

This work is protected by copyright and other intellectual property rights and duplication or sale of all or part is not permitted, except that material may be duplicated by you for research, private study, criticism/review or educational purposes. Electronic or print copies are for your own personal, non-commercial use and shall not be passed to any other individual. No quotation may be published without proper acknowledgement. For any other use, or to quote extensively from the work, permission must be obtained from the copyright holder/s.

THE TREATMENT OF POVERTY

IN

NANTWICH AND CREWE

1730-1914

by

FAYE EDWARDS

M. A. THESIS

1990

© COPYRIGHT

NO ORIGINAL MATERIAL HEREIN TO BE USED WITHOUT PERMISSION

CONTENTS

	Page
<u>ABSTRACT</u>	
<u>INTRODUCTION</u>	i
<u>CHAPTER ONE</u>	1
The operation of the old Poor Law in Nantwich, Monks Coppenhall, and Crewe.	
<u>CHAPTER TWO</u>	67
The charities of Nantwich, Monks Coppenhall, and Church Coppenhall - their development from the seventeenth century to 1837.	
<u>CHAPTER THREE</u>	118
The operation of the new Poor Law in Nantwich Union.	
<u>CHAPTER FOUR</u>	267
Trends in pauperism between 1834-1914 in Nantwich Union, Cheshire, England and Wales.	
<u>CHAPTER FIVE</u>	397
Voluntary endeavour to combat poverty in Crewe and Nantwich 1830-1914.	
<u>CONCLUSION</u>	559
<u>APPENDIX</u>	
<u>BIBLIOGRAPHY</u>	

LIST OF FIGURES

	page
1. Pie chart to show the different types of poor relief granted in Nantwich in 1803	22
2. Pie chart to show the different types of poor relief granted in Cheshire in 1803	22
3. Graph to show the numbers of people receiving poor relief in Church Coppenhall Monks Coppenhall, Crewe and Nantwich in 1803, 1813, 1814, 1815	26
4. Graph to show the total amount of money expended for the maintenance of the poor in Monks Coppenhall, Church Coppenhall, Nantwich and Crewe in 1776, 1784, 1803 1813, 1814, 1815	28
5. Graph to show the amounts of money collected and distributed by the Overseers of the Poor and the Constables in Monks Coppenhall 1795-1837	32
6. Graph to show the number of householders claiming against the Beam Heath Estate in January 1833	81
7. Graph to show the number of apprentices placed out to different trades under Hodgkin's Charity between 1800-1808	96
8. Pie chart to show the targets of charitable donations 1613-1834	106
9. Table to show the number of children in the workhouse on 1st December 1849 and 1st December 1850	223
10. Pie chart to show the composition of children in Nantwich Workhouse for the half year ending 21st April 1860	228
11. Table to show the number of children between the ages of 3-15 attending day school who were supported on out-relief on 1st July 1859 and 1869 in Nantwich	230
12. Table to show the number of children under 15 in Nantwich Workhouse	248
13. The proportion of paupers relieved in the workhouses of Cheshire 1st July 1860	276

	page
14. The amounts spent on in-maintenance in Cheshire Unions - year ending Lady Day 1863	279
15. The percentage of paupers who received relief in the workhouses of Cheshire Unions 1st January 1861	280
16. Pie chart to show the composition of inmates in Nantwich Workhouse 1851	296
17. Pie chart to show the composition of inmates in Nantwich Workhouse in 1881	296
18. Graph to show the ages of inmates in Nantwich Workhouse 1841-1881	299
19. Pie chart to show the various occupations of inmates in Nantwich Workhouse in 1851	304
20. Pie chart to show the various occupations of inmates in Nantwich Workhouse in 1861	304
21. Pie chart to show the various occupations of inmates in Nantwich Workhouse in 1871	304
22. Pie chart to show the various occupations of inmates in Nantwich Workhouse in 1881	304
23. Map to show where inmates of Nantwich Workhouse came from in 1851	308
24. Map to show where inmates of Nantwich Workhouse came from in 1861	309
25. Map to show where inmates of Nantwich Workhouse came from in 1871	310
26. Map to show where inmates of Nantwich Workhouse came from in 1881	311
27. The ages of inmates in the workhouses of Cheshire - 1901	325
28. Reasons why able-bodied adults applied for out-relief in Cheshire. Quarter ending Lady Day 1840	335
29. Total cost of in and out relief for each Union in Cheshire - year ending Lady Day 1842, and % increase/decrease compared to 1841	338
30. Graph to show the amount expended on poor relief by Parishes in Nantwich Union for year ending 25th March 1852	344

	page
31. Graph to show the number of paupers per thousand receiving relief in each Cheshire Union on 1st January 1861	354
32. Graph to show the number of paupers per thousand receiving relief in each Cheshire Union on 1st January 1863	357
33. Graph to show the % increase/decrease or paupers relieved in Lancashire and Cheshire during the cotton famine 1862-1864	358
34. Graph to show the ages of males and females in receipt of out-door relief because of sickness in Cheshire - December 1869	362
35. Graph to show the ages of males and females in receipt of out-door relief because of sickness in Nantwich - December 1869	363
36. Pie chart to show the types of diseases relieved on out-relief in Nantwich Union	364
37. Pie chart to show the Parishes from which recipients of out-door relief came from in Nantwich Union. Year ending Lady Day 1895	377
38. Graph to show the reasons why outdoor relief was granted in Monks Coppenhall Nantwich and Church Coppenhall- half year ending Michaelmas 1892	378
39. Pie chart to show the length of time people received relief in Nantwich Union - year ending September 1907	389
40. Pie chart to show the areas on which money was spent by the Nantwich Churchwardens	421
41. Pie chart to show which Nantwich Charities were augmented by William Sprout's legacy	422
42. Pie chart to show the purposes to which charitable benevolence was targeted in Nantwich	429

	page
43. Graph to show the number of Friendly Societies established in Cheshire between 1794-1831	440
44. Pie chart to show the targets of the charitable contributions of the L. N. W. R. at Crewe in 1907	478
45. Pie chart to show where contributions to the Hospital Sunday Fund originated from	487
46. Pie chart to show the chief sources of income for the Crewe Cottage Hospital - 1905	493
47. Graph to show the number of Friendly Societies established each decade in Cheshire and Crewe 1800-1900	507
48. Chart to show the various Friendly Societies existing in Cheshire and Crewe in 1870 and the proportion of the population that were members.	515
Photograph A	177
" B	181
" C	218
" D	219
" E	549
" F	551
" G	552

A B B R E V I A T I O N S

C.R.O.	Cheshire Record Office
C.P.L.	Crewe Public Library
K.U.L.	Keele University Library

ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the various ways in which poverty was treated in Crewe and Nantwich from the operation of the old Poor Law to 1914 when a complex combination of private and public effort existed in an attempt to ease the plight of the Poor. The operation of the old Poor Law is examined to establish who received relief and to identify the attitudes of the Overseers. The form in which relief was granted is discussed, together with an examination of the growing 'crises' in relation to the cost of relief. Comparisons are made with Cheshire and England and Wales as national fears are compared with the reality of local experience.

Charitable endeavour is then examined in the context of what groups were targeted for relief and what form relief took. The scale of relief is compared to that emanating from the Overseers and the problems associated with a lack of finance in the face of growing need is examined.

The impact of the new Poor Law on Nantwich Union is assessed in the context of developments within the County and Country as a whole. The application of the Amendment Act is examined in the context of whether or not the Commissioners aim of uniformity was achieved and conditions in the workhouse are compared with findings in The Lancet. Trends in pauperism are highlighted and assessed in the light of national policies.

Finally the role of charitable endeavour, self-help, and paternalism are examined between 1834-1914 emphasis being placed on how fund raising dominated working class leisure pursuits as sustained injections of cash were needed. The growing need for state intervention is examined together with the attitude of the Friendly Societies to this policy which threatened their very existence.

Introduction.

Many questions suggest themselves about the treatment of poverty in Nantwich and Crewe from 1730 to 1914 because while various studies and general histories have been written on the area, the subject of charitable endeavour, the treatment of the poor by the authorities and how societies generated by the working class themselves helped the poor, has been neglected. Instead, emphasis has been laid exclusively upon the emergence of the railways, with a concentration on technical detail rather than on the lives of the people who made up these two closely adjoining communities. In the case of Nantwich stress is usually placed on the town's role in the Civil War rather than on its later history and while both towns lie only a few miles apart, representing the two largest communities in Nantwich Union, no comparison has been made of the treatment of the poor in the two towns.

Previous histories have also tended to concentrate on a relatively small span of time. In order to compare the operation of the old Poor Law with the new and to assess whether or not the relief system was in crisis before the Amendment Act of 1834 was introduced, and to then examine the work of the new Poor Law Union, together with charities and friendly societies, allowing a more complete overview of the provision for the poor, a long time scale has been adopted.

J. Hall's History of Nantwich,¹ the standard history of the town, although now over one hundred years old, contains much useful information about the development of Nantwich, from Saxon and Norman times to the nineteenth century,

emphasising the role played by the leading families and the church. Hall deals with the main charities operating in the town and their original benefactors and supporters,² but does not deal in any great depth with the operation of the Poor Law in Nantwich, or the causes and extent of poverty in the town. Hall's history is solely concerned with Nantwich and so no comparisons are drawn between the old market town and the new railway town of Crewe which, by 1883, was assuming some importance. In E. Garton's Nantwich in the eighteenth century³ the condition of the poor is looked at over a relatively short span of time, and again no comparisons are drawn with other local areas. Similarly in N. Sedgwick's study of Wistaston⁴ a small parish on the outskirts of Nantwich, the village's history is considered from Domesday to the nineteenth century. However in the section on the relief of the poor analysis stops at approximately 1828, and so the implications of the effects of the introduction of the new Poor Law are not considered. Sedgwick concentrates on the role of the overseers, frugally providing a wide variety of services, apart from just relieving the poor. The overseer's role is stressed as being one where he was to prevent the poor from becoming a burden on the rates, but again there is no examination of the causes of poverty in the area or comparison in terms of the degree of poverty with any other local area.

