II. Providers and enablers and their critics

4. Women, business and the Old Poor Law

Peter Collinge

Widowed in 1817 and with no children to whom she could turn for support or assistance, forty-nine-year-old Elizabeth Dawes (1768–1852) of Lichfield, Staffordshire, could easily have been one of those seemingly ubiquitous women who populated early nineteenth-century towns, surviving on the margins, occasionally reliant on parish relief. Instead, upon her husband's death she inherited his goods and property and was appointed sole executrix of his will.[1] Between then and 1842 she operated independently as a grocer and tea-dealer, and supplied St Mary's workhouse.[2] Far from the trope of a widow in retail existing on a meagre income, her town centre address in St John Street provides an indication of Dawes's status and prosperity. She employed a shop assistant, and by 1841, her household consisted of herself, her niece and a servant, the latter freeing up time for Dawes to focus on her enterprise.[3] In 1851, Dawes, aged eighty-three, was registered as an annuitant.[4] She was not exceptional but representative of many women in business identified in overseers' vouchers.

This chapter presents a new perspective on women and their relationship with parish welfare under the Old Poor Law. Instead of focusing on women as the recipients of relief, it focuses on women as suppliers and conductors of business and their wider agency in commercial environments. Overseers' vouchers from Brampton, Cumberland and Lichfield, Staffordshire, are used as embarkation points to draw businesswomen and retail and Poor Law

[1] SRO, P/C/11, Benjamin Dawes, 1 Sept. 1817.

[2] W. Parson and T. Bradshaw, *Staffordshire General and Commercial Directory* (Manchester, 1818), p. 186; J. Pigot and Co., *National Commercial Directory for 1828–1829* (Manchester, 1828), part 2, p. 717; W. White, *History, Gazetteer and Directory of Staffordshire* (Sheffield, 1834), p. 161; J. Pigot and Co., *National Commercial Directory* (Manchester, 1842), p. 30; SRO, LD20/6/6, Lichfield, St Mary, Overseers' vouchers, E. Dawes, 6 Oct. 1823.

[3] SRO, LD20/6/6, E. Dawes, June–Sept. 1825; The National Archives (TNA, HO107/1008/3, 1841 census; J. Hughes, 'Elizabeth Dawes (1769–1852), grocer, Lichfield, Staffordshire', <thepoorlaw.org/elizabeth-dawes-1769-1852-grocer-lichfield-staffordshire> [accessed 26 July 2021].

[4] TNA, HO107/2014, 1851 census.

P. Collinge, 'Women, business and the Old Poor Law' in *Providing for the Poor: The Old Poor Law, 1750–1834*, ed. P. Collinge and L. Falcini (London, 2022), pp. 107–132.

history together to reveal 'a petit-bourgeois world from which historians and social commentators have traditionally shied away'.[5] The vouchers are used in conjunction with trade directories, newspapers, parish registers, probate documents, census returns and grocers' ledgers. Following an overview of the number of businesswomen in Brampton and Lichfield, case studies show how women conducted business with parish authorities and their connections to wider networks. The case studies explore the channels through which goods reached the poor, frequency of contact with parish authorities, access to commercial intelligence, product ranges and pricing, and business transfers. Despite diverse economic interests, commonalities in approach and long-standing trading connections between businesswomen and individual parishes are revealed. Many of these survived changes in personal circumstances and those wrought by the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act. It is recognized from the outset, however, that in supplying parishes women were never anything more than a numerical minority. In 1828 only ten out of 126 businesses engaged by St Mary's, Lichfield, were headed by women, with a further twelve signing receipts in outwardly 'male' enterprises.[6]

Increasing choice, shop display and levels of service are recurrent themes in research on late Georgian patterns of consumption.[7] Research by Nancy Cox, Claire Walsh, Helen Berry and Jon Stobart et al., often concentrating on metropolitan or expanding industrial towns, has analysed shop design, layout, advertising and sales techniques.[8] The focus on luxury goods, 'exotic' items and the repeat spending power of the middle ranks has added significantly to interpretations and understandings of urban retail practices. What was happening in small market towns and villages has received less

[5] H. Barker, 'A grocer's tale: gender, family and class in early-nineteenth century Manchester', *Gender and History*, xxi (2009), 34–57, at 341.

[6] Overlapping bills mean that some people are unidentifiable.

[7] P. D. Glennie and N. J. Thrift, 'Consumers, identities and consumption spaces in early-modern England', *Environment and Planning A*, xxviii (1996), 25–45; H. C. Mui and L. Mui, *Shops and Shopkeeping in Eighteenth Century England* (London, 1989); J. Stobart and A. Hann, 'Retailing revolution in the eighteenth century? Evidence from north-west England', *Business History*, xlvi (2004), 171–94.

[8] H. Berry, 'Polite consumption: shopping in eighteenth-century England', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, xii (2002), 375–94; N. Cox, *The Complete Tradesman: A Study of Retailing, 1550–1820* (Aldershot, 2000); C. Walsh, 'Shop design and the display of goods in eighteenth-century London', *Journal of Design History*, viii (1995), 157–76; J. Stobart, '"So agreeable and suitable a place": the character, use and provisioning of a late eighteenth-century villa', *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, xxxix (2016), 89–102; J. Stobart, 'Selling (through) politeness', *Cultural and Social History*, v (2008), 309–28; J. Stobart, A. Hann and V. Morgan, *Spaces of Consumption: Leisure and Shopping in the English Town, c.1680–1830* (London, 2007).

attention.[9] Consequently, as Ian Mitchell noted, most retailers 'remain in relative obscurity, often no more than a name in a trade directory or other listing', and, as Stobart remarked, 'It remains unclear how far such modes of shopping extended down the social scale.'[10] How these and other small businesses operated frequently remains a matter of conjecture.[11] Douglas Brown's analysis of supply networks to London's mid-nineteenth-century workhouses contributes significantly to scholarship on poor relief after 1834, but research on where goods were purchased from and the manner in which they were acquired under the Old Poor Law, and on the businesses and their owners is limited.[12] The role of women in such provision and the interplay of work and social activity are particularly obscure.

Although it has long been accepted that very many women worked in family enterprises, in partnerships and as sole traders, particularly in retail, the roles they adopted and the extent of their engagement if their names were not above the door, listed in trade directories or stated in newspaper advertisements are more debatable.[13] Often, specific and shifting contributions are reduced to generalization: women worked alongside male family members but withdrew when circumstances permitted. Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall noted the important financial contributions made by women to business ventures and ultimately their declining significance during the nineteenth century.[14] Pamela Sharpe concurred, while recognizing the diverse effects of capitalism and industrial development on women; declining infant mortality rates and increased life expectancy resulted in the survival of more sons and increased childcare responsibilities for women.[15] All this left less room for formal female

[9] Exceptions include J. Stobart and L. Bailey, 'Retail revolution and the village shop, *c*.1660–1860', *The Economic History Review*, lxxi (2018), 393–417.

[10] J. Stobart, *Sugar and Spice: Grocers and Groceries in Provincial England, 1630–1830* (Oxford, 2013), p. 14; I. Mitchell, *Tradition and Innovation in English Retailing, 1700–1850: Narratives of Consumption* (Aldershot, 2014), p. 59.

[11] D. Kent, 'Small businessmen and their credit transactions in early nineteenth-century Britain', *Business History*, xxxvi (1994), 47–64, at 47; Stobart, *Sugar and Spice*, p. 66.

[12] D. Brown, 'Supplying London's workhouses in the mid-nineteenth century', *The London Journal*, xli (2016), 36–59.

[13] I. Pinchbeck, *Women Workers and the Industrial Revolution: 1750–1850* (London, 1981), pp. 293–5; Mui and Mui, *Shops and Shopkeeping*, pp. 148, 158–9, 204–5; A. C. Kay, 'Retailing, respectability and the independent woman in nineteenth-century London', in *Women, Business and Finance in Nineteenth-century Europe*, ed. R. Beachy, B. Craig and A. Owens (Oxford, 2006), pp. 152–66, at p. 152.

[14] L. Davidoff and C. Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780–1850*, 2nd edn (Abingdon, 2002), pp. 272–315.

[15] P. Sharpe, 'Gender in the European economy: female merchants and family businesses in the British Isles, 1600–1850', *Social History*, xxxiv (2001), 283–306, at 283.

business activity. Important studies by Hannah Barker, Nicola Phillips and Amy Louise Erickson, however, point increasingly at continuity and the complexity of agency exhibited by businesswomen.[16] Analysis of overseers' vouchers builds on this research to reveal the 'fluid nature of gender roles in relation to work' and the consistent, active involvement of women in business rather than decline and withdrawal.[17]

Women and business in Brampton and Lichfield

The market town of Brampton and the cathedral city of Lichfield shared a number of similarities. Both settlements had moderately rising populations. By 1831, Brampton contained 3,345 people and Lichfield 6,360.[18] Each had good overland transport links, with regular services to larger towns and ports: Brampton with Newcastle upon Tyne, Carlisle and Whitehaven; and Lichfield with Birmingham, Nottingham and Liverpool. Passenger services from each town ran daily to London.[19] Both places had schools, almshouses, town or guild halls, the established church and Dissenting chapels, markets and fairs.[20] Retail premises often incorporated small-scale production. Brampton's fortunes rested primarily on agriculture, textiles and brewing. Lichfield, the seat of the diocese of Lichfield and Coventry, had 'excellent local trade' but was 'not remarkable for its manufactures'.[21] Both settlements had their share of the poor. For the periods covered by the vouchers, neither has corresponding overseers' accounts, although an indication of the levels of indoor, outdoor and casual relief are provided in the 1803 parliamentary returns (Table 4.1).

