonal.²² All but one of the seven married men were granted relief by the vestry in the winter and spring months, the period when demand for agricultural labour was typically at its lowest.

The effects of this increase in the number of married men receiving relief must not be exaggerated, however: the vast majority of poverty was still caused by what has been termed life-cycle events. As we have seen, at least 80 per cent of those receiving regular relief in the 1761–1780 period and 64 per cent of those in the 1830–1835 period were the elderly, young children, widows or single parents, all distinct life-cycle situations. Orphaned children had to be cared for; old age reduced the earning capacities of both men and women as their physical capabilities diminished; widowhood meant the loss of the husband's earnings and forced many women into poverty, especially if they had young children and little alternative means of support. Those at the bottom of the social scale were usually the most vulnerable although higher status individuals could also be affected. Using the Broughton parish registers, it was possible to trace the occupational

background of 13 pensioners (or their husbands in the case of widows) from the 1761–1780 accounts. Twelve of these had a labouring background but one pensioner, Elizabeth Caister, was the widow of Henry Caister, who was always referred to as 'Mr' in the parish registers and was probably of a higher social status. A wider social range was found in the 1830–1835 vestry minutes. Out of 21 pensioners or their spouses whose occupations could be traced, there were 10 labourers and 4 servants or housekeepers, all low status occupations, but there was also a mariner, a tailor, a baker, a pipemaker, a publican, and even a farmer and a schoolmaster. Ann Shaw, who was granted a pension of 2s. per week at the age of 55 in 1834, was the widow of a publican who had died in 1818. In an 1828 rate valuation she was recorded as renting 35 acres of land worth £15 10s. per annum, a significant sum. Another pensioner, Joseph Wilson, aged 68 in 1831, was a former schoolmaster who in 1828 had rented 19 acres of land worth £6 15s. per year.²³ The relative wealth of both of these individuals in 1828 was clearly insufficient to prevent them requiring support from the parish a few years later.

The duration of poverty varied. Some individuals received relief payments for many years, but for others it was more of a short-term affair, with people moving in and out of poverty as their life-cycle circumstances altered. The 1761–1780 overseers' accounts allow us to calculate the relief histories of some 19 individuals (people whose relief histories occurred at the beginning or the end of the period had to be omitted). It was found that the average duration of a pension was 5.3 years. Some individuals did of course receive pensions for much longer. Elizabeth Baldwin, a single woman, was on the pension list continuously from 1761 to 1780, the end of the accounts, and was described in the parish registers as a pauper when she died at the age of 74 in 1792. Others, however, were given a pension for much shorter periods. Magdaline Markham, widowed in 1754, only received a pension in the two years prior to her death in 1766 at the age of 67.²⁴ Mary Dial, unmarried with an illegitimate child, only received a pension for two years, from 1776, the date of her child's birth, to 1778. Such short periods of relief may, of course, reflect a severe attitude on the part of the Broughton overseers, but they also suggest that poverty, for some, may have been only a temporary experience, forming just one part of their life-cycle. The 1830–1835 vestry minutes unfortunately do not record the duration of relief, and so a direct comparison cannot be made with the earlier period, but there are a few examples of poverty being similarly short term in nature. Mary Sharp, a widow with four young children, was granted a pension of 5s. per week in 1835. By 1841, however, she had established herself as a confectioner, and lived in her own house with three of her children and a 15 year-old dressmaker. She had managed to improve her circumstances despite remaining a widow.²⁵