In D. Sylvester's A History of Cheshire⁵ Nantwich's role as a market town and road centre in the eighteenth century is emphasised in a general history of the county from prehistoric times to the present day. Crewe's role as a railway town is

studied from the point of view of the impact of the railways in Cheshire in the nineteenth century, but there is no consideration of their social impact or what poverty was present in the two towns, or how it was treated. J. H. Hodson⁶ has considered how towns like Nantwich were dominated by several families of the landed gentry, and has examined what influence they exercised locally. He considers the part played in Nantwich by Roger Wilbraham and his concern with the problem of the poor and the establishment of a workhouse.⁷ Similarly G. Scard⁸ has concentrated on the bond that existed between the landlord and tenants, many of whom could often be classed as in poverty, emphasising the strong mutual relationship that often existed between them. He quotes the example of Lord Cholmondeley, who regularly contributed to certain Nantwich charities like the Nantwich Clothing Club and the Nantwich National School.⁹ Undeniably the charitable support offered by the rich formed one aspect of the provision provided locally for the poor. However, in order to gain an overall indication of the magnitude of the problems being faced and to gauge how the local community sought to help relieve them, this form of relief must be seen in the context of the other sources of help on offer at the time and not in isolation. One also has to question what proportion of the gentry were actively involved locally, and to what extent their involvement was permanent or fleeting, and consideration has to be given to the growing number of wealthier townsfolk and businessmen who were assuming positions of authority in the area.

Although Crewe has assumed an ever dominant position since the coming of the railways, compared to Nantwich, it has not attracted the attention it deserves. W. H. Chaloner's The social and economic development of Crewe 1780-1923¹⁰ deals not only with the technical details of the railway but with the social policy adopted by the railway company. Passing mention is made to Nantwich in reference to the fact that there were often disputes between the two towns regarding representation on the Nantwich Board of Guardians, and a feeling that Nantwich paupers were being supported at the expense of Crewe ratepayers. In time of depression people from Crewe received relief from Nantwich workhouse, but the underlying links between the two communities needs to be emphasised more. Crewe was prosperous but there were times of depression, and a bad winter could mean having to apply for relief, either in Nantwich workhouse, or to receive outdoor relief. The paternalistic policies of the railway company were of great importance in shaping the social structure of Crewe, but other individuals, and societies created by the people themselves, also have to be considered as they too showed an interest in the welfare of the poor.

R. E. Tigwell¹¹ also emphasises the role of the railway company, and the welfare policy it adopted towards its workers in the new railway town. She also draws attention to the gradual transference of the initiative for providing social amenities from the railway company to the local council under pressure from the former. The responsibility for providing for the poor, and of providing the basic necessities

for the town, was obviously subject to changing attitudes in the early twentieth century, as the legacy of the nineteenth century was found to be unsuitable. In order to appreciate fully how this affected the lives of the people more research is needed into who initially identified the need, accepted responsibility for its provision, and conveyed this to the people. This in turn leads to more questions relating to how and why the need changed over the years, and how people responded to these changes - either with more aid, or a wish to terminate what previously had been provided, to set up new organisations, or transfer responsibility to others.

No historian has examined fully over a long period of time the interrelated growth of poor relief, charities, friendly societies, the co-operative movement, the impact of paternalism from a large company and the self-help exhibited by the people themselves. A fine balance existed within the local community between the official public response to poverty, private philanthropy, working-class self-help and casual relief. This interdependence within the local community, was crucial to those involved in the struggle to survive the desperate periods in their lives which might last for many years. Such an appreciation of this interdependence must underly any study of the provisions made for the poor, indicating how the private and state responses to poverty developed alongside one another as the need arose. This in turn will allow a comparison to be made with trends emerging nationally at the time.

To trace the differing needs of a largely rural community existing with small market towns and growing urban communities is also justified on the grounds that the people of Monks Coppenhall,¹² Crewe and Nantwich, have throughout the centuries moved freely between the two settlements, aware of, if not actually experiencing, the diversity of philanthropic endeavour available. By comparing the two communities over the last two centuries I would hope to see the development of philanthropy not in isolation, but as evolving and responding to change as the communities grew, and such a comparison will provide opportunity to trace different responses from the poor themselves, who no matter how poor always showed a capacity to help one another in times of hardship. The problems concerning the poor encountered by Nantwich and Crewe differed because of their contrasting economic and social conditions, and yet their joint experiences reflect the problems encountered in so many urban and rural areas in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In Nantwich the treatment of the poor was based around a combination of individual charitable endeavours and poor relief, and after 1834¹³ became the centre of the Poor Law Union for this part of South Cheshire.

When tracing the development of charities in Nantwich I hope to gain an insight into their ethos, and that this will help to reveal how well private and public efforts worked alongside one another, and if there was any attempt at co-ordination between the institutions. For example was there any transfer of inmates to the workhouse if the private charity felt it had discharged its duty fully. Did private

charity, as compared with the Poor Law institutions, see itself fulfilling certain needs and operate selective distribution of alms, rather than trying to satisfy all the poverty that existed in the area?

Nantwich had enjoyed commercial prosperity down the centuries.¹⁴ As far back as Roman times, salt production was important to the growth of the town, and by Norman times Nantwich was the second largest inland producer of salt after Droitwich in Worcestershire. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries Nantwich became an important local market town and a staging post on the main London to Chester road, prompting the question whether there is any evidence of the charitable relief of migrants passing through the town, and if vagrants from other areas were a problem. A weekly cattle market was held in the town, to which many Welshmen came to trade, and a tanning and dyeing industry developed from the fourteenth century onwards, together with cheese making and other dairy products.

Nantwich had two famous 'Hospitals' that can be seen as two of the first examples of charitable endeavour in the town. St. Nicholas' Hospital, founded by the first Norman Baron of Wich-Malbank and situated in Hospital Street, gave hospitality to travellers and alms to the needy poor. This religious house continued for nearly 500 years, until it was dissolved in the reign of Edward VI, when Sir Edmund Wright's Alms-houses were built on the same site in the seventeenth century.¹⁵ St. Lawrence's Hospital first mentioned in 1354, was a hospital for lepers and had three beds for poor sick people.

Coincidentally it stood on the site of the Almshouses later built in Welsh Row.¹⁶ So in the middle ages the western and eastern entrances to Nantwich were dominated by two institutions catering for the poor and needy.

By the sixteenth century Nantwich was regarded as Cheshire's second town because of its strategic position in the road network, which encouraged the development of the town's commercial basis. Industries and trades developed rapidly and contributed towards the town's prosperity, including shoemaking, bone lace making, glovemaking (which employed a great number of poor, many of whom were incapable of following any other employment);¹⁷ hatmaking, frame-work knitting, button making, weaving, spinning and related crafts such as dyeing, carding, stocking and knitting were also carried on.¹⁸ In 1850 shoemaking employed one third of the population.¹⁹ The cotton factory established in 1789 was worked chiefly with child apprentices of both sexes, from workhouses and foundling hospitals in various parts of the country²⁰ including Ireland.

In comparison with Nantwich, Crewe is a relatively new settlement, the population increasing rapidly only in the 1840s when the railway workshops moved from Edge Hill, Liverpool, to Crewe. In fact the landowners of Nantwich contributed to the sudden development of the new town of Crewe when, under pressure from the canal owners, they refused to sell their land to the railway company. As a result the new railway line and engine works were re-routed to the north taking advantage of cheap land passing through

Monks Coppenhall. In 1841 the contract for the erection of the works was signed, and 200 cottages for the workers were built - the first evidence of paternalism in the town. It was only with the growth of this new industrial colony that problems in the community relating to local government and social welfare arose on an unprecedented scale, and the Board of the Grand Junction Railway endeavoured to solve these problems themselves, motivated by a combination of self interest and necessity. They confronted the fact that in the old rural township of Monks Coppenhall (around which the modern Crewe developed) there was no system of local self government, or charitable endeavour on a scale large enough to deal with the new problems created when between 750-900 people from all over Liverpool were moved to live closely together in the countryside of South Cheshire.²¹

In the course of this study a comparison will be made between the existence of poverty prior to the coming of the Grand Junction Railway in Monks Coppenhall, a typical small rural community, with its close, but larger, counterpart of Nantwich, where individual charitable foundations seemed to have flourished, thereafter tracing how the Poor Law operated and affected the town of Nantwich and the surrounding area. Comparisons in terms of cost and numbers being made with the county of Cheshire as a whole and national figures. An examination will be made of how the railway company exercised paternalism over their workers in Crewe up to the twentieth century, and to show how this paternalism entered into charitable endeavour. To do this will inevitably lead to an

examination of the influence of men like F. W. Webb and his successors on the Board of the Grand Junction Railway Company, and to show how their paternalistic attitude changed over the years, noting how they combined public paternalism with private charity, posing the question whether Mr. Webb deserves the rather maligned reputation he has received over the years.

In the case of Crewe, paternalism operated together with pressure exerted from local political parties, the co-operative movement, friendly societies, and religious groups, which gradually began to take over and contribute towards the welfare of the town's citizens, and it will be worthwhile to examine how far all these different organisations affected the lives of the poor.

In common with other industrial areas in the nineteenth century, the people of Crewe and Nantwich seem to have been aware of other people's suffering and occasional disasters, in spite of their own poverty, suggesting questions as to what special charities were set up, albeit for a short period, to relieve special needs or crisis.

Self help assumed an important role in both towns, through individual private charity aimed at achieving this, and as expounded by the Grand Junction Railway Company, which constantly encouraged its workers to achieve new standards of technical knowledge by attending night school (funded by the railway company) at the Mechanics Institute. The part played by self help as propounded by charities, the Poor Law, and other organisations working with the poor, together with that displayed by the workers themselves will be discussed

where sources permit, along with the other interrelated strands that together formed a network of social welfare in the two towns.

The advent of the First World War united both Crewe and Nantwich in a vast fund raising endeavour involving all the community on a scale never before seen. The war in fact achieved what the Poor Law had failed to do during the nineteenth century, as a vast reduction in those claiming relief was evident in both towns, and all the attention became focused on the well being of soldiers and their families at home and abroad.