Official sources and trade directories often conceal female involvement in business.[22] Despite their deficiencies, however, trade directory entries for

[16] H. Barker, *Family and Business during the Industrial Revolution* (Oxford, 2017); H. Barker, *The Business of Women: Female Enterprise and Urban Development in Northern England, 1760–1830* (Oxford, 2006); N. Phillips, *Women in Business, 1700–1850* (Woodbridge, 2006); A. L. Erickson, 'Married women's occupations in eighteenth–century London', *Continuity & Change*, xxiii (2008), 267–307; A. L. Erickson 'Eleanor Mosley and other milliners in the city of London companies, 1700–1750', *History Workshop Journal*, lxxi (2011), 147–72.

[17] H. Barker, 'Women and work', in *Women's History: Britain, 1700–1850: An Introduction*, ed. H. Barker and E. Challus (Abingdon, 2005), pp. 124–51, at p. 133.

[18] 'Brampton, Cumberland' <http://www.workhouses.org.uk/Brampton> [accessed 17 Dec. 2019]; *The Victoria History of the County of Staffordshire* (London, 1908), i. 329.

[19] Pigot and Co., *National Commercial Directory for 1828–9* (Manchester, 1828), i. 65; White, *Directory Staffordshire* (1834), p. 162.

[20] Pigot, *Directory*, i, 65; ii, 714; W. Parson and W. White, *History, Directory and Gazetteer of Cumberland and Westmorland* (Leeds, 1829), pp. 413–14.

[21] Parson and White, *Directory Cumberland*, p. 412; Pigot, *Directory*, i. 65; ii. 714.

[22] Pigot's *Directory for 1828–9* and the 1841 census obscure Ann Jobberns's role in a

Table 4.1 Cost of poor relief in Brampton and Lichfield, 1803

	Brampton (township, part of parish)	**Lichfield, St Mary parish**
Poor rate	£408 16*s* 2*d*	£1291 5*s* 1*d*
Money expended out of house	£111 11*s* 1*d*	£757 3*s* 9*d*
Money expended in house	£140 0*s* 0*d*	£405 2*s* 11¼*d*
Law	£67 10*s* 0*d*	£21 19*s* 8*d*
No. relieved outdoor	13	83
No. relieved indoor	28	42
No. of children relieved outdoor	15	59
No. of casual poor relieved	6	63
No. of non-parishioners relieved	63	49

Source: *Abstract of Answers and Returns relative to the Expence and Maintenance of the Poor* (Parl. Papers 1803–4 [C. 175], xiii), pp. 78–9, 474–5.

Brampton and Lichfield do establish the minimum number and proportion of men and women in business and their occupations. Pigot's directory for 1828–9 listed 205 people in Brampton (6.13 per cent of the 1831 population) as having an occupation: 176 men and twenty-nine women (14.15 per cent of business owners).[23] For Lichfield, of the 416 business owners listed (6.5 per cent of the population), women constituted 9.9 per cent (forty-one).[24] Adding to a growing body of research on the vibrancy of retail in market towns and a counterpoint to the fluidity of rapidly industrializing centres as places where women found greater commercial freedom, the Brampton and Lichfield figures are higher than those for Manchester, where businesswomen constituted 7.6 per cent of directory entries in 1828.[25] The range of trading opportunities open for women, however, was significantly smaller than it

Lichfield bakery: TNA, HO107/1008/3, 1841 census; White, *Directory Staffordshire* (1834), p. 156; SRO, LD20/6/6, Thomas and Ann Jobberns, 4 Mar. 1828; LD20/6/7, Ann Jobberns, 7 Apr. 1835.

[23] Pigot, *Directory*, i. 65–6.

[24] Pigot, *Directory*, ii. 715–17.

[25] J. Stobart, 'Gentlemen and shopkeepers: supplying the country house in eighteenth-century England', *The Economic History Review*, lxiv (2011), 885–904, at 901; Barker, *Business of Women*, pp. 7–9, 56. C. van Lieshout noted that women owned 27–30 per cent of all businesses between 1851 and 1911: 'Portrait of a lady: the female entrepreneur in England and Wales, 1851–1911', | LSE Business Review (17 May 2019) <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/businessreview/2019/05/17/portrait-of-a-lady-the-female-entrepreneur-in-england-and-wales-1851-1911> [accessed 15 Apr. 2021].

Table 4.2 Business owners in Brampton and Lichfield in Pigot's *National Commercial Directory for 1828–9*

Business category	Brampton		Lichfield	
	No. of women	No. of men	No. of women	No. of men
Academies, schools and teachers	2	4	9*	6
Builders	0	0	2	9
Butchers	0	0	1	10
Chemists	1	1	0	5
Confectioners	0	0	1	2
Hairdressers and perfumers	0	0	2	7
Libraries	0	1	1	1
Maltsters	0	0	1	21
Millers	1	7	0	0
Milliners and dressmakers	3	0	11	0
Shoemakers and dealers	0	10	1	15
Shopkeepers, tea-dealers and grocers	11	32	5	21
Straw-hat makers	5	0	1	1
Tailors	0	4	2	12
Taverns, inns and public houses	5	32	4	47
Woollen mill proprietors	1	0	0	0
Total	29	91	41	157

* Includes two establishments listed as 'Misses'.

was for men: just eight occupations in Brampton compared to forty-three for men and fifteen against eighty in Lichfield (Table 4.2). Only millinery and dressmaking were demonstrably female but clusters in other 'traditional' female sectors including food, drink and education are evident.

Evidence from vouchers

Overseers' vouchers were retained as part of wider moves to make those in public office more accountable.[26] The evidence they contain opens windows

[26] S. P. Walker, 'Expense, social and moral control: accounting and the administration of the Old Poor Law in England and Wales', *Journal of Accounting and Public Policy*, xxiii (2004), 85–127, at 92–3, 98–9, 101–3.

onto ordinary experiences and encounters, and into businesses and trading networks. Through them, the Poor Law becomes visible in action on a daily basis. The coverage of the 356 vouchers (1759–1842) for Brampton is sporadic.[27] The 3,000 vouchers for St Mary's, Lichfield (1822–38), are more comprehensive in terms of the number and range of suppliers.

Vouchers deal with the legal flow of goods and services, but the reach of the informal economy also needs to be acknowledged.[28] The vouchers do not reveal whether overseers supplemented legitimate orders with more informal transactions for which bills were not produced, or disguised such purchases with bland itemization such as 'expenses laid out'. Despite reports of regular seizures of 'illicit importations' of beverages and tobacco, contraband goods, 'clandestine malt' and adulterated pepper, and subsequent prosecutions, little could prevent the purchase of goods from legitimate businesses whose stock potentially derived from greyer markets.[29] In addition to illegal imports, between dock, customs officer, merchant, agent, wholesaler, customer and ultimate consumer, much was cut, adulterated, thinned or watered down.[30] Grocer Daniel Dickinson of Workington advertised 'dust' tea, 'miserable' cocoa and adulterants including alum and copperas alongside more expensive ranges.[31] Overseers sometimes purchased legitimate, though low quality, goods including malt dust, thirds flour and alum.[32]

Much like male business owners, female business owners engaged in activities ranging from occasionally signing receipts, drawing up bills and collecting money to full enterprise management and near-daily contact with the Poor Law. From the vouchers it is possible to distinguish between part-time contributions and more fully engaged agency stretching over a period of years; and to identify changing demographic structures within small businesses, shifting relationships between individual enterprises and parish overseers, and the sustained 'contribution made by women to the formal economy'.[33] They reveal the wide participation of lower middle-ranking women in business at

[27] CAS, PR60/21/13/1–8, Brampton, Overseers' vouchers, 1759–1842.

[28] B. Lemire, *Global Trade and the Transformation of Consumer Cultures: The Material World Remade, c.1500–1820* (Cambridge, 2018), pp. 138–42.

[29] Seventeen dealers in illegal whisky were convicted in Carlisle in 1824: *Carlisle Patriot*, 10 July 1824, p. 3; 12 Dec. 1818, p. 3; 17 June 1820, p. 3; 18 Jan. 1823, p. 2.

[30] Lemire, *Global Trade*, p. 220.

[31] CAS, DSEN/12/Box 240/4/2, Daniel Dickinson, Curwen Street, Workington, 1800.

[32] SRO, D3891/6/36/4, Robert Wood, 24 Dec. 1830; D3891/6/42/130, Robert Wood, 21 May 1834; D3891/6/34/4/9, Fole Mills, 18 June 1829; D1149/6/2/1/6/2–3, Thomas Wood.