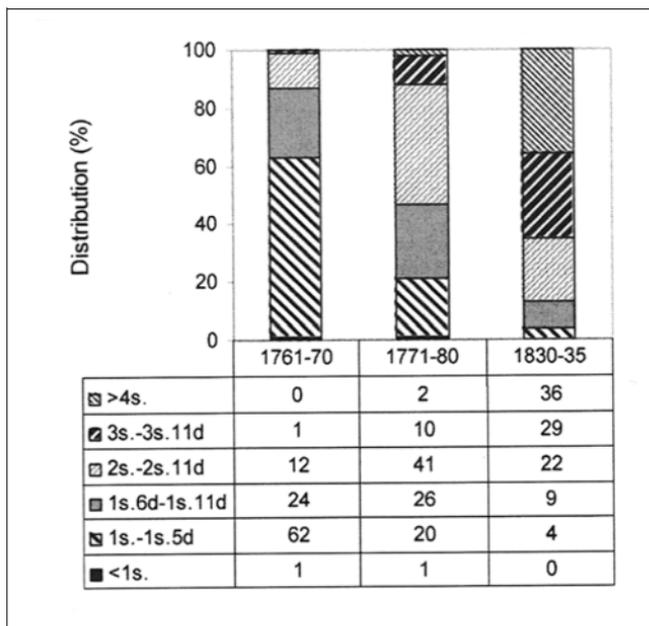
The case of the Dawber family provides a detailed example illustrating these trends. Robert Dawber, a labourer, married Rebecca Balderson at Broughton in 1764, the couple producing five children over the next six years, though only three, two boys and a girl, survived past the age of two. The family first

appeared in the overseers' accounts in 1772, when Robert Dawber was paid £2 6s. 4d. 'for relief', but this seems to have been a temporary period of hardship for there is no further record of them until 1777, when Robert Dawber died, probably still in his late 30s. The parish paid for his burial and granted a pension of 4s. per week to his widow and her three children. In 1778 this pension was reduced to 2s. per week and in 1779, after the parish had paid for the apprenticeship of the girl, Elizabeth, and one of the boys, James, it was paid for only 18 weeks. In 1780 Rebecca Dawber only received 1s. a week for 10 weeks. The overseers' accounts cease at this date but a surviving indenture records that the other son, John, was apprenticed to a miller at Caistor in 1781.²⁶ Rebecca Dawber never remarried, and was buried at Broughton in 1789. The Dawbers almost certainly had a low income; Robert was after all a labourer, but the poverty that Rebecca Dawber and her children experienced in 1777 was caused by a life-cycle event, the death of her husband. This particular phase of hardship only lasted three years, however. As her children were apprenticed out Rebecca Dawber came to need less and less relief herself until by 1780 she received only 10s. for the whole year. We do not know if Rebecca Dawber required further help from the Broughton overseers after this date, as the records cease, but for a time at least she was largely able to support herself. One of her children, John Dawber, later encountered hardship again; in 1784, at the age of 19, he appeared in a Broughton settlement examination, indicating that he had applied for relief there or was likely to become chargeable to the parish. The overseers, however, removed him to Binbrook St Mary's in eastern Lindsey, the last parish where he had been an apprentice.²⁷ The case of the Dawber family thus shows that poverty was not always long lasting in nature, but could be short term and temporary. Hardship could nevertheless re-occur, as the example of John Dawber illustrates, and for some individuals it may have formed part of an intermittent pattern, people experiencing it periodically at different stages of their lives.²⁸

Assessing the generosity of poor relief

How generous was the relief system practised in Broughton during this period? Some historians have argued that the poor law was almost a welfare state in miniature, occupying a central place in the lives of the poor, while others have stated that it was harsh and inflexible, functioning only as a safety net for those facing destitution.²⁹ How did the parish authorities support the poor in Broughton? As was typical in rural areas at this time, the main mechanism for aiding the poor was outdoor relief. Some paupers were given weekly pensions, typically 1s. or 1s. 6d. in the 1760s and 1770s and 3s. in the 1830s. Casual relief was also administered, both in cash and in kind. The parish doled out small cash payments to individuals, gave money towards rent and medical expenses and even paid for funerals. Clothing and fuel in the form of furze (brushwood) or coal was also provided. The Broughton overseers also paid for pauper children to be apprenticed and on occasion even arranged weddings when unmarried women became pregnant to avoid having to support illegitimate children. Broughton also had a small

Figure 2 The distribution of weekly pension payments in Broughton, selected years.



workhouse, built in 1780. Its exact function is not clear; it only had eight occupants in 1803 and 1815 and the vestry minutes for 1837 refer to it as a 'workhouse for widows' so it may have been no more than some form of pauper accommodation.³⁰ It was almost certainly less important for most of the poor than outdoor relief.

In order to begin to quantify the value of the pensions and casual relief that the poor received, Figure 2 gives a breakdown of the different amounts of pensions paid to paupers in Broughton in the periods studied.