Footnotes to Introduction

1. J. Hall, A History of the Town and Parish of Nantwich
(Privately printed 1883)
Republished by E. J. Morten 1976
2. Hall's book was privately published and many of the subscribers to the history of Nantwich had been influential in the establishment and support of the charities in the town. This presumably explains Hall's concentration on this aspect of the treatment of the poor and lack of detail relating to poor relief in general.
3. E. Garton, Nantwich in the eighteenth century
(Chester 1978)
4. N. Sedgwick, Wistaston - A history of the Parish and Church (no year of publication)
5. D. Sylvester, A History of Cheshire (Pillimore 1980)
6. J. H. Hodson, Cheshire 1660-1780 Restoration to Industrial Revolution (Cheshire Community Council 1978)
7. See p. 74
8. G. Scard, Squire and Tenant: Rural life in Cheshire 1760-1900 (Cheshire Community Council 1981)
9. ibid. p.26
10. W. H. Chaloner, The social and economic development of Crewe 1780-1923 (Manchester University Press 1950 reprinted 1973)
11. R. E. Tigwell, Cheshire in the twentieth century
(Cheshire Community Council 1985)
12. The ecclesiastical parish of Coppenhall from an early date had been divided into the civil townships of Church Coppenhall and Monks Coppenhall. Church Coppenhall lay to the north of Monks Coppenhall and contained the parish church of St. Michael's. Monks Coppenhall was smaller, had less population and was less fertile than Church Coppenhall, but was later to form the centre of modern Crewe because of the cheapness of the land. Modern Crewe takes its name from the railway station in Crewe, which was from 1837 situated in the old township of Crewe, adjacent to Monks Coppenhall. The new railway works were built to the West of the station and this meant that the new town, called Crewe for convenience, grew up in the township of Monks Coppenhall.

13. The villages covered by the Nantwich Union included the following:

Acton	Haslington
Alpraham	Hatherton
Alvaston	Haughton
Aston-juxta-Mondrum	Henhull
Audlem	Hough
Austerson	Hunsterson
Baddiley	Hurleston
Baddington	Lea
Barthomley	Leighton
Basford	Minshull Church
Batherton	Minshull Vernon
Beeston	Monks Coppenhall
Bickerton	Nantwich
Blakenhall	Newhall
Bridgemere	Peckforton
Brindley	Poole
Broomhall	Ridley
Buerton	Rope
Bulkeley or Buckley	Rushton
Bunbury	Shavington-cum-Gresty
Burland	Sound
Burwardsley	Spurstow
Calveley	Stapeley
Checkley-cum-wrinehill	Stoke
Cholmondeley	Tarporley
Cholmondeston	Tilstone Fearnall
Chorley	Tiverton
Chorlton	Utkinton
Church Coppenhall	Walgherton
Coppenhall Monks	Wardle
Church Minshall	Warmingham
Cool Pilate	Weston
Crewe	Wettenhall
Dodcott-cum-Wilkesley	Willaston
Doddington	Wistaston
Eaton	Woodcott
Edleston	Woolstanwood
Egerton	Worleston
Faddiley	Wrenbury-with-Frith
Hankelow	Wybunbury

14. The population of Nantwich -

1700-1710	2463 estimated dwellers
1710-1720	2580
1720-1730	2934
1790-1800	4000
1811 census	1875 male
	2124 female

1801	3463
1811	3999
1821	4661
1831	4886
1841	5489
1851	5579
1861	6225
1871	6673
1881	7495
1891	7412
1901	7722

C.R.O. Abstracts of Census Population Returns 1801-1901

15. G. Ormerod, The History of the County Palatine and City of Chester
3 vols. (Second edition, London 1882)
3 pp 448-50
16. ibid. p.450
17. Commons Journal XI, pp 766-67
18. C.R.O. DDX 196 fo37r fo57r fo58r
19. Bagshaw's Directory 1850
20. J. Hall, op. cit., p.268
Hall quotes the case of Mrs. Sarah Steel, widow, who died on 16th November 1878, aged 98, who informed him that she was brought from Cirencester, Gloucester, in the year 1788, being at that time only 8 years old, to be apprenticed at Bott's Mill.
21. Census Population figures for Monks Coppenhall and Church Coppenhall:

Year	Church Coppenhall	Monks Coppenhall
1801	241	121
1811	266	114
1821	366	146
1831	350	148
1841	544	203
1851	495	4571
1861	822	8159
1871	2094	7810
1881	2879	24285
1891	4165	28761
1901	5563	35930

C.R.O. Abstracts of Census Population Returns 1801-1901

Chapter 1

The operation of the Old Poor Law in Nantwich, Monks Coppenhall, and Crewe

The Old Poor Law has variously been defined as a flexible, simple, convenient, effective and caring system, founded on the 'face to face' relationships of a close local community. No two parishes administered the Poor Law in the same manner and each used it to help solve the problems created by their own particular economic and social circumstances. However J. R. Poynter has argued the curse of such localism was confusion, and reform and decay could be 'simultaneous and contiguous'.¹ As G. W. Oxley has pointed out, the task of the Old Poor Law was to 'catch', like a safety net, all those who were not liable to conviction as vagrants, but for whom charitable resources were inadequate.² Consequently the provisions supplied by the Old Poor Law must be viewed as only part of the support available for relieving the poor, taking its place alongside the charities of the area and the self help that families and neighbours supplied to each other and which in the majority of cases would have been resorted to first, such hardships going largely unrecorded.

In Nantwich, Monks Coppenhall, and Crewe, the local responses to the problem of poverty exhibited a combination of consternation at the increasing poor rate on the one hand, and a sensitivity to the plight of the distressed that emphasises the adaptability and potential for individual, compassionate treatment on the other. An examination of the Poor Law in these parishes also emphasises the fact that caused such

concern nationally, that because the economic infrastructure of the country was undergoing vast changes, the able bodied unemployed began to form a proportion of applicants for relief through no moral fault of their own. The relief system faced the challenge of adapting to the demands of this group and for whom the workhouse offered neither a solution for the individual or his family: a problem that ultimately led to the reform of the system.

Many questions suggest themselves about the administration of the Old Poor Law: how were different groups of paupers treated in terms of the relief they received? Did the Overseers take a long or short term view of the problems they had to deal with, and how was this reflected in the relief that they granted? Was the Poor Law flexibly and humanely administered? Was the local system of relief swamped by an overwhelming number of able bodied unemployed adults? What proportion of the local population were forced to claim poor relief and what did this service cost the ratepayers? What reaction did the local gentry make to the prospect of increasing poverty and how did the ratepayers respond to rising rate bills? Was the Poor Law in crisis in the 1790s, 1813 and the early 1830s, and were fears expressed nationally about the state of the poor evident in this locality?

It is only through local investigation that the answers to such questions can be put forward to modify or confirm the general statements made about poor relief: a system which acquired its very essence from the variety of local circumstances.

The gentry's response to growing poverty and the establishment of the first workhouse in Nantwich

How did the gentry perceive the problem of poverty in the town of Nantwich and what was their response to dealing with the situation? The problem of the poor appears to have troubled the gentry to such an extent that in 1631 an agreement was made not to let houses out to strangers because:

That by reason our Towne is greatly oppressed with inmates and strangers continually cominge to reside amongst us, without any restraynt, in regard whereof our owne poore cannot so wel be received as otherwise they might. That from henceforward, wee will not sett or lett any of our howses or cottages to strangers dwellinge out of our towne, excepte they shall be such as shal be able to secure the Towne, by bond to the Church Wardens, (as Overseers of the Poor) for the tyme beinge, from any charge that they or their ffamillies might draw uppon ytt.

3

This initial reaction by the gentry centred around raising awareness in others, but to simply stop renting out houses to those who were likely to become paupers was a short term measure that did not help establish the cause of the problem or offer a solution. The key role in this respect was left to Roger Wilbraham,⁴ an important figure in matters relating to the poor in Nantwich, who was the first to try to establish the extent of poverty in the town and helped introduce measures in an attempt to alleviate its effect. He echoed earlier expressions of concern when, in 1663, he noted that the poor increased daily as strangers came into the town. To confirm his suspicions he completed a survey of their numbers and

found there to be 782 poor people in Nantwich which represented 52% of the population, and in 1665 he described Nantwich as being 'overcharged with poore'.⁵ This information was presented to the Justices of the Peace at the Quarter Sessions held at Nantwich on 7th July, 1663. As a result a lay mize or lune was charged upon the county for market towns and other places that were found to be overcharged with poor. £50 0s 0d of this was allotted to Nantwich after Wilbraham's evidence had been submitted and three more payments of £50 0s 0d were made with Wilbraham commissioned to apply it to orphans, poor child apprentices and other charitable uses. This suggests that child poverty was a particular problem in the town as 'those younglings ... eate up ye Breade that sholde have sustained ye Aged poor'⁶ but like many other areas in England at that time there were a high number of poor children and perhaps the problem was exacerbated because Nantwich was a market town with a large number of trades operating on a fairly prosperous basis and children were brought to the town by their families who were seeking work.

Wilbraham also put forward the suggestion that an annual assessment be made throughout the parish and that 'one moiety' be collected by the Overseers of the Poor soon after they entered office, and once at Michaelmas so that the poor could receive some relief every month. Wilbraham pointed out that this assessment almost doubled the fortnightly collection made in the parish church 'and not above halfe a dozen were assessed more then [than] what they voluntarily paid before.'⁷

Having arranged for better financial provision of the poor Roger Wilbraham made an urgent application to the Justices of the Peace at the Quarter Sessions in July 1677 to obtain an order to build a House of Correction and Workhouse. He believed that many of the poor 'through a habit of idleness' grew 'insolent' because there was no House of Correction in the town, and others were poor simply because there was not enough work. A lay was subsequently granted for raising money in Cheshire to purchase a building at the end of Beam Street, and Roger Wilbraham gave £200 0s 0d from the £400 0s 0d left to the poor by Ralph Wilbraham to help provide work for the Workhouse and House of Correction.