[33] S. Haggerty, 'Women, work and the consumer revolution: Liverpool in the late-eighteenth century', in *A Nation of Shopkeepers: Five Centuries of British Retailing*, ed. J. Benson and L. Ugolini (London, 2003), pp. 106–26, at p. 106.

a newly granular level. In numerous instances the sources allow for networks (defined by Sheryllynne Haggerty as 'a group or groups of people that form associations with the explicit or implicit expectation of mutual long-term benefit') and supply and distribution chains to be established from supplier to shopkeeper to consumer.[34] From them, stories of community and commerce highlight mundane and personal preoccupations. With implications for notions of polite shopping and constructs of customer loyalty, it is also evident that parish representatives shopped in multiple establishments for the same goods while retailers and service providers simultaneously supplied wealthier customers and those in receipt of relief. What providers recognized was that the value in supplying the poor extended beyond immediate financial remuneration. It incorporated a more broadly held view exemplified by physician Anthony Fothergill: 'If you set apart 2 hours every day in prescribing for paupers they will not fail to spread your fame, and bring in opulent farmers and by degrees the neighbour[in]g gentry'.[35]

Overseers' vouchers point to a diverse picture of women in business. Five groups are discernible: those women already known through directories and newspaper advertisements; those recorded as business owners in voucher headings but not listed elsewhere; those running businesses recorded under male names; those assisting in male-owned businesses; and those assisting in female-owned businesses. In Brampton eleven businesswomen are identifiable, seven of whom appear in directories between 1797 and 1829: grocers Mary Routledge, Sarah Oliver and Ann Lawson; milliners and dressmakers Jane Fleming, Jane Clark, Janet Smith and Ann or Jane Bell (the *Universal British Directory* lists only a Mrs Bell while there are vouchers for both).[36] Women in the vouchers but with no directory entry include grocer Jane Davidson; dressmaker Ann Stephens; and Jane Scott, who was paid for funeral expenses.[37]

[34] S. Haggerty, *'Merely for Money'? Business Culture in the British Atlantic, 1750–1815* (Liverpool, 2014), p. 163.

[35] With thanks to Alannah Tomkins for this reference: C. Lawrence, P. Lucier and C. C. Booth (eds), *'Take Time by the Forelock': The Letters of Anthony Fothergill to James Woodforde, 1789–1813* (London, 1997), p. 63.

[36] CAS, PR60/21/13/5/87, Mary Routledge, 14 Oct.–2 Dec. 1819; PR60/21/13/5/112, Sarah Oliver, 21 Dec. 1818; PR60/21/13/5/66–7, Ann Lawson, 24 Sept. 1819; PR60/21/13/5/75, Jane Fleming, 13 Oct. 1819; PR60/21/13/3/48, Jane Clark, 27 Apr. 1795; PR60/21/13/2/47, Janet Smith, 15 Oct. 1782; PR60/21/13/2/20, Ann Bell, 3 Aug. 1780; PR60/21/13/2/12, Jane Bell, *c.*1780; P. Barfoot and J. Wilkes, *Universal British Directory* (5 vols, London, 1790–7), v, appendix, p. 28; F. Jollie, *Jollies Cumberland Guide and Directory* (Carlisle, 1811), p. xxiii; Pigot, *Directory*, i. 65–6; Parson and White, *Directory Cumberland*, pp. 417–19.

[37] CAS, PR60/21/13/5/101, Jane Davidson, 20 Jan.–1 Apr. 1819; PR60/21/13/8/18, Ann Stephens, 17 Oct. [no year]; PR60/21/13/2/55, Jane Scott, 8 Jan. 1783.

Of the seventy-nine women engaged in enterprise named in vouchers submitted to St Mary's, Lichfield, between 1821 and 1834, only sixteen appear in directories between 1818 and 1850. Forty-six women signing receipts on behalf of others were found in nine occupational sectors, with two sectors accounting for over 60 per cent: seventeen in food and drink; and twelve in shops and dealing. Regularity in signing on behalf of others varied significantly between individual enterprises, illustrating habitual involvement for some and the propensity for others to dip in and out of business. As there was no set day when accounts were settled either by the parish or by individual concerns, variations in signing may also reflect who was available at any given time. Coal dealer Mary Sutherns signed ten out of twelve bills between 1823 and 1826 whereas Sarah Holland acknowledged the receipt of money owed to her husband for shaving and cutting the hair of workhouse inmates in just five of twenty-seven bills submitted between 1822 and 1833.[38] Superficially, the thirty-three women who headed businesses occupied traditional economic roles, twenty-four of whom were found in three sectors: shops and dealing, clothing and food and drink. Behind these headline figures, however, a more varied pattern emerges. The women worked in multiple trades: hairdressers, grocers, straw hatters, bakers, flour dealers, nurserymen, shoemakers and dealers, midwives, carriers, coffin-makers, dressmakers, drapers, stay-makers, washerwomen, braziers, innkeepers, beer retailers and spirit merchants. Seven women worked in the butchery trade, three as owners and four as assistants. Six traded in coal; Alice Adie and Elizabeth Wood worked in plumbing and glazing, Mary Danks and Mary Acton in blacksmithing and Mary Naden in building and bricklaying, drawing up bills and signing receipts. The range of businesses was still significantly narrower than for men, but included women engaged in traditionally 'male' enterprises, a situation not peculiar to England.[39]

Supplying the parish

It might be tempting to follow a familiar trope and to hold that the women in the vouchers had been thrust into a working environment of which they were largely ignorant, through demographic misfortune, and that they exited business at the earliest opportunity. Such examples do exist and, while routes into business varied, the women identified in Brampton and Lichfield came largely from existing trading families. They were expected

[38] SRO, LD20/6/6, John Sutherns, 2 July 1823; Benjamin Holland, 1 Oct. 1822.

[39] V. Piette, 'Belgium's tradeswomen', in *Women, Business and Finance in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, ed. Beachy, Craig and Owens, pp. 126–38, at p. 130; O. Hufton, *The Prospect before Her: A History of Women in Western Europe, 1500–1800* (London, 1995), pp. 150, 158–9.

to contribute to the business, learn how to manage both it and the vagaries of the commercial environment, and be equipped to take over or establish new enterprises when circumstances shifted.[40] As a minimum, nearly half the female-run enterprises identified in Lichfield's vouchers came through inheritance. At least eight women had succeeded to 'male' enterprises before the vouchers begin in 1822. Between then and 1831, a further six did so; at least two, butcher Mary Allsop and grocer Elizabeth Budd did so after the vouchers cease.[41]

Early nineteenth-century businesswomen are often depicted as entering commercial arenas to supplement family incomes in transitional or critical periods, operating in temporary capacities until businesses were sold or liquidated, or until men were old enough to take over, whereupon the women withdrew.[42] This sequence of events did happen but the vouchers provide evidence of more sustained business involvement. Coal dealer Mary Francis acknowledged the receipt of money in seven out of thirteen bills submitted by George Francis between 1827 and August 1830 and ten bills between December 1830 and February 1832, when her name alone is found in the vouchers.[43] It was not uncommon for businesses to be inherited by widows, for daughters to inherit in preference to sons and for such businesses to remain in female hands for many years, sometimes with male assistance.[44] The vouchers show women in each stage of the life cycle engaged in business and, in widowhood, extending their economic undertakings from being assistants and keepers of accounts to becoming owner-managers who employed others.[45] Even when acting in temporary capacities and to ensure business survival, stock, customers, orders, accounts, correspondence, advertising, staff, premises and rent all had to be attended to.

The business longevity of women evident in the vouchers cannot be explained by lucrative parish contracts. Like the majority of men in business,

[40] H. Barker and M. Ishizu, 'Wealth-holding and investment', in Barker, *Family and Business*, pp. 38–9.

[41] *Post Office Directory of Birmingham, Staffordshire and Worcestershire* (London, 1850), pp. 276, 278. Of 33 male-owned bakers', butchers' and grocers' shops listed in 1818, 15 were still listed in 1834, 11 had disappeared and 7 were operating under the same surnames but with different forenames. Of these, six had been inherited by males: Parson and Bradshaw, *Staffordshire Directory*, pp. 184–6; White, *Directory Staffordshire* (1834), pp. 156–61.

[42] Piette, 'Belgium's tradeswomen', p. 127; T. Ericsson, 'Limited opportunities: female retailing opportunities in nineteenth-century Sweden', in *Women, Business and Finance*, ed. Beachy, Craig and Owens, pp. 139–52, at p. 142.

[43] SRO, LD20/6/6, Francis, 12 Jan. 1827; LD20/6/7/409, Mary Francis, 10 Feb. 1832.

[44] Barker, *Family and Business*, p. 39.

[45] Piette, 'Belgium's tradeswomen', pp. 127–9.

such connections generated only modest returns.[46] Although contact could be regular, relatively few bills link individual enterprises to parish authorities. In Lichfield, the trading links of Ann Keen (1771–1853) of Market Street to the overseers of St Mary's appear weak (based on surviving bills) but potentially functioned as 'bridges to wider systems of supply' increasing information networks and business opportunities.[47] Covering thirty individual transactions for men's, women's and children's ready-made shoes, Ann Keen submitted just ten bills totalling £10 9*s* 2*d* between August 1822 and January 1829.[48] This continuity with parochial authority and the details in the vouchers, however, flesh out Keen's simple listing in trade directories from 1818 to 1851.[49] The daughter of ironmonger and grocer William Keen, Ann never married. She trained her niece, Catherine Keen, to draw up bills, take payment and run a business.[50] In 1823, Catherine married tobacconist Moses Smith of Newcastle-under-Lyme and continued the enterprise after his death in 1831 while also bringing up two children.[51] Catherine's place in the shoe shop was taken over by J. Beattie (*c*.1825–7) and then by another assistant known only as 'WB' (*c*.1828–9).[52] As with other long-term business owners with family backgrounds in trade, Keen found that supplying the parish of St Mary's did not offer substantial remuneration. There was, however, perhaps something more important; a regular settling of accounts in full, usually within three weeks of the last item on a bill. There were other benefits too. Social capital accumulated through parish connections, including the conferring of respectability and recognition of a business's stability.