Pension payments in Broughton were broadly similar to those of other eastern and southern parishes that have been examined.³¹ In the 1760s the majority of pensions granted were at the level of around 1s. per week; a decade later, however, payments of 1s. 6d. and 2s. per week were becoming more common. Even higher amounts were recorded on occasion: 12 per cent of payments in the 1770s were at the level of 3s. or more per week. By the 1830s pensions had increased considerably in value and over half of all payments were above 3s. per week. There had been significant inflation in the intervening years; it has been estimated that during the Napoleonic War period prices doubled and although they fell again after 1815 they still remained above pre-war levels.³² As in the earlier period there was much variation: the highest pension granted was one of 10s. per week while payments of as low as 1s. per week occasionally occurred.

Such variation in the amounts granted makes evaluation of the relative generosity of pensions rather difficult; some individuals also received casual relief (clothing and fuel for example) that could significantly augment their income. It might be possible to compare pensions to prices, examining what they were worth against a basket of basic necessities such as the cost of bread, fuel, clothing and rent; but evaluating the relative weighting of these items is extremely difficult, given the very limited information we have about the consumption habits of the poor, and no household budgets have survived in north Lincolnshire for either of the periods that we are studying. Perhaps a better alternative is to compare relief payments to the wages of the lowest paid to try to establish how closely pauper pensions matched the average wage of an agricultural labourer. For the 1761–1780 period no wage data can be found for the parish of Broughton itself, but on the nearby estates of Charles Pelham at Brocklesby (who also owned land at Broughton) agricultural labourers were paid an average of 7s. 6d. per week in the 1770s.³³ This figure is much higher than even the most generous pension of the time (4s. per week) but labourers' wages typically provided for a whole family while pensions usually supported one or two individuals only. We need to adjust the data to reflect the actual number of people reliant on a pension. Let us take the example of a labourer with a wife and two small children, solely dependent on his weekly wage of 7s. 6d. It has been estimated that adult males consumed one and a half times as much as women and children.³⁴ Therefore the labourer would consume 2s. 6d. of the total wage himself and his wife and two children 1s. 8d. each. We can thus generalise that adult males would require approximately 2s. 6d. per week to meet their most basic subsistence needs, women and children 1s. 8d. each. It must be stressed that these calculations are heavily reliant on assumptions, especially with regard to family size. Wages remained constant regardless of the size of family and so labourers with larger numbers of children may have had to rely on lower subsistence thresholds than the ones quoted above. The calculations omit any additional income that a labourer might have received from, for instance, cultivating a small plot of land or any work that wives and children might perform. Labourers with families might also have paid different levels of rent to paupers, especially if the paupers were single and lodged in other households. The thresholds can thus only be regarded as a rough guide and any conclusions drawn from them must be regarded as tentative.³⁵

Table 4 compares the median weekly income, including casual payments such as clothing, of different groups of pensioners (single men, single women, children, married couples and family groups) with the estimated basic subsistence minimum using the above assumptions. Only people receiving pensions in the 1770s have been included, pensions were slightly lower in the 1760s and there is no accurate wage data from this decade to make a proper comparison. The data shows that for single men, single women and children their median income from pensions and casual relief was approximately the same as the basic subsistence minimum. A few people did receive much less; one woman, Sarah Belton, only received 1s. per week for example, but the majority nevertheless were probably just

Table 4 Median income of different groups of Broughton pensioners, 1771–1780.

Category	n	Median income	Subsistence level
Single men	1	2s. 9d.	2s. 6d.
Single women	9	1s. 7d.	1s. 8d.
Children	3	2s. 3d.	1s. 8d.
Childless couples	4	2s. 6d.	4s. 2d.
Family groups	4	not avail.	not avail.

Note: For income calculations see text.