After the workhouse had been established, Roger Wilbraham drew up another poor list in January 1683 and the number of poor in the town was said to have been 'reduced' to 281, a reduction of 64% compared with the previous survey made in 1663. The workhouse established in Nantwich was not a workhouse in the nineteenth-century sense but was a place where work was provided for the able-bodied poor, who lived in their own homes but received relief there. The House of Correction was a prison for 'idle vagabonds' or paupers who were able to work but refused this when offered.

In the vestry minutes for 1730 the Workhouse Governor was instructed to apply to the Overseers for permission before obtaining goods and provisions and the accounts for such purchases were to be submitted to the vestry meeting for approval and payment. The tone of the entry implies that there might have been some mismanagement of funds, or that the goods that

had been purchased previously for the workhouse were not considered suitable for the poor by some members of the vestry. The work of running the workhouse and providing provisions for its inmates was a fairly new experience for parish officials, and as was the case in the post 1834 period, some people became concerned when items such as beef, veal and mutton were purchased in large quantities in case the poor should be over protected, and costs were always under scrutiny.

By 1748 this House of Correction and Workhouse had ceased to function and in 1767 the buildings were converted into seven almshouses by John Crewe of Crewe. So before 1739, when a new gaol house existed in Pillory Street, the poor, and the people who came before the courts for minor offences, were treated similarly together in the Workhouse/House of Correction which ceased to be used prior to 1748. The fact that criminals and the poor were treated in a similar way gives an indication of how people at the time comprehended the problem of poverty. Bearing in mind the prevailing opinion the poor must have felt that they too had committed a crime when they had to resort to the workhouse.

Under an Act of Parliament dated 1723 the first workhouse or poorhouse in Nantwich actually to have the poor living as well as working there was provided prior to 1748 by using several houses in Queen Street which were taken over for this purpose. Before the opening of this poorhouse the poor had received town relief in their own homes, but from then on they had to inhabit the building set apart for them. This workhouse existed until 1779-1780 when a new poorhouse or workhouse was

opened in June 1780 on land known as the Barony which had been given by the Marquis of Cholmondeley. £450 0s 0d was given from the funds of certain local charities to help with the building and thirty-one local gentlemen and tradesmen became shareholders in the venture,⁸ emphasising the interest of local businessmen in Nantwich in an activity which some historians have argued was traditionally dominated by the local gentry. Indeed by 1750 most of the ancient landed families had moved from the town to the surrounding countryside. The tradesmen began to show an interest in such a venture perhaps because they were motivated by social ambition and this was a way that they could emulate the role that the local gentry had played in local affairs. On the other hand they may well have been spurred on by a genuine disquiet at the evident increase in the numbers of the poor or as prudent ratepayers they wished to keep a careful eye on the rates that were levied and supervise how they were spent. So from the initial interest shown by the gentry between 1630-1680 in cutting down the number of poor in the town and establishing a workhouse, there was a discernible shift in activity towards the small businessmen and ratepayers, who, by 1780 had assumed positions of responsibility on the vestry. It was this group of people, rather than the local gentry, who decided matters relating to the poor between 1780-1834.

Whatever the combination of motives, the new workhouse opened in June 1780 was described in 1789 as follows:

...The house is visited weekly by the gentlemen of the town in rotation. It was clean, and great attention seems to be paid to the inhabitants. The rooms are too low, and the upper parts of the windows too far from the ceilings. Five shillings a month is allowed for tobacco and snuff, yet the use of tea, though purchased with their own money, is ordered to be punished by confinement in the dungeon. On August 1st, 1788 there were 11 men, 16 women, 10 boys and 7 girls (total 44).

9

The work of the Nantwich Overseers'

The work of the Overseers was obviously of crucial importance to the poor in that they were the means of their survival during times of hardship, but as K. D. M. Snell has argued they personified the key to social understanding in the eighteenth century, which facilitated agreement and mutual respect between the ranks and orders of parish society.¹⁰ Poor Law officials cut across the divides of wealth and

...were the means by which the gentry and middling classes secured positions in parish society which would be precarious without the respect received by acting according to certain customary expectations favourable to the economic interests of the labouring poor.

11

Also P. Dunkley has emphasised that local magistrates saw themselves as protectors of the poor in their dealings with the old Poor Law. By so doing they were protecting their landed position, wealth and standing within the community and, so he argues, the operation of the old Poor Law can be seen in terms of deference and social control. Dunkley emphasises that a 'claim of connexion' existed between rich and poor and that

this 'deference model' was personified in the operation of the Poor Law.¹² How were the poor of Nantwich relieved and what can be learned about the attitude of the Overseers in terms of the way they viewed the problems brought before them? Were the Overseers' concerned to just to satisfy immediate need or is there evidence of money being 'invested' in longer term remedies, for example apprenticeships for the children of the poor and medical provisions?

The earliest existing record of the organisation and administration of the poor in Nantwich is recorded in the vestry minute book of 1731.¹³ The vestry empowered twelve men for a period of twelve months to order levies on the town annually for the relief of the unemployed poor, and for the management of the workhouse in Beam Street. Secondly, they were empowered to provide materials and other necessities so that people who were able to work could be directed towards this, and thirdly, they generally supervised the expenditure of the Overseers of the poor.

At the 1732 vestry meeting, a rate of six pence in the pound was levied on the real and personal estates for the maintenance of the poor both in the workhouse and in their own homes.¹⁴ Overseers of the Poor in Nantwich were appointed by two resident Justices of the Peace, and these Overseers, together with Churchwardens, had the duty of putting the poor and their children to work, placing apprentices in craft work, husbandry or housewifery by indentures, males up to the age of twentyfour and females up to twentyone, or until marriage. It was not obligatory on the Overseers and Churchwardens to pay

an employer for taking an apprentice and apprentices could be sent to work within another parish within the same county. Any parents who refused to let their children be apprenticed, or enticed them away, could be committed to the House of Correction.

The Overseers attended the poor house at 10 a.m. on the first Monday of each month to present their accounts and to receive instructions about disbursements. Payments made by the Overseers were generally made in arrears, indeed often as much as twelve months in arrears for such items as rent and the maintenance of a child. Relief was also given to particular members of the families to care for crippled children, the blind, people confined to their houses, the old and infirm, deranged, and bastard children.¹⁵ The amounts of relief varied from six pence (this amount was given to the people who ate at the workhouse and were therefore not considered to need much relief in cash) to eight shillings in 1757, and it was always noted if the recipients had 'bothersome families' to support. The army occupied and garrisoned Nantwich continuously between 1740-1747, the period around the 1745 rebellion when the government were cautiously preparing for possible uprisings. In the Overseers accounts for these years there are cases of soldiers wives and children receiving financial help and several were deported to their home parishes as they were becoming a financial burden on the rates.

In May and June 1757 there were 159 paupers in Nantwich;¹⁶ with an estimated population of 3,000, 5.3% of the population were apparently in poverty. Payments were made by the

Overseers on a weekly or monthly basis and these amounted to £18 4s 8d for the month of May and £17 11s 8d for June.

The Overseers in Nantwich also accepted money from individuals on the understanding that this payment would relieve them of serving in public office. This gives an indication that by 1750 the Overseer's job was becoming an increasingly difficult one in terms of the number of people wanting relief and the time and paper work that was involved. For example Plant Maddock paid £10 0s 0d in November 1748 so that he could be excused public office. While all ratepayers were concerned with increased rate bills commitment to be involved on a day to day basis was another matter.

Filiation orders also appear many times in the vestry books when men paid money to the Overseers to assist in the upkeep of their illegitimate children. In 1760 Thomas Hilditch (one of the Nantwich Overseers) accepted responsibility for a child born to a Nantwich woman and executed a bond in March 1760 which relieved the Overseers at Wybunbury of the costs, charges and expenses of the upkeep of the child. Also frequent applications were made for permission to deport paupers who did not belong to Nantwich, but the applications to the magistrates and the Quarter Sessions were costly and did not always go in favour of the Nantwich Overseers. Many examples of appeals against removal orders can be found in the records of the Quarter Sessions for the county and a typical example appears on the 22nd April 1800.¹⁷ Edmund Chesters and his wife and five children were put on a cart with £8 18s 8d in February 1800 and were removed to the township of Broomhall outside Nantwich

which the Nantwich Overseers argued, was their last legal settlement. The Overseers of Broomhall then appealed against the removal order at the next Quarter Sessions in April. The court repealed the order and decreed that the Nantwich Overseers should pay the Broomhall Overseers £8 18s 8d, plus court charges, and the cost of maintaining the Chesters family from the time of their removal, and the cost of a cart to take them back again. This example serves to emphasise that while for settled inhabitants the Poor Law could be caring and flexible, for those where settlement was doubtful the Overseers showed no mercy and their main concern was to rid themselves of the financial burden. The upheaval for those concerned in terms of being shuttled from one place to the other and establishing a fresh claim to relief caused great distress, and if, as in the above case, the Overseers were found to be shirking their duty, the poor found themselves back where they had started.

Apart from the vestry minutes and Quarter Session records two volumes of parish books relating to the work of the Overseers of the poor in Nantwich still exist dated 1780-1781 and 1784-1785.¹⁸ From these it may be deduced that payments made by the Overseers fell into the following categories:-

- 1) a) Maintaining the workhouse.
- b) The cost of running the farm and dairy at the workhouse
- c) Payments for food, beef, veal, liver, oatmeal, wine, potatoes, clothing, bedding, medicines, snuff and tobacco.
- d) Maintenance of the animals and gardens used for providing food and work for the workhouse.