Following a practice that ran across all social classes, neither Lichfield's nor Brampton's overseers relied on any single supplier. Those purchasing on behalf of the poor, however, did so almost exclusively within the immediate locality while those of middling status and above purchased in local, regional and metropolitan centres.[53] In Brampton, meat purchased

[46] Brown, 'Supplying London's workhouses', 36–59.

[47] Stobart, *Sugar and Spice*, pp. 77–9: Haggerty, *'Merely for Money'*, pp. 107, 166.

[48] SRO, LD20/6/6, Ann Keen, 14 Aug. 1822; 1 Jan. 1829.

[49] Parson and Bradshaw, *Staffordshire Directory*, pp. 165, 175, 184; W. White, *History, Gazetteer and Directory of Staffordshire*, 2nd edn (Sheffield, 1851), p. 522.

[50] SRO, D20/1/11, Lichfield St Mary, Parish register, 30 June 1823; LD20/6/6, Ann Keen, 14 Aug. 1822.

[51] SRO, BC/11, Will of Moses Smith of Hanley, Staffordshire, proved 7 March 1832; White, *Directory Staffordshire* (1834), pp. 157, 569.

[52] SRO, LD20/6/6, Ann Keen, [1825]; 7 Apr. 1827; 4 Sept. 1828; 1 Jan. 1829.

[53] Stobart, 'Gentlemen and shopkeepers', pp. 885–904; Stobart and Bailey, 'Village shop', 408.

by the parish came from male butchers, while groceries came from Mary Routledge, Sarah Oliver, Jane Davidson and Ann Lawson.[54] This might imply a gendered division of suppliers but both sexes were actively involved in the town's butchery and grocery trades. Nor should it be assumed that female responsibility for domestic food provision led to their knowledge, skills and experience being 'transferred almost without question to their public roles'.[55] Undoubtedly, domestic kitchen activity imparted knowledge of groceries, their storage and uses, but being able to store, sort, cut, clean, grind, mix and weigh products bought wholesale meant that the grocery trade was unlikely to be taken up by someone with little or no experience.[56] Moreover, to be successful necessitated operating within 'a complex network of support' and favourable market conditions.[57] These were not always forthcoming and could easily be disrupted by war, storms at sea, harvest failures and issues surrounding debt and credit.[58] All could be compounded by small customer bases. In Brampton, Mary Graham had twenty-seven customers, Joseph Forster forty-six, Elizabeth Sewell fifty-seven and Isaac Bird 178.[59] As grocers were three times more likely than bakers and four times more likely than butchers to suffer financial misfortune, it is not surprising that between 1812 and 1822 at least three grocers in Brampton succumbed: Thomas Millar, Isaac Bird (although he continued trading) and George Bell.[60]

The issues of Poor Law supplies, business practice and family strategy are brought into close alignment through the partial biographies of three Brampton women. Previous experience enabled many widows to assume

[54] CAS, PR60/21/13/5/1, John Halliburton, Jan. 1811; PR60/21/13/5/70, William Tinling, 4 Dec. 1819; PR60/21/13/5/46, Thomas Parker, 6 Nov. 1818–26 May 1819; PR60/21/13/5/87, Mary Routledge, 14 Oct.–2 Dec. 1819; PR60/21/13/5/73, Sarah Oliver, 22 Dec. 1818–10 May 1819; PR60/21/13/5/101, Jane Davidson, 20 Jan.–1 Apr. 1819, PR60/21/13/5/66–7, Ann Lawson, 24 Sept. 1819.

[55] J. Howells, '"By her labour": working wives in a Victorian provincial city', in *New Directions in Local History since Hoskins*, ed. C. Dyer, A. Hopper, E. Lord and N. Tringham (Hatfield, 2011), pp. 143–58, at p. 155.

[56] Stobart, *Sugar and Spice*, p. 147.

[57] Cox, *Complete Tradesman*, pp. 163, 184.

[58] Stobart, *Sugar and Spice*, pp. 48–9.

[59] Only credit purchases are recorded: CAS, DCLP/8/38–9, Isaac Bird, Brampton, Ledger and day book, 1817–19; DCLP/8/28, Elizabeth Sewell, Brampton, Ledger, 1817–20; DCLP/8/48, Mary Graham, Brampton, Ledger, 1821; DCL P/8/47, Joseph Forster, Brampton, Ledger, 1819–31.

[60] J. Hoppitt, *Risk and Failure in English Business, 1700–1800* (Cambridge, 1987), pp. 93–5; *London Gazette*, 15 Aug. 1812, p. 992; 24 May 1817, p. 1220; 10 Aug. 1822, p. 1327.

control of enterprises following their husbands' deaths, even where no specific instructions were detailed in formal documents.[61] The grocery inherited by Mary Routledge (née Calvert) in 1815 was on Front Street alongside grocer Joseph Forster, printer Robert James, chemist Elizabeth Townley and milliner Rachael James.[62] Robert Routledge's will made no stipulation regarding the continuation or disposal of the business. An enfranchisement deed of 1810 transferring shop premises to 'Robert Routledge of Brampton, grocer, and Mary his wife', however, indicates that prior arrangements may have been made, with Mary considered best placed to continue the business because of her existing 'intimate and active involvement' in it.[63] Mary was in frequent contact with the parish authorities. In a representative voucher of 1819, covering fifty days, purchases amounting to £5 5*s* 1½*d* were made on thirty-four separate occasions.[64] Regular purchases, nearly always in small amounts (except salt), helped to reduce the spoilage of potentially slow-moving stock. Beyond the act of securing provisions, the frequency of visits also suggests that shopping expeditions offered opportunities for sociability and information exchange, both of which engendered business continuity and trust.

Female control of the enterprise was no short-lived affair. Mary Routledge's position was not relinquished when her sons were old enough to take over. In 1815 the Routledges' offspring ranged in age from three to eighteen. In time, Robert the younger became a tax supervisor, William a cleric, George the founder of the eponymous publishing house and John a high constable and relieving officer, while Mary married the son of a cabinet-maker.[65] It was, therefore, daughters Margaret (1799–1880) and Ann (1807–81) who inherited the grocery on their mother's death (*c*.1845). They remained in business at the same address until at least 1873, employing a female servant in the census years of 1861, 1871 and 1881.[66] The minimum

[61] Barker and Ishizu, 'Wealth-holding and investment', pp. 34–8.

[62] Parson and White, *Directory Cumberland*, pp. 417, 418; D. J. W. Mawson, 'Brampton in the 1790s', *Transactions of the Cumberland and Westmorland Antiquarian and Archaeological Society*, lxxiii (1973), 299–316, at 299.

[63] CAS, PROB/1815/W317, Robert Routledge, 1815; DHN/C/166/11, Howard family of Naworth, Enfranchisement deed: Hardhurst, Troddermain for Robert Routledge of Brampton, grocer and Mary his wife, 20 Dec. 1810; Barker and Ishizu, 'Wealth-holding and investment', p. 39.

[64] CAS, PR60/21/13/5/87, Mary Routledge, 3 Dec. 1819.

[65] *Carlisle Journal*, 18 July 1818, p. 3; 21 Jan. 1837, p. 2; 11 Dec. 1841, p. 1; 25 June 1861, p. 4; 18 Dec. 1888, p. 2; South West Heritage Trust, 2891A/PR/1/8, Cotleigh, Devon, Parish burials, 1 Apr. 1875.

[66] TNA, RG 9/3907, 1861 Census; RG 10/5209, 1871 Census; RG 11/5149, 1881 Census; *Post*

life-span of the enterprise in female hands, therefore, was fifty-eight years and testament to their ability to manage stock, meet changing customer demands, keep regular accounts and control the balance between credit and ready money. The Routledge grocery contrasts with more usual depictions of spinsters or widows eking out a 'marginal existence in small, short-lived retail businesses'.[67] Indeed, the income generated enabled the daughters to contribute to a memorial fund, to retire on annuities and to each leave an estate valued in excess of £800.[68]

Mary Routledge supplied the parish of Brampton at the same time as Sarah Oliver (1780–1832), whose grocery business flourished between 1811 and 1825.[69] In 1808, cotton manufacturer Henry Brough Oliver was declared bankrupt and died soon after, leaving Sarah with six dependent children.[70] Resolving Henry's affairs took much time. Dividends were paid in 1811 but in 1826 a notice in the *London Gazette* called his creditors to a meeting to 'determine upon the best mode of proceeding as to a certain sum of money, lately become due to the said Bankrupt's estate'.[71] Sarah may have been engaged in an enterprise separate to that of her husband while he was still alive, but her first recorded appearance in business is in an 1811 trade directory.[72] Her surviving bills evidence active account management: separate ruled columns record purchase dates, items, weights and prices, with 'carried forward' and 'brought over' amounts duly noted; a final total; and the dates accounts were settled together with Oliver's signature. Like Routledge's bills, there is little to suggest that the overseers purchased groceries on particular days, for example, to coincide with markets. Until she transferred her business to Scotch Street, Carlisle, Oliver, like Routledge, was also in regular contact with the parish overseers. In the 139 days between 22 December 1818 and 10 May 1819 purchases totalling £16 13*s* 5*d* were made by Brampton's overseers on seventy separate occasions.[73] After moving to Carlisle, Oliver acted as agent to the London Genuine Tea

Office Directory of Cumberland and Westmorland (London, 1873), p. 817.