Source: LAO, Broughton by Brigg Par. 10/3, Parish account book 1761–1781.

about able to survive on their payments. It must also be stressed that some of these individuals may have received free accommodation and fuel. Poor or common houses are mentioned in the parish accounts as are 'coals and furze for the poor'.³⁶ Childless couples only had a median income of 60 per cent of the subsistence level, however, even though all four couples in the sample were over the age of 60, and would probably have needed to supplement their income by other means. Evaluating the relative generosity of relief given to the seven family groups (families or single parents with children) is more difficult, as they each had different numbers of children. Three unmarried mothers (each with one child) only received 1s. per week, which would have supported their offspring but not themselves. There were three widows, each with three young children, but only one, the previously mentioned Widow Dawber, received anything approaching a reasonable income, 5s. 3d. per week, the other two had to make do with 2s. 8d. and 3s. per week, which would have been insufficient to maintain their families. The 1s. 6d. per week in 1771 that the parish gave to Amos Hare, the only married man with children, would also have been well below what was needed for himself, his wife and four children.

By the period 1830–1835 labourers' wages in the Broughton area had increased to an average of 12s. per week.³⁷ Using the same assumptions as before, that males consumed half as much again as women and children, this would mean that an adult male needed about 4s. per week to meet his basic needs, women and children about 2s. 8d. per week. Table 5 compares the weekly income of Broughton pensioners in the period 1830–1835 with this estimated basic subsistence level. Only pensions are included, as there is no consistent data available on casual payments.

For single men, single women, children and childless couples the median pension granted provided about 70–90 per cent of the minimum needed for

Table 5 Median income of different groups of Broughton pensioners, 1830–1835.

Category	n	Median income	Subsistence level
Single men	7	3s. 0d.	4s. 0d.
Single women	16	2s. 6d.	2s. 8d.
Children	1	2s. 1d.	2s. 8d.
Childless couples	6	4s. 6d.	6s. 8d.
Family groups	15	not avail.	not avail.

Note: For income calculations see text.

Source: LAO, Broughton by Brigg Par. 10/5, Select vestry minutes 1830–1835.

subsistence. This is below the percentage seen in the statistics from the 1770s. However, the data does not include any casual payments and some free or subsidised accommodation for the poor may still have existed; 10 parish houses were recorded in the 1828 rate assessment.³⁸ If a notional allowance is made for these factors the figures are broadly comparable to the previous period. Again some individuals received much less than the subsistence level; two elderly pensioners, William Streets and Elizabeth Hix, were only given 1s. 3d. per week and 1s. 6d. per week respectively. The majority were nevertheless possibly just able to manage on their pension payments. Just as in the 1770s, interpreting the relative position of family groups is more complex and we can again only be subjective. Some payments were clearly inadequate and people would have had to resort to other earning opportunities; for example Mary Sharp, with four young children, and William Foster, married with three children, were both given only 5s. per week. Others, however, received more generous payments almost equalling the average 12s. wage: three married men with families were given pensions of 8s., 9s. and 10s. per week respectively.

Throughout both periods that we have examined the Poor Law in Broughton seems to have acted as a safety net. The majority of single adults and children, and to a lesser extent childless couples, were given just enough relief to live on. Family groups faced more varying degrees of generosity: some were given pensions almost equivalent to a labourer's weekly wage, others received much smaller amounts and would have had to seek other earning opportunities. There seems to be an expectation from the parish authorities that people should earn for themselves wherever possible; full pensions were only given to those, such as children or some of the elderly, who could not support themselves by any other means. Paupers did benefit from the fact that in the vast majority of cases their pensions were regular, paid over continuous periods of months or years, whereas due to the seasonality of farm work labourers did not always receive a constant income. To take just one example,

a labourer on the Brocklesby estate of Lord Yarborough in 1832 was only paid for 269 days when the maximum number of days that he could have worked was 312.³⁹ The level of generosity must not be exaggerated, however. We are only comparing pauper incomes with those of agricultural labourers, themselves relatively poor according to investigations and reports from the period.⁴⁰ The parish authorities could also be harsh on occasion. Parish support for children was not necessarily a guarantee that they would receive it later on in life. In the 1760s Hannah Hollingworth, an orphan, was given board and lodging while a child before being sent away to work as a servant. When, however, she later returned to Broughton and needed assistance, the overseers removed her on the grounds that she had now obtained a settlement elsewhere.⁴¹ The same fate befell John Dawber, who was similarly removed in 1784. The 1830 accounts record that people were sometimes taken off the relief list for no apparent reason and the select vestry disputed the decision of the local JP, Sir Robert Sheffield, to grant one pauper 5s. a week, stating that 'some mis-statement by the applicant must have been made to Sir Robert Sheffield or the above order would not have been granted'.⁴² These reservations aside, it can still be argued that the parish authorities in Broughton supported people when they were in need, whether they were elderly, widowed, or married men requiring support for their families. Relief was seldom generous, was constantly reviewed and often only of a short duration, but it was nevertheless granted to most of those who required it.