- 2) The payment of rent for the poor. For example payments of approximately £30 0s 0d were made in 1780 for 20 people living in their own homes who would otherwise have become inhabitants of the workhouse.
- 3) The payment of pensions to the poor. An average of £4 15s 0d was paid in pensions to individual paupers in 1780.
- 4) Payments made to people who had undertaken to be foster parents; for example £1 7s 0d for 24 weeks fostering in 1784.
- 5) Payments made to paupers belonging to Nantwich who had been allowed to settle in other parishes and who received subsistence money from their original parish.
- 6) Payments made for medical treatment in sickness and childbirth. One typical medical bill in 1784 consisted of:

	£.	s.	d.
6 bottles white wine	12	0	
Sitting up for 3 nights	2	10	
Laying out	2	10	
Shaving	1	0	
Coal and Candles	1	0	
Funeral expenses	10	9	
Church fees	9	10	
2 weeks attendance	10	0	
Opening grave and coffin	13	0	
Doctoring	10	6	
	<hr/>		
	3	13	9
	<hr/>		

As has been pointed out by G. W. Oxley this form of relief is a supreme example of how rising standards broadened the scope of poor relief, and such provision became accepted as the necessary minimum. 19

- 7) Payment for work completed for the Overseers by the poor, e.g. 2 days work at 3s 4d (1784)
- 8) Payment for shoes - 5s 6d a pair 1780
- 9) Payment to supply coal to the poor.
- 10) Payments for burials averaging 8s 10d in 1784
- 11) Money for items such as a night-stool, a pair of stays.

Such payments indicate the wide spectrum of social concern exhibited by the Overseers' and illustrate how circumstances could force the poor to claim relief as a result of 'temporary' disasters in their lives, for example sickness, and the permanent relief offered in the form of pensions. G. W. Oxley has defined the pension or regular cash payment made to the poor as the 'central bulwark against poverty', but because it was uncontroversial it has not received due emphasis. However as a form of relief it had advantages for all: it was simple and convenient for the overseer and the recipient had the maximum choice in spending his income '... to meet needs which none knew better than he.'²⁰ Increases or decreases could also be quickly implemented and new types of poverty could be dealt with as they arose via this type of relief.

All the forms of relief disbursed in Nantwich testify to the fact that even though the Act of 1722 had specified that the workhouse should dominate the relief system, circumstances dictated that out-relief was essential not only in terms of the numbers needing to be relieved, but in terms of cost too, as out-relief could prove cheaper to dispence. Also as J. D. Marshall has argued the great majority of those seeking relief were not able-bodied and they: '... offered too many distinct human problems for even the most constructively run workhouse to deal with.'²¹ A fact that belied much of the criticism heaped against the system in the 1830s. Gilbert's Act of 1782 legalised the position where workhouses were to be used for the old, sick and infirm, and out-relief became 'acceptable for the able-bodied poor being further extended

by statutes in 1796 and 1815.

The Nantwich Overseers combined both in and out relief with an apparently humane and flexible attitude, satisfying long as well as short-term needs, and medical requirements both in and out of the workhouse accounted for an important part of the relief granted. By so doing the Overseers were including in their pauper host individuals who would in ordinary circumstances, have managed to survive without recourse to the parish. It was the occasional crisis that just tipped people into the realms of relief that are apparent from the Overseers' books as well as those who were, through age, permanently reliant on relief.

However as M. E. Rose has pointed out the trade depressions and poor harvests of the 1790s coupled with increasing prices, led to 'searching criticism' of the old Poor Law as the cost of administering relief increased rapidly.²² However as J. R. Poynter has argued the critics of the system did not agree on the nature of the disease or on the possible remedies.²³ What form did this criticism take in Nantwich?

Consternation about the increasing poor rate.

Bad harvests resulting in rising prices combined with increasing population and the dislocation of war meant that the old Poor Law faced an acute crisis nationally in 1795. In England generally between the late 1780s and 1834 the poor relief system was being adapted to a rapidly changing social and economic system. As J. D. Marshall has pointed out, the cost of poor relief was rising at an unprecedented rate,²⁴ and

this situation was reflected in Nantwich, where by 1776 the ever-increasing amount spent on the poor²⁵ meant that less money was left for other parish responsibilities such as highways and this resulted in an overall deficit of £9 8s 4d in 1776, a situation mirrored to a lesser extent in the neighbouring township of Church Coppenhall, and in Cheshire and England as a whole.²⁶ Appendix A shows that the rates in Nantwich had increased by 31% between 1777 and 1786 and yet further increases were to take place between 1776 and 1814 when the rates increased by 292%. The steady and continuous climb in the poor rates was the cause of great consternation locally with Church Coppenhall and Crewe experiencing increases of 230% and 253% respectively, and Monks Coppenhall ratepayers enduring a 534% increase between 1776 and 1814.

The concern locally about the scale of poverty and the 'heavy burden of the poor rates' is reflected in a document issued to the freeholders and inhabitants of Nantwich in the early 1790s. In this document the Overseer of the poor states that the poor rates had of late become:-

... very oppressive to many householders
 ... though provisions in general are reduced to half their late price, the price of labour is very little, if any diminished, think the present a favourable time to attempt a reduction of them, and intend as soon as the severity of the season is over, to call a General Vestry, before which, the whole of the poor who receive relief shall be summoned to appear, that the circumstances of each may be investigated, their claims for parochial assistance be considered, and the sum each may be entitled to, be ascertained and fixed.²⁷

Obviously of immediate concern to ratepayers was the fact that their rates had increased, by the 1790s to what they considered to be an unacceptable level. It is evident from the number of people applying for help to the charities in the town, as well as for parish relief, that for the poor a crisis situation was developing as the traditional avenues of help in times of need could no longer cope with the demand. The ratepayers viewed the problem from a different perspective - that of how to reduce the rates as quickly as possible, but considering the scale that poverty had reached the problem could not be solved by merely rooting out idle, and false claimants. Indeed to presume that why the number of poor claiming relief had increased to such levels was to any significant extent due to people not wanting to work, or relying too heavily on the parish to support their family, was too narrow a view of the problem and its underlying causes. The ratepayers wanted a quick solution, but reducing the numbers receiving parish relief did not solve the problem, it merely meant that the people who were refused parish relief turned to the charities in the town, or their families if possible, and the problems were exacerbated in the following years.

The document referred to is undated but was obviously printed in the late 1780s, early 1790s and draws comparisons between the 'crisis' situation then encountered with conditions existing a few years earlier in 1781. The figures reveal the following picture:

<u>1781</u>			<u>Post 1781 - early 1790s</u>		
	£	s d		£	s d
50 Resident paupers	137	3 0	90 Resident paupers	456	19 0
15 Paupers residing in other towns	60	2 6	42 Paupers residing in other towns	236	12 0
18 Paupers paid	31	10 0	37 Bastard children	183	14 8
<u>83</u> Total yearly demand	<u>228</u>	<u>15 6</u>	<u>169</u> Total yearly demand	<u>877</u>	<u>5 8</u>
			Casual poor relieved	<u>155</u>	<u>7 0</u>

In just ten years the number of paupers relieved in Nantwich had increased by 103.6% while the money disbursed to these people had escalated by 283.5% during the same period, and if relief granted to the casual poor was included an increase of 351% had taken place. As a percentage of the population paupers accounted for 4.2%, or 1 in every 24 people and the fact that such a startling rate of increase had occurred in just ten years worried ratepayers seriously. To try to explain why poverty had increased so dramatically in the town the Overseer argued that the price of wheat could not be blamed, as it had only increased slightly since 1781 and wages were considerably higher. The town boundaries were still the same -

...though perhaps local causes may have increased the number of those who have obtained settlement with us. It appears to us, that a dependence upon parochial assistance, has caused in the poor, a diminution of their honest exertions, a relaxation of morals, and a less strict economy than they formally used, it has even been asserted that in proportion to the liberty of the parish these evils have increased: the comforts and happiness of their families have of course diminished in the same proportion. Every

additional shilling given, lessens the necessity of being diligent and frugal and too often enables them to indulge in habits of idleness and dissipation; parochial relief is frequently extorted under a false pretence that they cannot procure employment, and is wasted by mismanagement or intemperance. 28

By reassessing all the people claiming poor relief in the town the Overseer hoped to reduce expenditure '...and are convinced that we shall not, by this measure, confer a less important service on the poor themselves.' He emphasised that he wanted the poor to know that they did not want to deprive anyone of their pay and that was why everyone claiming was to be reassessed:

...it being our greatest wish, while we strike off the idle and undeserving from the list, to continue upon it those whose characters and situations render them fit objects for parochial relief. 29

The Overseers argued that they were fulfilling 'the greatest act of kindness' by 'removing the props' that encouraged idleness and making the able bodied find work and support themselves.

It is clear that the Overseers at Nantwich no longer approved of the system of constant weekly pay that had been used extensively up to that period and appears to have been used in neighbouring areas such as the township of Crewe and Monks Coppenhall long after the 1780s and 1790s without such apparent abuse. To identify a decline in honest exertions, falling morals, a lack of frugality, idleness and dissipation among the poor and for the Overseer to directly attribute such qualities to the liberality of poor relief was an indictment of

the system that the 1832 Royal Commission would have applauded some forty years later. The Nantwich Overseers had found that the poor, perhaps because of sickness or temporary unemployment, were placed on the list to receive a weekly allowance and then:

...demand the same allowance long after the necessity which first entitled them to it, has ceased to exist. If an Overseer attempts to stop or reduce it, they contrive by the concealment or misrepresentation of their real circumstances, or through the interest and mistaken kindness of their friends, to counteract his exertions, and seldom fail to load him with abuse. 30

This was a common reaction, as G. W. Oxley has stressed, once local residents had gained ground in receiving benefits from the Poor Law these were rarely lost because the continuing presence of recipients made it impossible to terminate a relief system once it had been inaugurated.³¹

The Overseers obviously felt in a difficult position as they were answerable to the ratepayers and yet even with the greatest vigilance could not be aware of the circumstances of each individual claiming relief. Perhaps it was this conflict that prompted the Overseers to make available to the freeholders of the town a list of all the resident poor and the amounts they were paid weekly, and all the inhabitants were invited to attend a vestry meeting to help decide correctly from 'full and impartial information' who was entitled to claim relief and what amount should be given. So by making use of the discipline of publicity a pauper list was drawn up that the ratepayers deemed acceptable. This period early in the 1790s emphasises decisively the influence the ratepayers were having

on the Overseers, who, more than ever before, exercised caution in terms of who they granted relief to as they faced increasing criticism about growing pauper lists and rising rate bills.

What then was the extent of poverty in Nantwich, and were these paupers permanently in receipt of relief or only occasionally relieved? What was the relief of the poor costing the people of Nantwich and were the fears of the ratepayers founded on fact or mere self interest?