[67] R. Beachy, B. Craig and A. Owens, 'Introduction', in *Women, Business and Finance*, ed. Beachy, Craig and Owens, pp. 1–19, at p. 6.

[68] *Carlisle Patriot*, 22 Mar. 1872, p. 1; TNA, RG 11/5159, 1881 Census; National Probate Calendar (1858–1966), 30 Nov. 1881, 6 Dec. 1881.

[69] *Carlisle Patriot*, 27 Oct. 1832, p. 3.

[70] *Tradesman; or, Commercial Magazine*, i (July–Dec. 1808), 271; *London Gazette*, 26 Nov. 1811, p. 2301; *The Monthly Magazine*, xxvi (1808), 492.

[71] *Carlisle Journal*, 7 Dec. 1811, p. 3; *London Gazette*, 25 Feb. 1826, p. 437.

[72] Jollie, *Cumberland Guide and Directory*, p. xxiii.

[73] CAS, PR60/21/13/5/73, Sarah Oliver, 22 Dec. 1818–10 May 1819.

Company between 1822 and 1825. The company supplied 'unadulterated' tea, coffee and chocolate for ready money only. In the *Cumberland Pacquet* Oliver's name appears among the general list of agents supplying the north-west of England.[74] In the *Carlisle Patriot*, however, Oliver's name, in a larger font above those of other agents, helped to distinguish her business in a crowded marketplace; Pigot's directory for 1828–9 listed thirty-four grocers and tea dealers and 111 dealers in sundries in Carlisle.[75] None of the Olivers' children followed their parents into the grocery or textile manufacturing trades, although Elizabeth and Jane became milliners and dressmakers and Sarah a straw bonnet-maker. Arguably, they could have drawn on their mother's commercial experience and may have received training in her enterprise. Another daughter, Mary, married ironmonger Richard Hind.[76] Richard Oliver trained as a doctor before becoming medical superintendent of Bicton Heath Lunatic Asylum, near Shrewsbury.[77] Sarah Oliver died in 1832, aged fifty-two.[78]

The business activity of grocer Jane Davidson (1748–1827) emerged initially through overseers' vouchers and subsequent volunteer research.[79] Although neither she nor her husband appear in directories, nor advertised in newspapers, the business operated until 1827 when the *Carlisle Patriot* announced Jane Davidson's death.[80] Robert Davidson (1742–1816), a widower, married Jane Lovet in Carlisle in September 1779. When he died, only three of their eight children were mentioned in his will. An inventory valued his household furniture at £33 and swine at £2 10*s*. No mention was made of any business, stock-in-trade or book debts, but his personal estate and its administration devolved to his wife 'to be by her freely enjoyed without restraint'.[81] One guinea was left to his eldest son, John, by his first marriage and five pounds to his son, Thomas, by his second. Only after his wife's decease were two of his daughters by Jane to share

[74] *Cumberland Pacquet*, 22 Oct. 1822, p. 3

[75] *Carlisle Patriot*, 17 Dec. 1825, p. 1; Pigot, *Directory*, i. 70–2; Stobart, *Sugar and Spice*, p. 149.

[76] Pigot, *Directory*, i. 71; Parson and White, *Directory Cumberland*, pp. 165, 166; *Carlisle Journal*, 1 Nov. 1834, p. 3; 13 Feb. 1836, p. 3.

[77] TNA, HO107/1992, 1851 Census.

[78] *Carlisle Patriot*, 27 Oct. 1832, p. 3.

[79] J. Hughes, 'Jane Davidson (1748–1827), grocer, Brampton, Cumberland' <https://thepoorlaw.org/jane-davidson-1748-1863-grocer-brampton-cumberland> [accessed 18 May 2021].

[80] *Carlisle Journal*, 20 Jan. 1827, p. 3.

[81] CAS, PROB/1816/WI462A, Robert Davidson, 9 Sept. 1816.

what remained of his effects. Both were already married by the time their father died, Mary to grocer George Hadden and Jane to provision dealer Thomas Hobson. Like others similarly positioned, Robert's death was the moment for Jane Davidson to decide whether she wished to continue in an enterprise in which she might already have been involved or to dispose of it as a going concern.[82]

Between them, Routledge, Oliver and Davidson supplied Brampton's parochial authorities with imported items including tea, coffee, sugar, pepper, tobacco and snuff; and domestic items including candles, soap, starch, barley and flour.[83] These purchases confirm Stobart's view that by the nineteenth century imported groceries had gone 'from being novelties or expensive luxuries … to central elements of the British diet'.[84] Workhouse inmates, however, had little say in what was purchased on their behalf, so, rather than ascribing the attraction of such items to 'emulative consumption', it would be more appropriate to state that the imported items were purchased because they were relatively cheap, or for their stimulant capabilities, the nourishment they offered, their ability to make monotonous fare more appetizing, or as rewards or medicine.[85] Spices, sugar and treacle added flavour to otherwise bland hasty puddings, broths, and oatmeal porridge made with beer or milk – staple foods of Brampton's workhouse inmates and the labouring poor alike.[86] As evidence of rewards or medicine, Oliver's bills itemize tea and sugar for tailors, spinners and the sick.[87]

Cooperation among retailers mattered just as much as competition. To stock their shops, Oliver and Davidson purchased goods from wholesale and retail grocer and spirit merchant Isaac Bird. His premises, 'situated in the most eligible part' of Brampton, consisted of 'a very commodious shop and dwelling house, and large warehouse'.[88] Among his customers were thirteen male and eight female grocers.[89] Davidson made three purchases

[82] Hufton, *Prospect before Her*, p. 229.

[83] CAS, PR60/21/13/5/87, Mary Routledge, 3 Dec. 1819; PR60/21/13/5/73, Sarah Oliver, 22 Dec. 1818–10 May 1819; PR60/21/13/5/101, Jane Davidson, 20 Jan.–6 Apr. 1819.

[84] Stobart, *Sugar and Spice*, p. 1; see also Kay, 'Retailing, respectability', p. 162.

[85] Lemire, *Global Trade*, pp. 179–80; Stobart, *Sugar and Spice*, pp. 7–9.

[86] CAS, PR/60/21/13/8/1, Food and clothing Brampton workhouse, *c*.1765; F. M. Eden, *The State of the Poor: A History of the Labouring Classes in England* (3 vols, London, 1797), i. 60; ii. 58.

[87] CAS, PR60/21/13/5/124, Sarah Oliver, 8 Jan. 1819.

[88] *Carlisle Patriot*, 28 June 1817, p. 1.

[89] CAS, DCLP/8/38, Bird, Ledger, 1817–19; DCLP/8/39, Bird, Day book, 1817–19.

consisting of tea, sugar and tobacco between October 1818 and February 1819. From May 1818 to June 1819 Oliver's purchases, made on thirteen separate occasions, included three types of sugar; two of tobacco; cheese, currants and tea, amounting to £18 2*s* 9*d*.[90] One order in May 1818 was followed by three in June, two in August, one in December, one each in March and May 1819, and four in June. Oliver settled her account in cash and once in tobacco. The narrow range of goods and irregular purchasing patterns in Bird's ledgers indicate that both women resorted to him to supplement stock ordered from their more regular suppliers. This was standard practice: their fellow grocer Joseph Forster used seventy-six different suppliers between 1815 and 1817.[91]

Brampton's vouchers show little variation over time in what was purchased by the overseers, irrespective of the supplier. Neither the range of goods, the quality of shop fittings, levels of display, nor customer service enticed the overseers into purchasing a wider range of goods. What was purchased by Brampton's overseers, however, was consistent with the range of products stocked by other grocers in the town. Indeed, the goods were identical in name and either identical or near identical in price to the flour, soap, starch, blue, candles, tobacco, barley, tea, coffee and sugar sold by Joseph Forster, Isaac Bird, Mary Graham and Elizabeth Sewell to their non-pauper customers.[92]

Of the many women who ran small enterprises from their homes, sharing the space with family activity, little is known. The women furnishing Lichfield's Poor Law authorities, however, occupied premises that separated public from domestic spaces. Attesting to their visibility and acceptability within trading communities, all the businesswomen associated with St Mary's, Lichfield, occupied centrally located premises alongside prominent tradesmen.[93] Many of them were also publicly active in other settings. Butcher Grace Brown, grocer Ann Walker and victualler Jane Godwin were among a cluster of twenty-seven business owners with premises in Sandford Street near the workhouse. Of these, twelve, including blacksmiths,

[90] CAS, DCLP/8/39, Bird, Day book, 1817–19, 27 May, 9 June, 2 Oct., and 24 Dec. 1818; 5 Mar., 4 and 13 Feb., and 29 June 1819; DCLP/8/38, Bird, Ledger, 1817–19, p. 94.