Alternative welfare strategies

The poor law was not the sole means of support for people in poverty, however. Alternative welfare avenues such as charity, familial support, self-help and access to common rights were also available at times. It is difficult to quantify exactly the degree of assistance provided by these alternative welfare networks but some basic points can be made about them. Information on charitable activity in Broughton is very limited. Parliamentary surveys of charity from the period make only one reference to an eighteenth-century charity worth about £12 per year for teaching poor children.⁴³ A Reverend Robert Carter, from the nearby village of Redbourne, did, however, leave £10 a year to be donated to the poor of Broughton in the late 1780s.⁴⁴ Thirty-five people were also recorded in 1750 as being given 6s. or 6s. 6d. (almost a week's wages at the time) from the rent of a house left in a will; eleven of these individuals later featured in the 1761–1780 overseers' accounts.⁴⁵ Some degree of charity thus existed in Broughton, but the limited evidence available for it suggests that its scale and consequent effect on peoples' lives was probably small.

Poor people, especially the elderly, may also have received support from relatives. Evidence from pauper letters and household censuses in eighteenth-century Essex has revealed that some elderly paupers received care from their adult children or even lived with them.⁴⁶ No pauper letters or censuses survive from Broughton to confirm this assumption, however. We do know from the parish registers that some Broughton paupers had adult children

living in the village at the same time as they were claiming relief; at least four paupers from the 1761–1780 period and five from the 1830–1835 period. Magdaline Markham, a pensioner in 1765, had a married son living in Broughton in the same year. Ann Shaw, a pensioner in 1834, had a son (a publican) and a daughter, the wife of a blacksmith, residing in the village. In the absence of any definite evidence we can only guess at what support such relatives provided, if any. It could be argued that most married labourers with families would have lacked the resources to look after any aged parents. Evidence of familial support does, though, exist in the nearby village of Willoughton, which lay ten miles to the south of Broughton. An inventory dated 1764 of the possessions of George Lupton, an elderly pauper, survives which reveals that the parish agreed to pay his son in law John Banister 1s. per week ‘to take George Lupton my father in law and to board and supply him with all necessaries’ in return for the use of his goods.⁴⁷ Familial support for the poor almost certainly existed in north-west Lincolnshire, but more evidence is needed to assess its true significance.

Self-help among the poor was more common. Pensioners from both the late eighteenth century and the 1830s who received very small amounts such as 1s. per week would also have had to work to support themselves. Levi Hare was given 1s. per week in 1832 ‘for his youngest child’: presumably he was expected to support his wife and two other young children by himself.⁴⁸ Poor people were also given employment by the parish, lodging other paupers and caring for the sick, for example, and work was often provided for individuals just before or after they were granted a pension. William Crowder was paid by the Broughton overseers for looking after the orphan Hannah Hollingworth from 1762 to 1765 and two orphans from the Fiddle family in 1766, prior to receiving a pension himself in 1768. Anne Brown, a pensioner from 1762 to 1773, was paid 8d. per day for 44 days for serving the masons working on the parish poor houses in 1774. In December 1831 Susannah Sowerby was paid 2s. 6d. per week for looking after two elderly pensioners; a year later she herself was given a pension. On some occasions, therefore, the Broughton overseers used work as an alternative source of support for the poor. People who were still physically able were often provided with work before old age or some other infirmity prevented them from supporting themselves.