The extent of poverty in Nantwich.

By 1803 10.4% of the population of Nantwich were receiving relief from the poor rates, (see figure 1) as compared with 12% in the county as a whole, (see figure 2) and 9% in England and Wales as a whole. 10% of the paupers relieved in Nantwich were accommodated in the workhouse, evidence that the Overseers were attempting, as far as the size of the workhouse would permit, to make full use of this facility which Wilbraham set so much store by, in the hope of inculcating habits of industry in the poor - a concern uppermost in the minds of Nantwich Overseers in the wake of rising rates. In the county as a whole only 1.3% of paupers were relieved in a workhouse. However the growth in the number of workhouses in Cheshire was continuing: in 1776 there had been 31, and by 1803 61 parishes could relieve all or part of their population in a workhouse, with possible accommodation for 273 people at an average cost of £11 16s 11³/₄d per person per year.³² Having stressed the importance of the workhouse however, 90% of paupers were receiving relief in their own homes in Nantwich, of which 39.7% were

PIE CHARTS TO SHOW THE DIFFERENT TYPES OF POOR RELIEF

GRANTED IN NANTWICH AND CHESHIRE IN 1803.

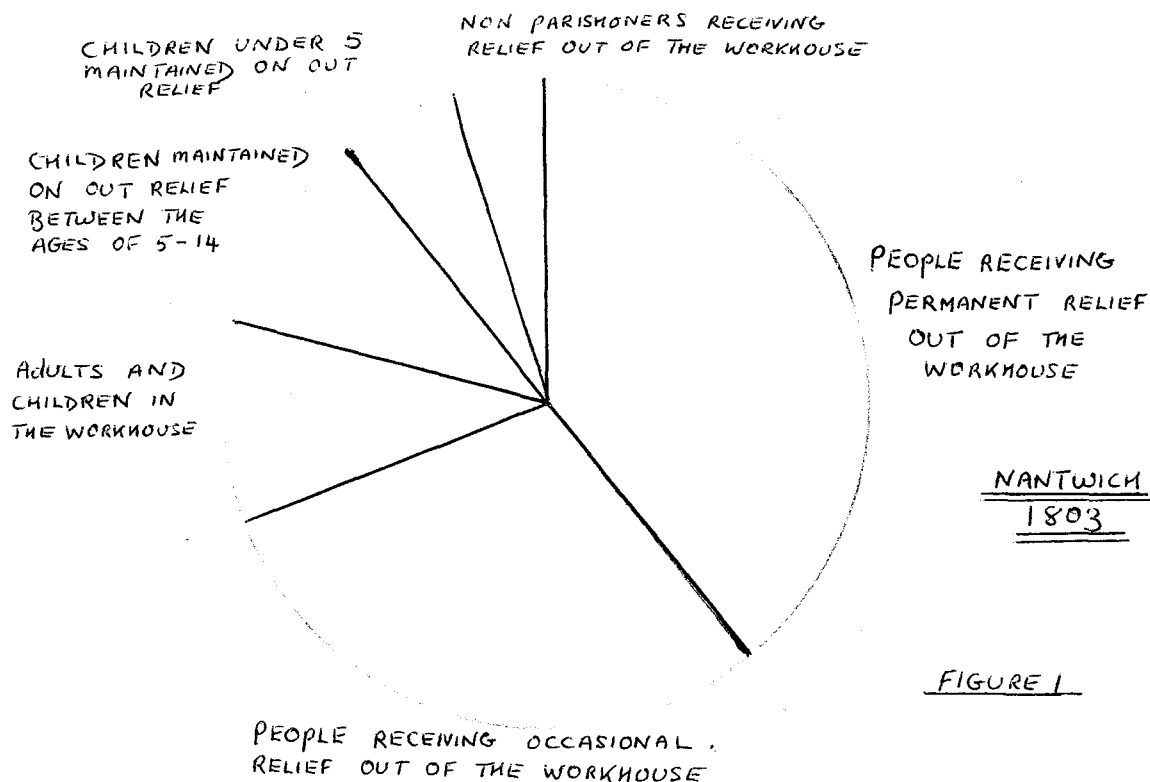


FIGURE 1

20% OF THESE PEOPLE RECEIVING PERMANENT RELIEF, BOTH IN AND OUT OF THE WORKHOUSE, AND THOSE OCCASIONALLY RELIEVED, WERE CLASSED AS ABOVE 60 YEARS OF AGE OR DISABLED FROM LABOUR BY PERMANENT ILLNESS OR OTHER INFIRMITY.
10.4% OF THE POPULATION OF NANTWICH WERE RELIEVED FROM THE POOR RATE IN 1803.

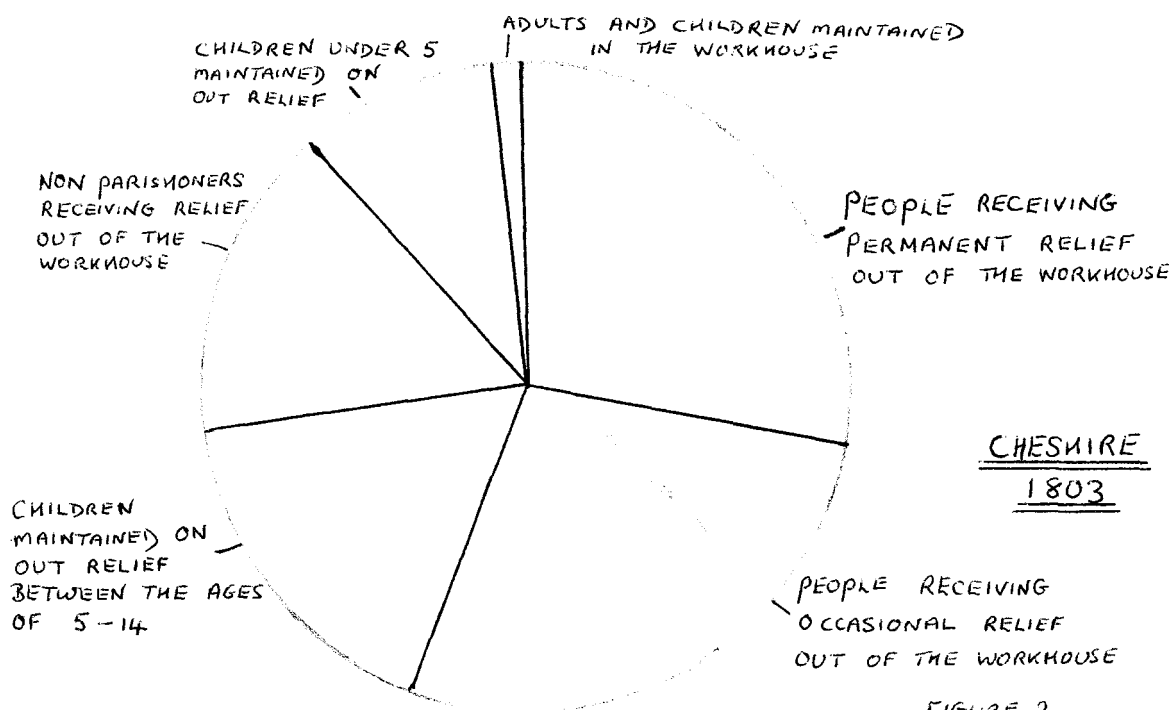


FIGURE 2

22.3% OF THESE PEOPLE RECEIVING PERMANENT RELIEF, BOTH IN AND OUT OF THE WORKHOUSE, AND THOSE OCCASIONALLY RELIEVED, WERE CLASSED AS ABOVE 60 YEARS OF AGE OR DISABLED FROM LABOUR BY PERMANENT ILLNESS OR OTHER INFIRMITY.

12% OF THE POPULATION OF CHESHIRE WERE RELIEVED FROM THE POOR RATE IN 1803

SOURCE: ABSTRACT OF THE ANSWERS AND RETURNS MADE PURSUANT TO AN ACT,

classed as permanently on out-relief and 29.7% were in receipt of occasional relief, compared with 28% and 28.3% respectively in the county as a whole. While those permanently on out-relief were a burden for the Overseers, little could be done to improve the situation with limited workhouse accommodation and trade difficulties affecting food prices and the problems in agriculture during a war time economy. Also in the short term out-relief proved less costly than in-maintenance and the 29.7% occasionally relieved bears witness to the flexibility of the old Poor Law in that when unexpected crisis were confronted individuals could resort to the parish for assistance. It should also be stressed that 20% and 22.3% of paupers respectively in Nantwich and Cheshire as a whole were over the age of sixty or were disabled in some way, emphasising the large proportion of paupers who could in no way be classed as abusing the system and reinforcing the fact that the Poor Law offered relief to those least able to fend for themselves. Also bearing witness to this fact were the children under the age of fourteen in receipt of relief: 16.3% in Nantwich and 26.9% in the county as a whole.

Judging by the views expressed in the undated document discussed earlier, the ratepayers of Nantwich believed outdoor relief encouraged people to become increasingly reliant on help from the parish in both the long and short term, but as J. D. Marshall has argued³³ the pauper problem was more complex than this and the majority of labouring families were not at most periods consistently in receipt of any relief. Indeed as K. Williams has pointed out³⁴ the chief characteristics of

poor relief in 1802-1803 were that it was selective, discontinuous and supplementary, and indeed these three features dominated until 1834. As a result no firm line was established between pauper and non-pauper, and selective and discontinuous out-relief doles ensured a constant movement of people across an ill-defined line. Indeed one of the strengths that emerges about the old Poor Law is that it did not exclude any class of pauper.

The reason for the increasing number of paupers was the result of a combination of factors, for example illegitimacy, low nutrition which produced early ageing and sickness, kinship bonds and settlement constraints, both of which discouraged migration. These factors encouraged a growing but varied pauper group which had a stable core little affected by any given form of relief, a fact discernible with hindsight, but not always fully appreciated by the ratepayers who viewed the problem of the increasing poor rate from a purely economic standpoint. Indeed they were perhaps not interested in the reasons, just that the 'result' of a lower rate should be achieved as quickly as possible.