[91] CAS, DX5/1/1–118, Bills and receipts of Joseph Foster, 1815–17; DX5/1/2/1–4, William Routledge's accounts with Joseph Foster, 1815–17; DX5/3/1–14, Accounts from J. and W. Armstrong, carriers for Joseph Foster, 1815–17; DX5/1/5–7, Miscellaneous receipts for Joseph Foster, 1814–17; Abraham Dent made use of around 190 suppliers: T. S. Willan, *An Eighteenth-Century Shopkeeper: Abraham Dent of Kirkby Stephen* (Manchester, 1970), p. 28.

[92] CAS, DCL P/8/47, Forster, Ledger, 1819–31; DCLP/8/38, Bird, Ledger, 1817–19; DCLP/8/28, Sewell, Ledger, 1817–20; DCLP/8/48, Graham, Ledger, 1821.

[93] Stobart, *Sugar and Spice*, p. 92.

maltsters and coopers, conducted business with the overseers in 1828. All three women worked in established family enterprises, Godwin alongside her husband and Brown and Walker with their husbands and sons. There was no attempt by the parish to abandon these commercial relationships when their husbands died because the businesses were now being run by their widows. Close proximity to the workhouse may have been a factor in their ongoing business relationships, together with their ability to meet the regular requirements of the parish.

Jane Godwin, like Julia Wilkinson of Penrith (see Interlude 4), was an innkeeper.[94] One of nine women out of fifty-five victuallers listed in the 1834 directory under 'Hotels, inns & taverns', Godwin (1770–1852), became landlady of the 'well-known and old-established', 'large and convenient' Turk's Head, with its 'spacious yard, coach house, extensive stabling and piggeries', following the death of her husband James (1775–1822).[95] She submitted regular bills to the overseers from 1822 until 1835.[96] In a characteristic bill between 10 May 1829 and 23 March 1831, St Mary's overseers made purchases from Godwin on 107 separate occasions, totalling £4 4*s* 2*d*. All purchases were for the supply of ale except one for gin and two of barm for bread-making.[97] Parish business occupied only part of Godwin's time. In addition to managing the Turk's Head, Godwin was the lessee of a house, garden and piggery and owned another public house, a farm, land, house and gardens, all of which she let.[98] It was as an owner and occupier that Godwin's name appeared in a petition opposed to the construction of the Stafford–Rugby railway.[99] Her name and those of Lichfield's mayor, aldermen, burgesses and charity trustees, however, had been used without consent. The issue reached Parliament, where it was made clear that Godwin and the others did support the scheme.[100] The significance, is not whether Godwin supported the railway or not, but that her name carried sufficient weight for those opposing the scheme to use it and for her to be one of the

[94] See Interlude 4 (M. Dean, 'The Wilkinsons and the Griffin Inn, Penrith') after this chapter.

[95] Parson and Bradshaw, *Staffordshire Directory*, p. 172; White, *Directory Staffordshire* (1834), p. 159; *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 29 Aug. 1835, p. 1.

[96] SRO, LD20/6/6, Jane Godwin, 30 Dec. 1822; LD20/6/7/181, Jane Godwin, 2 Apr. 1831.

[97] SRO, LD20/6/7/181, Jane Godwin, 2 Apr. 1831.

[98] SRO, B/A/15/422, Lichfield, St Michael, Tithe award, 1845; B/A/15/562, Lichfield, St Mary, Tithe award, 1848.

[99] *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 5 May 1838, p. 2; 23 Jan. 1841, p. 2.

[100] J. H. Barrow (ed.), *The Mirror of Parliament* (London, 1839), ii. 1673; J. Herapath, *The Railway Magazine*, vi (London, 1839), p. 284.

few named individuals in the parliamentary petition. After quitting the Turk's Head around 1835, Godwin moved first to Queen Street and then to Dam Street, where by 1851 she was living off independent means with her daughter and two granddaughters.[101]

Between 1822 and 1832 St Mary's overseers purchased similar goods from at least thirteen grocers supplemented by produce from the workhouse garden.[102] This reduced the risk of failures in supply lines, over-reliance on one supplier or the inability of one individual to supply the regular quantities required by the parish.[103] These were important considerations when feeding workhouse inmates thrice daily. Ann Walker (1772–1832) worked alongside her husband, Richard (1770–1827).[104] Using the knowledge gained, including drawing up bills, she could assess the creditworthiness of customers and extend credit or refrain from doing so accordingly.[105] Ann took control of the business, assisted by her son, also named Richard (d.1838), after her husband's death, when the bills record 'settled the above for Ann Walker', or 'settled this account for Ann Walker'. Supplying the workhouse with sugar, tea, tobacco, snuff, black pepper, sugar, cardamom, ginger, salt, oatmeal, starch and flour, the Walkers stocked an almost identical range of goods at the same or near-identical prices to those of their competitors, including Thomas Woodward.[106] Except for flour by the sack and salt and oatmeal by the stone, nearly all goods were supplied in small quantities. Following her husband's death and revealing Ann's continued access to markets and timely commercial information, the range of goods did not diminish, and prices remained comparable to her male competitors. Between 28 June and 19 September 1828 a total of sixty-eight items were purchased on forty-five occasions costing fractionally over £5 18*s*.[107] The most frequently purchased items were sugar (sixteen times) and tea (thirteen), followed by salt (six) and snuff (four). Starch, pepper and potash were each ordered three times; vinegar, blue, flour, tobacco and oatmeal, twice each, but there were also

[101] TNA, HO107/1008/3, 1841 Census; HO107/2014, 1851 Census.

[102] P. Collinge, '"He shall have care of the garden, its cultivation and produce": workhouse gardens and gardening, 1780–1835', *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, xliv (2021), 21–39. White listed 33 grocers, shopkeepers and tea dealers in 1834: White, *Directory Staffordshire* (1834), pp. 158, 160–1.

[103] Brown, 'Supplying London's workhouses', 48, 51.

[104] SRO, LD20/6/6, Richard Walker, 2 July 1823; D27/1/9, St Michael, Burial register, 29 Apr. 1827; 19 Dec. 1832.

[105] M. Finn, *The Character of Credit: Personal Debt in English Culture, 1740–1914* (Cambridge, 2003), p. 97.

[106] SRO, LD20/6/6, Thomas Woodward, 6 Oct. 1825.

[107] SRO, LD20/6/6, Ann Walker, 19 Sept. 1828.

single purchases of bread, pipes, mustard, ginger, cardamom, coffee, treacle and a bath brick. Repeat purchases and settlement of accounts established reciprocal trust. Walker's regular contact with the parish replicated that of Thomas Woodward who, between 2 July and 6 October 1825, supplied St Mary's with a total of fifty-seven items on twenty-three separate occasions.[108] Ultimately, whether male or female, parochial officers overwhelmingly relied on traders they knew, because they were consistent in their supply of goods and demonstrated effective business management.

John (1790–1833) and Grace (née Smiles) Brown (1780–1876) supplied meat to St Mary's overseers during the 1820s and 1830s. For most of the time, the enterprise was in John's name. From the vouchers, Grace's involvement appears initially to be casual and part-time, fluctuating according to family circumstances and its ability to employ male and female servants.[109] As such, it corresponds to accounts of female participation in the workplace more broadly but obscures her long-term involvement. She signed receipts on behalf of her husband, took over after his death and worked in the business alongside her sons George (b.1812), John Samuel (b.1815) and William (1817–47).[110] She first appeared in a trade directory in 1835.[111] In 1841, she and John Samuel were recorded in the census as butchers, and in the same year she thanked the 'nobility, clergy, gentry and inhabitants of Lichfield' for the favours conferred upon her since her husband's death, announcing that the business would now be carried on in conjunction with John Samuel Brown; the announcement ended with 'Grace Brown and Son'.[112] The following year the Browns advertised for an apprentice.[113] Long-term business involvement turned into sole ownership and then into a partnership. The butchery trade, however, was not Brown's only source of income. Indicating her status as one of Lichfield's wealthier citizens, she also leased five parcels of land and owned two houses, which she let.[114] Brown's property portfolio enabled her to exercise a specific civic right. Despite female disenfranchisement in

[108] SRO, LD20/6/6, Thomas Woodward, 6 Oct. 1825.

[109] TNA, HO107/1008/3, 1841 Census.

[110] SRO, LD20/6/6, John Brown, 27 June 1824; LD20/6/7/60, Grace Brown, July 1830; LD20/6/7, Grace Brown, 20 Jan. 1836.

[111] Pigot and Co., *National Commercial Directory, Derby–South Wales* (Manchester, 1835), p. 417.

[112] TNA, HO107/1008/3, 1841 Census; *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 16 Jan. 1841, p. 2.

[113] *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 11 June 1842, p. 2.