As noted above, Broughton still contained some common land, final enclosure not occurring until 1849. Commons and wastes often served as a source of support for the poor, allowing them to cut furze or turf for fuel and graze animals.⁴⁹ There is no specific evidence of fuel-gathering on the common in Broughton, but in the township of Brumby, which lay immediately to the west, a survey from 1787 recorded that the inhabitants had the right to dig for fuel on the common there.⁵⁰ Animals may also have been kept by the poor on the meadows adjoining the River Ancholme. The overseers’ accounts of 1761–1780 record that one pensioner, Widow Leaning, kept a cow, the parish contributing a weekly sum towards its upkeep, probably recognising its value to the widow and her three children. In 1774 William Moody was actually

given £1 10s. to help purchase a cow, which may have helped him to defer claiming relief for he did not become a pensioner until 1778. Broughton's sandy soil also allowed for the creation of rabbit warrens; these were often privately owned by the late-eighteenth century but there may have been poaching opportunities for the poor. The woods on the western side of the parish may have been another source of sustenance, although how much access the villagers had is uncertain. We do know, however, from the diary of Abraham de la Pryme, vicar of Broughton in the late seventeenth century, that people then picked lily flowers in the woods and sold them. This practice was still occurring as late as 1869, according to the Victorian editor of the diaries.⁵¹ The evidence concerning Broughton's commons is limited and rather circumstantial, but the poor nevertheless made some use of them.

Conclusions

Most of the evidence for this study has been confined to two periods, 1761–1780 and 1830–1835: little detailed information is available about the poor in Broughton in the 1790s and the early 1800s, a period of economic change and rising relief expenditure. The gaps in the records also mean that it is not possible to trace the relief histories of most individuals over their complete life-cycle. Nevertheless, it is still possible to establish some basic patterns from the available evidence. Only a minority of the population of Broughton received assistance from the poor law at any one time. The relief lists were dominated by those who were vulnerable because of life-cycle circumstances: the old, the widowed and young children. The numbers receiving relief did rise by the early nineteenth century, in particular extending increasingly to married men with families, but even by 1803 only 15 per cent of the population were given support by the parish. Poverty was not necessarily a continuous state either; some individuals did receive pensions for very long periods, but for others their period of dependence was much shorter and there is evidence that some people moved in and out of poverty as their life-cycle circumstances altered. Those who were deemed to be in need were generally given just enough to survive on, pensions and casual relief for the majority of paupers falling slightly below or equalling the proportionate earnings of a typical labourer of the period. There were exceptions, though, and the Broughton overseers could be harsh at times, cutting off relief or removing people who had been supported in the past but who no longer had a settlement. Alternative welfare avenues were also used by the poor. Charity, familial support, self-help and the resources of Broughton's commons and woods all seem to have been utilised to varying degrees, though the effect of these is hard to assess given the limited evidence available.

The poor law in Broughton thus seems to have operated more as a safety net, available as a last resort, rather than as an all-encompassing welfare system. We have not found the same level of dependency as in more southerly counties like Oxfordshire, where it has been estimated that in 1803 some 40 per cent of the population received help from the poor law.⁵² The limited evidence for other north-west Lincolnshire parishes suggests some similarities

to Broughton, with relatively small numbers on relief and comparable pension levels. More local studies are needed to further explore the poor law and poverty in this area, and only when this is complete will we be able to place the conclusions obtained from Broughton in their proper context.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank Dr Steven King of Oxford Brookes University for his helpful comments on an earlier draft of this article.