The problem of a deficit in the Overseers budget was still a problem in 1803 as it had been in 1776. In 1803 Nantwich raised £1,120 1s 3d with a rate of eight shillings in the pound. The total expenditure of the Overseers of the Poor including removals was £1,131 2s 9d which left a deficit of £11 0s 0d. The amount given in relief alone totalled £1,100 17s 10½d. The total town expenditure for 1803 equalled £1,325 7s 3d which left a total deficit of £205 0s 0d. Once

again the amount of money of necessity expended on the poor meant there was less money left for the highways.

The figures for Cheshire relating to the total annual expenditure on poor relief show that throughout the county poverty was a growing problem from the 1770s onwards.³⁵ Between 1776 and 1803 expenditure on account of the poor had increased by 135% and by 1803 £2 17s 7d was spent on each parishioner in the county relieved out of the workhouse. If the figures are taken to include people relieved in and out of the workhouse £3 2s 8d was spent on each parishioner relieved.³⁶

When we look at how much was actually spent on the poor in Nantwich and in what proportion this increased over the years it gives some indication of the magnitude of the problem, and the amounts that were being spent locally. For the ratepayers of Nantwich in 1814 who could cast their minds back to the 1770s expenditure on the poor had increased by 178% (see Appendix C). Similarly for the poor this percentage increase represented the extremes of poverty that many families found themselves increasingly having to face.

By 1813 the amount of money spent on each member of the poor in Nantwich had increased by 94.9% compared to the amount expended in 1803 (see Appendix D), although the total number of people claiming poor relief had fallen by 19.7% between 1803 and 1815, and paupers represented 7.4% of the local population in 1815 compared to 10.6% in 1803 (see figure 3). Between 1803 and 1815 the number of people receiving relief in the workhouse in Nantwich remained fairly constant, the number being limited by the capacity of the workhouse.

GRAPH TO

SHOW THE NUMBER OF PEOPLE RECEIVING RELIEF

KEY:

1 square = 5 people

Permanently
Receiving
Relief

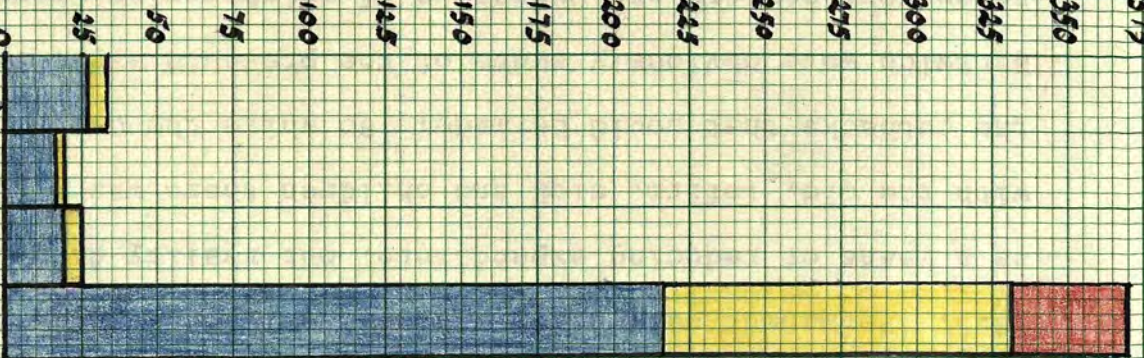
Occasionally
Receiving
Relief

Receiving
Relief in
the
workhouse

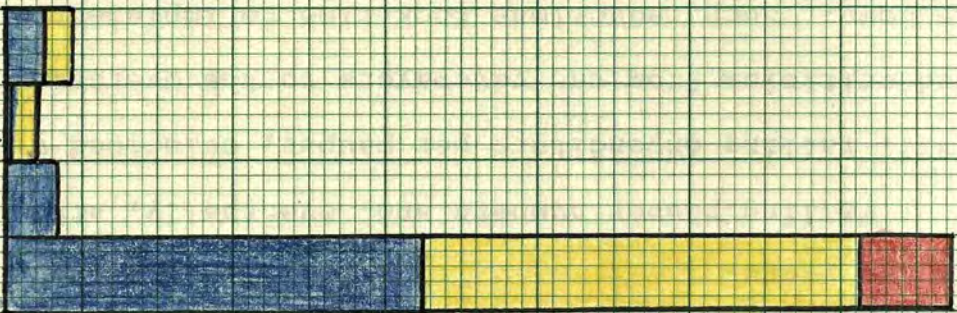
SOURCE:-
abstracts of the
Returns and
Answers to the
enquiries
relative to the
expenses
and maintenance
of the poor
1804 and 1818
C.R.O.

375
350
325
300
275
250
225
200
175
150
125
100
75
50
25
0

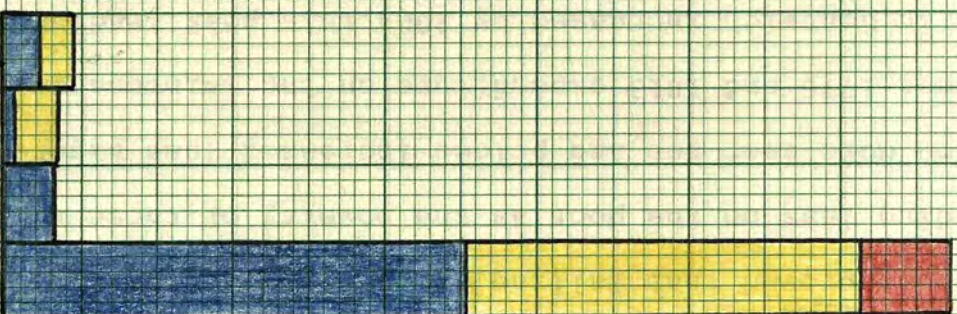
CHURCH
COPPENHALL
MONKS
COPPENHALL
CREWE
NANTWICH



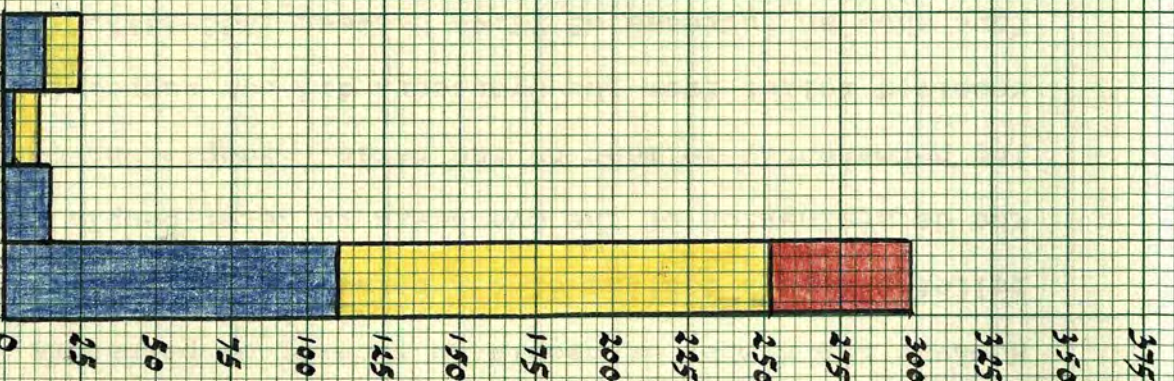
CHURCH
COPPENHALL
MONKS
COPPENHALL
CREWE
NANTWICH



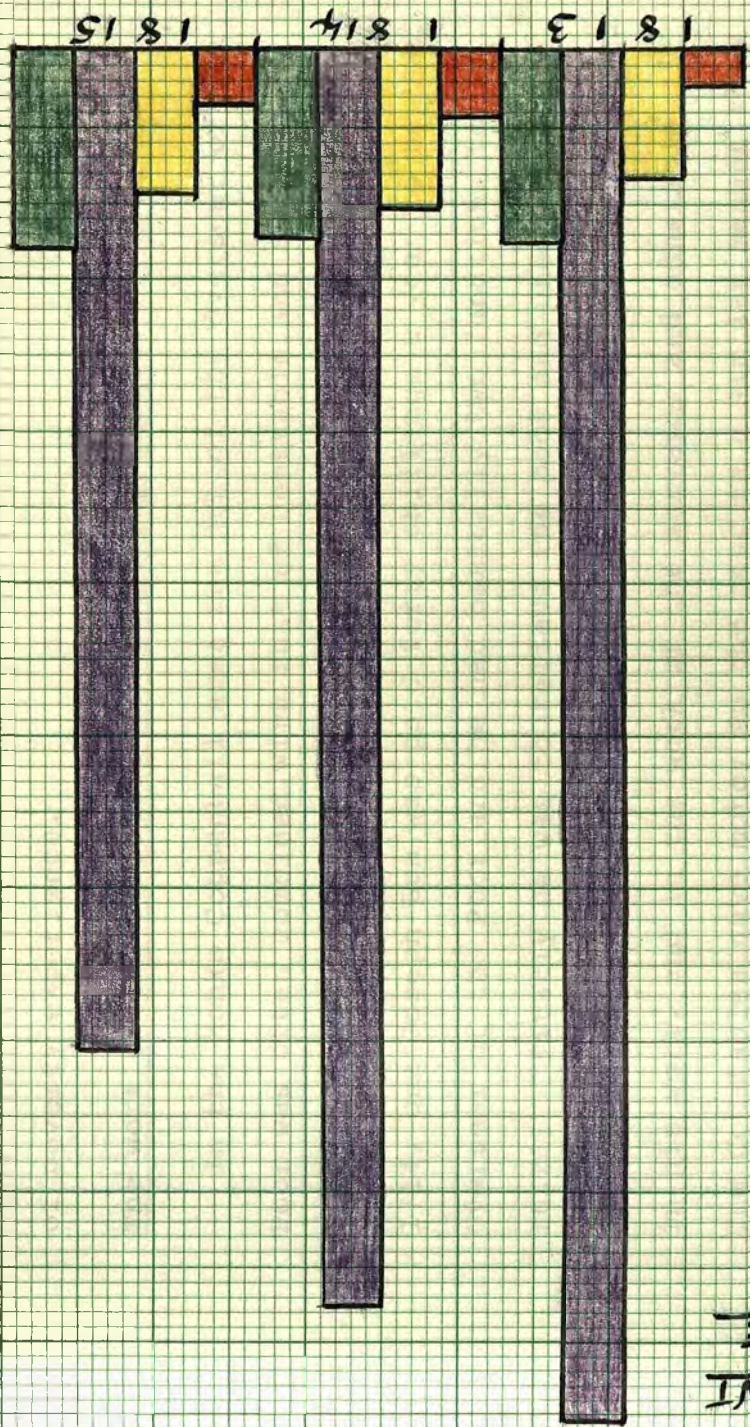
CHURCH
COPPENHALL
MONKS
COPPENHALL
CREWE
NANTWICH