[114] SRO, B/A/15/422, Lichfield, St Michael, Tithe award, 1845; B/A/15/562, Lichfield, St Mary, Tithe award, 1848. See also D. Eastwood, 'Rethinking the debates on the Poor Law in early nineteenth-century England', *Utilitas*, vi (1994), 97–116, at 107.

the Great Reform and Municipal Corporations Acts of the 1830s, in 1843 she cast four votes (out of a maximum entitlement of six stipulated in the Sturges Bourne reforms) in a contested election for the assistant overseer of St Chad's.[115] Of twenty-four other women also eligible to vote (compared to 395 men), twenty-two did so. By 1851, Brown had returned to Windley, Derbyshire, where she had been born. There, as head of the household and assisted by her son George, she farmed 100 acres, and employed five labourers and two live-in servants.[116] She was still listed as a farmer in 1861 but by 1871 had become an annuitant.[117] At her death, aged ninety-six, she was living once again in Lichfield with her son John Samuel.[118]

Close geographic proximity to St Mary's workhouse was significant to those who supplied it. Out of 126 suppliers recorded in 1828, seventy-nine lived in twelve streets, fifty-nine of whom lived in just five: Sandford Street, Bird Street, Market Street, Boar Street and Tamworth Street. One such supplier was widow Ann Hill (1748–1833), a butcher and the landlady of The Scales, Market Street.[119] With her name heading the vouchers throughout, all bills were drawn up by her and, apart from some settled by her sons William and James, she acknowledged receipt of the money.[120] As with Grace Brown, the admission of sons into the business did not result in Hill's withdrawal from it. They worked within a business that Ann Hill controlled. Her directory entry as a butcher in addition to that of victualler in 1828 merely confirmed an occupation she was already engaged in. Like all butchers' bills submitted to St Mary's, those sent by Ann Hill were short, usually listing between two and four items. In a sample of ten bills settled quarterly between April 1823 and June 1827, Hill delivered 992¾ pounds of beef, five legs and five shins of beef, one leg of veal, one unspecified amount of mutton and nine gallons of beer wort.[121] The combined cost amounted to £25 1*s* 2*d*.

Property auctions held at The Scales offered Hill opportunities for information exchange, the gathering of commercial intelligence and

[115] SRO, D15/4/11/9, 'W. Gorton's Notes at 1841 Parliamentary Revision Courts', with polls for assistant overseer of poor, St Chad's parish, 1843 and 1848; S. Richardson, *The Political Worlds of Women: Gender and Politics in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Abingdon, 2013), pp. 100–2.

[116] TNA, HO107/2144, 1851 Census.

[117] TNA, RG9/2507, 1861 Census; RG10/3578, 1871 Census.

[118] TNA, RG10/2915, 1871 Census; SRO, D29/ADD/6, St Chad, Lichfield, Parish register, 23 March 1876.

[119] SRO, LD20/6/6, Ann Hill, 29 June 1824; *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 17 Dec. 1814, p. 3; Parson and Bradshaw, *Staffordshire Directory*, p. 173; Pigot, *Directory*, ii. 716.

[120] SRO, LD20/6/6, Ann Hill, 25 Jan. 1828; LD20/6/7/231, Ann Hill, 18 July 1831.

[121] SRO, LD20/6/6, Ann Hill, 1 Apr. 1824–28 June 1827.

social activity.[122] These and other links embedded her further in Lichfield's commercial life. One was the credit network of shoemaker Francis Willdey. At his death in 1824, Willdey owed nearly £300 to forty-one people including £29 17*s* 7*d* to Hill, the second highest amount after the £48 3*s* 11*d* Willdey owed his brother-in-law.[123] This was a large amount, considering that no individual bill submitted by Hill to St Mary's overseers' exceeded four pounds, but should not be taken as evidence of Hill having been exploited by a male trader; she owed Willdey a comparable £29 1*s* 6*d*. Another network to which Hill belonged, as did Ann Keen, James Godwin and John Brown, was Lichfield's Association for the Prosecution of Felons.[124] The Association's ninety-four male and six female members sought to protect their businesses and property through financial assistance and to uphold the law for the wider community. At the same time, subscribers accrued social capital.[125] For Hill, membership also brought custom: in 1816 the society's annual meeting was held at The Scales. The sociability attached to such events 'kept business and information flowing in a world where economic and social values were becoming a matter of exchange'.[126]

Business orientated, literate, numerate and at times politically active, Lichfield's businesswomen were able to participate in its commercial environment because, as Haggerty argued in a different context, there was a 'relatively homogeneous, commonly understood and conformed-to business culture' in which gender mattered less than a trustworthy reputation.[127] As the acknowledged successors to established businesses well regarded for reliable delivery (evidenced in the vouchers), their civic engagement and localism instilled business confidence further. They were, after all, as likely to meet St Mary's parish officers in the street as in their business premises.

Contracts and prices

The simple listing of items in grocers' bills submitted to overseers rarely gives any indication of variety or quality. Standard goods, however, carried almost identical prices irrespective of the supplier, male or female. Two ounces of tea

[122] *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 17 Dec. 1814, p. 3.

[123] SRO, LD15/12/72, Creditors of the late Francis Willdey, undated.

[124] *Lichfield Mercury*, 29 Nov. 1816, p. 1.

[125] M. Koyama, 'Prosecution associations in Industrial Revolution England: private providers of public goods?', *The Journal of Legal Studies*, xlii (2012), 95–130, at 115.

[126] J. Mee and C. W. Smith, 'Georgian fascination with conversation' (2018) <www.york.ac.uk/news-and-events/news/2018/research/georgian-fascination-with-conversation> [accessed 10 Feb. 2021].

[127] Haggerty, *'Merely for Money'*, p. 26.

and one a quarter pound of sugar in Lichfield cost 5*d*; half a pound of black pepper 2*s*; and six pounds of treacle 2*s* 6*d*.[128] Price consistency is indicative of the use of contracts, a keen awareness of competitors' prices, collusion or arrangement.[129] Awarding contracts through competitive tendering was widespread before it became a requirement in the Poor Law Amendment Act.[130] Prior to 1834 in Brampton, John Ewart submitted a bill along with a tender for goods; in Dalston, Cumberland, Matthew Routledge tendered for oatmeal, barley, butter and straw, while the overseers of Kingswinford, Staffordshire, sought tenders for flour, butcher's meat and 'malt and hops of the best quality'.[131] Where contracting was in place, both before and after the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act, female and male suppliers had to conform to the same processes. Usually this meant suppliers brought samples and tenders to the overseers in person and provided sureties. In the immediate aftermath of the new law, Brampton's and Lichfield's overseers did not use the opportunity to exclude women from supplying parishes, even though food and drink could have been supplied wholly through male traders. By continuing to purchase from men and women (in 1835 Ann Jobberns supplied flour and Grace Brown beef to St Mary's), overseers were keen to be seen to be spreading their patronage among the more substantial traders who stocked the right mix of goods, while also returning money to those who funded the Poor Law.[132] The use of more than one supplier also enabled parish officials to keep abreast of changing commercial information where, in instances of 'poor quality', non-sanctioned price increases or failure to deliver, they could respond by switching suppliers.[133] No trader could afford to be complacent.

Making use of multiple suppliers for the same goods raises questions about the significance of customer loyalty in late Georgian England. Many private shoppers patronized retail outlets based on price, quality, variety, display and level of service, aspects that have garnered much attention

[128] SRO, LD20/6/6, John Budd, 31 Mar. 1825; Thomas Woodward, 6 Oct. 1825; Richard Walker, 5 July 1826; Ann Walker, 28 June 1828.

[129] Brown, 'Supplying London's workhouses', 54.

[130] Edmonton, Middlesex, *Morning Advertiser*, 18 June 1807, p. 1; Oxford, *Oxford University and City Herald*, 30 Aug. 1817, p. 3; Liverpool, *Liverpool Mercury*, 17 July 1818, p. 3; Kendal, *Westmorland Gazette*, 19 Jan. 1833, p. 1; Kingswinford, *Aris's Birmingham Gazette*, 20 May 1833, p. 1.

[131] CAS, PR60/2/13/60, John Ewart, 14 Apr. 1796; SPC/63/6, Matthew Routledge, 1827; *Aris's Birmingham Gazette*, 20 May 1833, p. 1.

[132] Brown, 'Supplying London's workhouses', 37; SRO, LD20/6/7, Ann Jobberns, 6 July 1835; Grace Brown, 20 Jan. 1836.

[133] Stobart, *Sugar and Spice*, pp. 84–5.

from historians of consumption practices.[134] Similarly, those tasked with purchasing for institutions adopted a strategy in which lowest cost was not always the determining factor and, conversely, offering the lowest prices was no guarantee of securing business against the competition. The awarding of local contracts and orders took account of a variety of issues. Not the least of these was the need to balance the self-interest of ratepayers (who constituted the membership of vestries) against the moral responsibility many felt towards those who were unable to help themselves or who faced critical transitions in circumstances.[135] Vestries and overseers, therefore, used their discretion to find community-based solutions to the national issue of poverty. They were fully cognizant that by supporting local enterprises they were reducing the number of potential occasions when and the number of people who might otherwise seek parish relief.[136] Women (especially widows) could be particularly problematic in this respect; while some had 'money and assets', others, poverty-stricken and without male support, might 'make demands on the public purse'.[137] In response, some leeway could be extended to businesses inherited by widows.[138] In Brampton, Oliver and Routledge occasionally charged the overseers a ½*d* or 1*d* more than Isaac Bird and Joseph Forster charged their non-pauper customers for goods of the same name and weight. Although price variations could be the result of competition, inflation, or irregular or scarce supplies, it could also be interpreted as evidence of the relative inability of women to secure the best prices because they lacked access to current commercial information.[139] Additional outlay not absorbed by reducing profit margins would compel businesswomen to pass such costs on. Most of the prices charged by Oliver and Routledge, however, were identical or near identical to those of their male counterparts, which makes it reasonable to assume that overall they had access to the same commercial information as men. If overseers chose to reject fractionally higher supply costs on occasion, an independent ratepaying family could easily become a dependent non-paying

[134] Walsh, 'Shop design', 157–76; A. Hann and J. Stobart, 'Sites of consumption: the display of goods in provincial shops in eighteenth-century England', *Cultural and Social History*, ii (2005), 165–87.