NOTES

1. 39 Eliz I, c.1 to c.6, c.17, c.21; 43 Eliz I, c.2.
2. 14 and 14 Chas II, c.12; For a concise explanation of the early Poor Law legislation, see S. King, *Poverty and welfare in England 1700–1850* (Manchester, 2000), 18–23.
3. A small selection of recent literature includes, T. Wales, 'Poverty, poor-relief and the life-cycle: some evidence from seventeenth century Norfolk', in R.M. Smith ed., *Land, kinship and life-cycle* (Cambridge, 1984), 351–74; L. Botelho, 'Aged and impotent: parish relief of the aged poor in early modern Suffolk', in M. Daunton ed., *Charity, self-interest and welfare in the English past* (London, 1996), 91–112; S.R. Ottoway, 'Providing for the elderly in eighteenth century England', *Continuity and Change*, 13 (1998), 391–418. King, *Poverty and welfare*, also provides much of interest.
4. The only recent article has been J. Johnston, 'The management of the poor law in seven parishes of western Lincolnshire 1790–1834', *East Midlands Historian*, 8 (1998), 11–22.
5. Besides the Broughton parish registers, the two main documents used in this study are: Lincolnshire Archive Office, Lincoln, (hereafter LAO), Broughton by Brigg Par. 10/3, Parish account book 1761–1781; Broughton by Brigg Par. 10/5, Select vestry minutes 1830–1835.
6. *Census of England and Wales, 1831*, Parliamentary Papers, 1833, XXXVI.
7. *Census of England and Wales, 1811*, Parliamentary Papers, 1812, XI.
8. N. Lyons, ed., *Enclosure in context in NW Lincolnshire* (Scunthorpe, 1988), 35–41.
9. LAO, LQS/Land Tax/Manley/1786, 1830, Broughton land tax assessments 1786, 1830.
10. R.E.G. Cole, ed., 'Speculum', *Lincoln Record Society*, 4 (Lincoln, 1913); *Census of England and Wales, 1801*, Parliamentary Papers, 1802, VII; *Census of England and Wales, 1831*.
11. Lyons, *Enclosure in context*, 18–19.
12. See, for instance, King, *Poverty and welfare*, 113–17.
13. King, *Poverty and welfare*, 80–2.
14. Broughton by Brigg Par. 10/3; *Abstract of returns relative to the expence and maintenance of the poor*, Parliamentary Papers, 1803–4, VIII (hereafter *Abstract of returns 1803–4*), 284–285; *Abstract of answers and returns relative to the expence and maintenance of the poor in England 1813, 1814, 1815*, Parliamentary Papers, 1818, XIX (hereafter *Abstract of answers and returns 1813–15*), 254–5.
15. King, *Poverty and welfare*, 115. For an earlier period Paul Slack has used a higher figure of 2.0: P. Slack, *Poverty and policy in Tudor and Stuart England* (Harlow, 1988), 174. The figure can only be regarded as an approximation and further research is needed. With more families receiving relief in the early nineteenth century average pauper household size might have increased.
16. The parishes were: Hibaldstow, Messingham, Scawby, Waddingham, Appleby, Burton upon Stather, Roxby, Winterringham, Winterton, and Frodingham. *Abstract of returns 1803–4*, 284–287; *Abstract of answers and returns 1813–15*, 254–5.
17. S. King and G. Timmins, *Making sense of the industrial revolution: English economy and society 1700–1850* (Manchester, 2001), 316–17.
18. For explanations of the process of family reconstitution see Botelho, 'Aged and impotent', 93–4 and Wales, 'Poverty, poor relief and life-cycle', appendix 2, 395–404. Average ages of marriages for the period are given in E.A. Wrigley, R.S. Davies, J.E. Oeppen and R.S. Schofield, *English population history from family reconstitution 1580–1837* (Cambridge, 1997), 134.
19. See, for instance, King, *Poverty and welfare*, 164–170; M.E. Fissell, 'The sick and drooping poor in

- eighteenth century Bristol and its region', *Social History of Medicine*, 2 (1989), 49–81.
20. LAO, Broughton by Brigg Par. 10/5.
 21. King, *Poverty and welfare*, 164–6. Historians have also detected an increase in casual relief over this period; unfortunately there is insufficient evidence to confirm this in Broughton.
 22. See T.L. Richardson, 'The agricultural labourer's standard of living in Lincolnshire, 1790–1840: social protest and public order', *Agricultural History Review*, 41 (1993), 1–19, and M. Overton, *Agricultural revolution in England: the transformation of the agrarian economy 1500–1800* (Cambridge, 1996).
 23. LAO, Broughton by Brigg Par. 13/1, Survey of Broughton 1828.
 24. The fact that Markham was only given relief in the two years prior to her death suggests that even for some of the elderly relief was only granted when there was a clear need.
 25. PRO, HO 107/629/8, Broughton census return 1841.
 26. LAO, Broughton by Brigg Par. 13/3/17, apprenticeship indenture.
 27. LAO, Broughton by Brigg Par. 13/6/25, Settlement examination; Broughton by Brigg Par. 13/7/5, removal order.
 28. See also B. Stapleton, 'Inherited poverty and life-cycle poverty: Odiham, Hampshire 1650–1850', *Social History*, 18 (1993), 339–55.
 29. For a benevolent view of the Old Poor Law, see K.D.M. Snell, *Annals of the labouring poor: social change and agrarian England 1660–1900* (Cambridge, 1985), 104–8. For a more pessimistic interpretation, see S. King, 'Reconstructing lives: the poor, the poor law and welfare in Calverley, 1650–1820', *Social History*, 22 (1997), 318–38.
 30. *Abstract of returns 1803–4*, 284–5; *Abstract of answers and returns 1813–15*, 254–5; LAO, Broughton by Brigg Par. 10/5.
 31. See R. Wall, 'Ageing and well-being in early modern England', in P. Johnson and P. Thane eds, *Old age from antiquity to post-modernity* (London, 1998), 84, for two Lincolnshire examples. See also, King, *Poverty and welfare*, 150–1.
 32. M.J. Daunton, *Progress and poverty: An economic and social history of Britain 1700–1850* (Oxford, 1995), 434.
 33. LAO, Yarborough 5/2/1/5–6, Accounts of Charles Anderson Pelham 1774, 1779.
 34. R. Wall, 'Some implications of the earnings, income and expenditure patterns of married women in populations in the past', in J. Henderson and R. Wall eds, *Poor women and children in the European past* (London, 1994), 318–19.
 35. A good explanation of this method is given in Ottoway, 'Providing for the elderly in eighteenth century England', 405–7. A similar methodology was employed for an analysis of the incomes of single-parent families in the early nineteenth century: see K.D.M. Snell and J. Millar, 'Lone-parent families and the welfare state', *Continuity and Change*, 2, (1987), 387–422.
 36. LAO, Broughton by Brigg Par. 10/5, Overseers accounts for 1763. For evidence from other localities, see J. Broad, 'Parish economies of welfare, 1650–1834', *Historical Journal*, 42 (1999), 985–1006.
 37. LAO, Yarborough 5/2/12/1, Brocklesby and Little Limber farm labourers' wages 1832. See also *Extracts from information received by poor law commissioners 1833. Poor law report*, Parliamentary Papers, House of Commons, 1834, XXX (hereafter *Poor law report*), 299, which found that labourers were earning about 12s. a week in the nearby village of Burton upon Stather.
 38. LAO, Broughton by Brigg Par. 13/1.
 39. LAO, Yarborough 5/2/12/1. The figure of 312 days assumes that a labourer worked 6 days a week throughout the entire year.
 40. See, for instance, the report on the living conditions of labourers in Burton upon Stather, *Poor law report*, 1834, XXX, p. 299, XXXI, 290.
 41. LAO, Broughton by Brigg Par. 13/6/26; Broughton by Brigg Par. 13/7/7.
 42. LAO, Broughton by Brigg Par. 10/5, Entry for 12 March 1832.
 43. *Abstract of the returns of charitable donations for the benefit of poor persons 1786–1788*, Parliamentary Papers, 1816, XVI, 724–5.
 44. LAO, Redbourne 3/1/4/7, Recepted bills for donations to the poor 1787.
 45. LAO, Broughton by Brigg Par. 10/2, Accounts of churchwardens and overseers of the poor 1725–1817.

46. Thomas Sokoll, 'Old age in poverty: the record of Essex pauper letters, 1780–1834', in T. Hitchcock, P. King and P. Sharpe *Chronicling poverty: the voices and strategies of the English poor, 1640–1840* (London, 1997), 127–54.
47. LAO, Willoughton Par. 13/1, Overseers' accounts 1752–1800.
48. LAO, Broughton by Brigg Par. 10/5, Entry for 24 December 1832.
49. See, for instance, J. Humphries, 'Enclosure, common-right and women: the proletarianisation of families in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries', *Journal of Economic History*, **50** (1990), 17–42.
50. LAO, Misc. Dep. 77/10, Copy, part of survey of Brumby 1787.
51. Charles Jackson ed., *The diary of Abraham de la Pryme, the Yorkshire antiquary*, Surtees Society, **54** (Durham, 1870), 137.
52. King and Timmins, *Making sense of the industrial revolution*, 316–17.