[135] R. Pearson 'Knowing one's place: perceptions of community in the industrial suburbs of Leeds, 1790–1890', *Journal of Social History*, xxvii (1993), 221–44, at 228.

[136] Brown, 'Supplying London's workhouses', 54–5.

[137] Hufton, *Prospect before Her*, p. 221.

[138] The appointment of assistant overseers, discussed by Tomkins in Chapter 5 in this volume, also suggests a proactive response to the possibility of poverty.

[139] Haggerty, 'Women, work and the consumer revolution', pp. 116–17.

one, exacerbating further fragile community finances and relationships.[140] Accepting occasionally higher prices was thus a pragmatic response to a transitional stage in the relationship between businesswomen and parish overseers. Workhouses still needed regular supplies, and widows, especially those with dependent children, needed an income.

Conclusion

For those in search of casual relief, welfare provision was often short-term and the response of parochial officers appears frequently to have been reactive.[141] From the supply perspective, however, especially in parishes with workhouses, there were more predictable costs. In response, vestries and traders developed a system that anticipated requirements while also being alive to changing circumstances. Through the lens of overseers' vouchers, it is apparent that the Old Poor Law influenced what traders produced, stocked and retailed. The regular, consistent purchase of goods, often in small quantities, is also evident in Elizabeth Spencer's chapter on clothing. The active participation of businesswomen in this system points to an environment of economic cohesion in which women were doing far more than struggling along with little or no assistance to eke out a sparse living. Those who also purchased goods from fellow tradespeople, as Oliver, Davidson and Hill did, strengthened their positions, in the process becoming fully integrated into distribution and provision networks.[142] Negotiating the line between providing for themselves and their families and being required to maintain creditworthiness, they adapted and extended their entrepreneurial activities, maintained their independence and forged identities beyond the domestic. In doing so, they also extended the meaning of female business ownership beyond the purely physical and the legal to become familiar and essential figures in their communities.

Although some of the women supplying parishes ultimately divested themselves of their enterprises, the inheritance of business, property and/or investments saw none of those cited here retreat into rentier-funded retirement in the immediate aftermath of bereavement. Only in very old age did Elizabeth Dawes and Grace Brown withdraw from business; Davidson, Hill and Keen all died in harness. Jane Godwin, however, was

[140] One-fifth of ratepayers were likely to receive poor relief at some stage: S. Williams, *Poverty, Gender and Life-Cycle under the English Poor Law, 1760–1834* (Woodbridge, 2011), pp. 79, 162–3.

[141] S. King, *Poverty and Welfare in England, 1700–1850: A Regional Perspective* (Manchester, 2000), p. 5.

[142] Cox, *Complete Tradesman*, p. 179.

the exception. After trading on her own for thirteen years, she enjoyed an independent income for the next seventeen. Through family, assistants, co-partners or servants, the children of Routledge, Davidson and Oliver, Brown, Hill, Walker and Godwin all benefited from the training, experience, employment, income, security or support provided by their mothers' business endeavours. They, in turn, inherited enterprises, established their own, married local traders or moved into the professions.

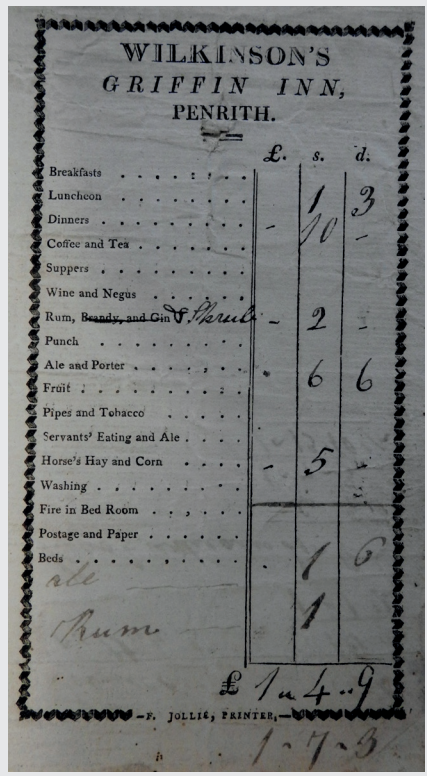
Despite their sometimes piecemeal nature, overseers' vouchers have provided the opportunity to see beyond the simple listing of businesswomen in trade directories and to consider how women conducted business. Long-term survivors established, maintained and renewed business and social contacts and adopted solid working practices. In all the enterprises, newspaper advertising was the exception rather than the rule, but pricing structures and product ranges matched those of male traders, showing that women had access to timely commercial information. Indeed, numbers aside, there was often little to distinguish female traders and their businesses from their male counterparts in terms of the goods and services provided, prices charged and individual levels of engagement with parish authorities.

Interlude 4

The Wilkinsons and the Griffin Inn, Penrith

Margaret Dean

Licensed premises were the locations of much parish business (see the Preface, Introduction and Chapter 4). In Penrith, the Griffin, a large coaching inn containing kitchens, parlour, dining rooms, lodgings,


WILKINSON'S
GRIFFIN INN,
PENRITH.

	£.	s.	d.
Breakfasts			
Luncheon		1	3
Dinners	-	10	-
Coffee and Tea			
Suppers			
Wine and Negus			
Rum, ~~Brandy, and Gin~~	-	2	-
Punch			
Ale and Porter		6	6
Fruit			
Pipes and Tobacco			
Servants' Eating and Ale			
Horse's Hay and Corn	-	5	-
Washing			
Fire in Bed Room			
Postage and Paper			
Beds		1	6
ale		1	
Rum			
	£	1	4 - 9

F. JOLLIE, PRINTER,

1 - 7 - 3

Figure 4.1 Pre-printed bill for expenses at the Griffin Inn, Penrith, submitted to the overseers of Threlkeld, *c.*1800, CAS, SPC 21/8/11/13

cellars, brewhouse and stables, was such a place.[1] A pre-printed bill for board and lodging submitted to the overseers of Threlkeld shows that, alongside accommodation, the inn offered breakfasts, luncheons, dinners and suppers, beers, wines and spirits, pipes, tobacco, washing, and corn and hay for horses (Figure 4.1).

From at least the 1790s the Griffin was run by the Wilkinson family. John Wilkinson married Julia Harrison (1768–1824) at Greystoke in 1789. They had six children, four of whom survived into adulthood. After John's death in 1801, Julia settled his estate and the lease of the Griffin was offered for a term of nine years.[2] In 1811, however, Jollie's directory listed Julia Wilkinson as the innkeeper of the Griffin.[3] She appears to have been the only female proprietor of the inn before it ceased trading at the end of the nineteenth century.[4]

As well as running the inn, Julia administered the estate of her father after he died in 1818. Applications regarding the letting of his house and thirty acres in Greystoke were to be submitted to her at the Griffin.[5] The following year, local newspapers reported that Julia Wilkinson, 'late of the Griffin', had married Isaac Hodgson of London at a ceremony in Greystoke. Hodgson was a slop merchant, a trader providing clothes and bedding to sailors.[6] Despite the announcement, no such marriage had taken place. The *Carlisle Patriot* issued a retraction, claiming it to be the 'invention of some wiseacre' whom they wished to detect and expose.[7]

Julia died in 1824.[8] The Griffin remained in the Wilkinson family but was again offered for lease.[9] None of Julia Wilkinson's children followed her into the licensed trade. Her eldest son, Harrison (1790–

[1] For further details see M. Dean, 'Wilkinson's Griffin Inn, Penrith', The Poor Law <https://thepoorlaw.org/wilkinsons-griffin-inn-penrith> [accessed 13 Apr. 2021]. The blog post is made available under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC 4.0); *Cumberland Pacquet and Ware's Whitehaven Advertiser*, 8 June 1779, p. 1.

[2] *Carlisle Journal*, 17 Jan. 1801, p. 1; 7 Feb. 1801, p. 1.

[3] Jollie, *Cumberland Guide and Directory*, p. xxxi.

[4] *Cumberland and Westmorland Herald*, 11 Mar. 1893, p. 4.

[5] *Cumberland Pacquet and Ware's Whitehaven Advertiser*, 8 Sept. 1818, p. 3.

[6] *Carlisle Patriot*, 31 July 1819, p. 3; *Cumberland Pacquet*, 3 Aug. 1819, p. 3.

[7] *Carlisle Patriot*, 14 Aug. 1819, p. 3.

[8] CAS, PR5/11, Greystoke, St Andrew, Burial register, 1813–90.

[9] *Carlisle Patriot*, 17 Dec. 1825, p. 1.

1830), joined the Royal Navy before settling as a surgeon in Hounslow, Middlesex.[10] In his will he instructed his trustees to divide the majority of his estate between his siblings Thomas (1797–1860), Mary (1791–1848) and Ann (1800–1865).[11] The Griffin made up part of his estate. Dorothy, the eldest daughter of his sister Mary, was the beneficiary of the profits arising from the Griffin Inn.

[10] *London County Directory* (1811), p. 1566.

[11] TNA, PROB11/1792/175, Will of Harrison Wilkinson of Hounslow, Middlesex, 3 Nov. 1831.