CHURCH
COPPENHALL
MONKS
COPPENHALL
CREWE
NANTWICH



PEOPLE RECEIVING RELIEF



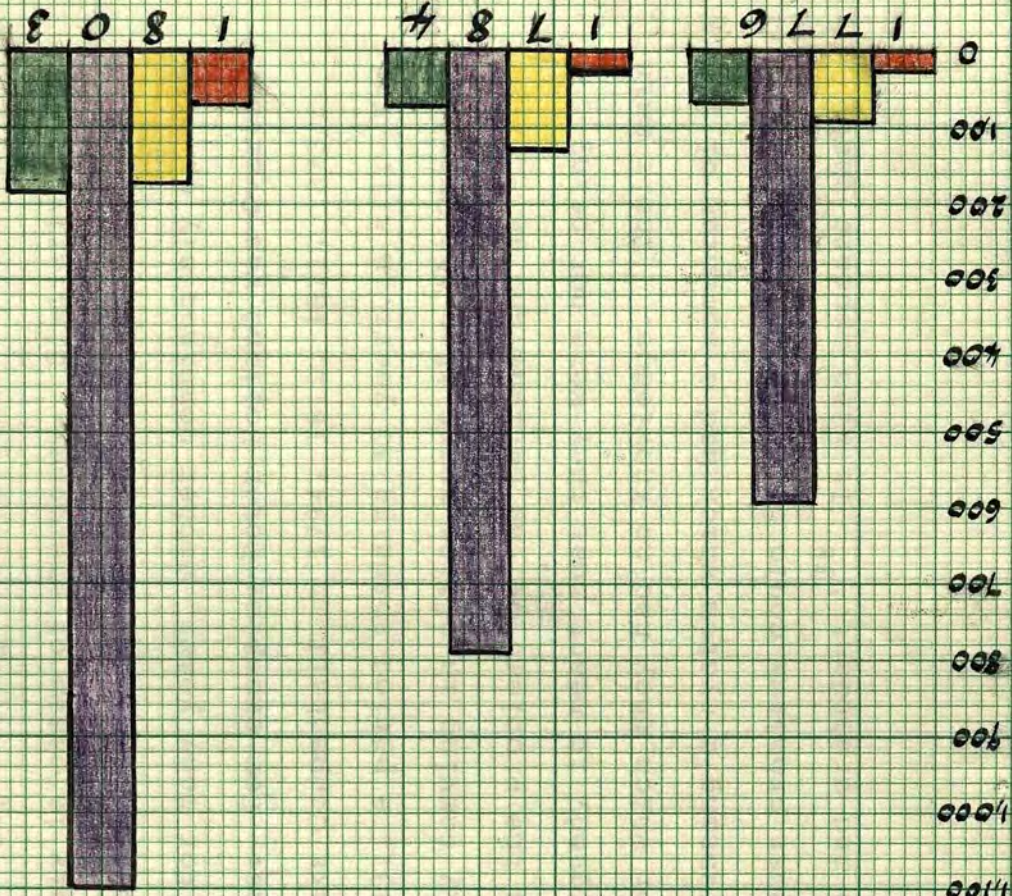
Source: - The
 Abstracts of the
 Returns made by
 the Owners of
 the Poor: 1777,
 1787, 1805, 1818

A GRAPH TO SHOW THE TOTAL AMOUNT
OF MONEY EXPENDED FOR THE MAINTENANCE

OF THE POOR

Key -
 Monks Coppenhall
 Church Coppenhall
 Nantwich
 Crewe

1 square = £20



MONEY EXPENDED FOR MAINTENANCE OF POOR

1,800
1,700
1,600
1,500
1,400
1,300
1,200
1,100
1,000
900
800
700
600
500
400
300
200
100
0

people within the same family held positions of responsibility, for example in 1793 William Williams was the Overseer followed by Thomas Williams in 1796 (and they too served several times in the following decades), Peter Walker and Richard Walker served as Overseer and Constable in 1832, and Samuel Sherwin and Richard Sherwin were Overseer and Constable in 1833.

The type of payments that were made in Monks Coppenhall, and in what particular circumstances, varied. Being 'in want' or 'in need' is a term frequently used and money was given to relieve this, amounts varying from twelve pence a week in 1690, to two shillings in 1794, and Thomas Laurences received £9 10s 7½d in 1797 (although this was the most money distributed to anyone that year) and most people seemed to have received between £2 0s 0d to £3 0s 0d in the late 1790s

The extent of poverty in Monks Coppenhall.

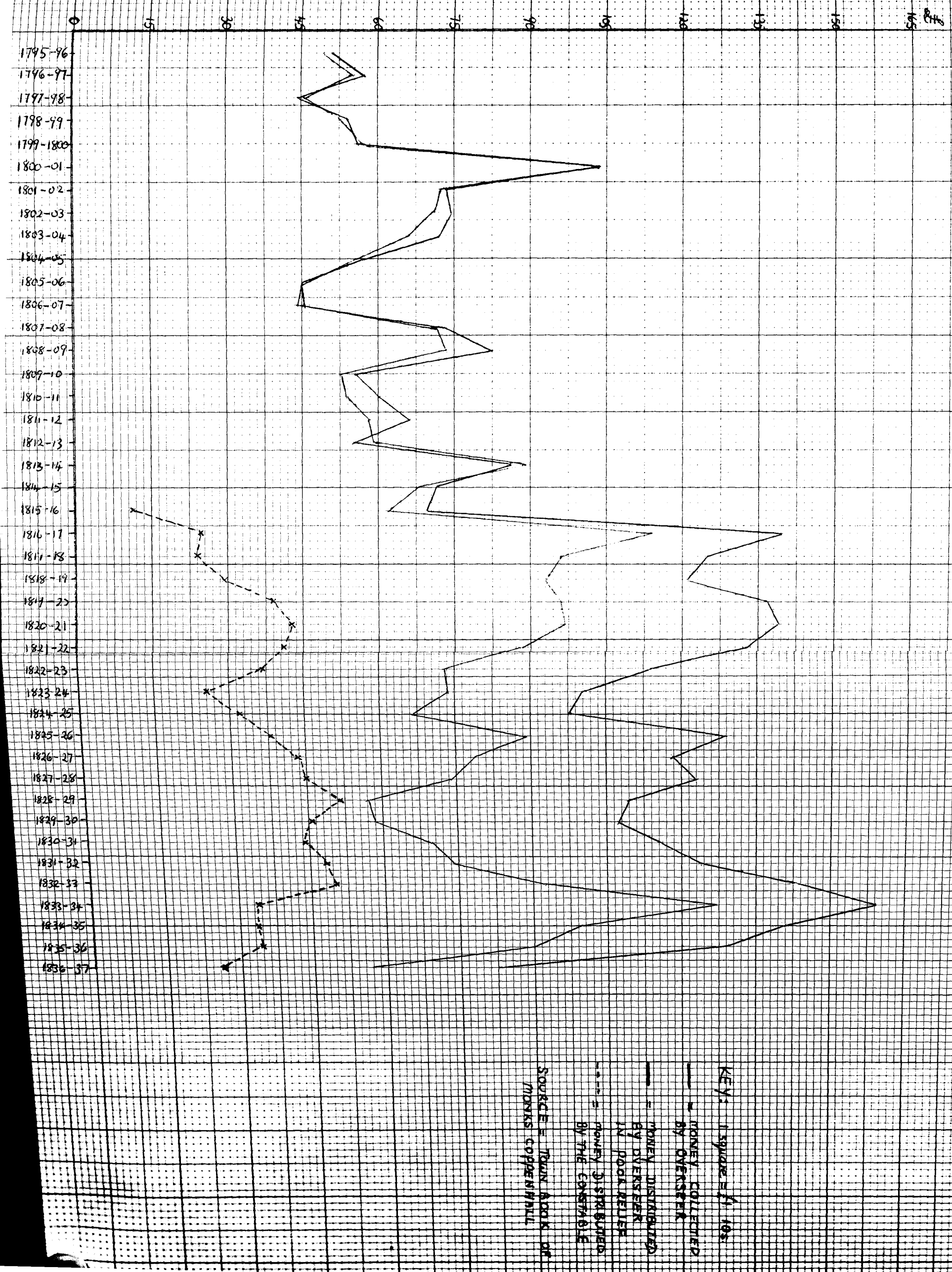
Expenditure on poor relief in Monks Coppenhall increased by 25% between 1776 and 1784, but showed an increase of 161% between 1784 and 1803 when a population of 121³⁹ was recorded and a total of 12 people and their families received relief, representing more than 9.9% of the population. While this figure is just 0.5% lower than that recorded in Nantwich the scale, and therefore the pressure of the problem, was different in so far as the population of Nantwich was twentyeight times larger than Monks Coppenhall.

By 1814 expenditure on the poor had increased by 213% compared with 1776 illustrating that even in this small community the Overseers were under increasing pressure from the

communities for relief (see figure 4 and Appendix C.) However between 1803 and 1815 those receiving permanent relief fell by 81%, while those occasionally relieved increased by 166% (see figure 3) emphasising that even in this rural community the Overseers were attempting to wean the residents away from permanent relief, and as a result the poor were relying more on occasionally resorting to the parish. Despite this the amount of money spent per pauper in Monks Coppenhall had increased by 50.6% between 1803-1815 the reality of which no doubt further encouraged the Overseers to make cutbacks where possible. However as G. W. Oxley has pointed out, the fact that the ratepayers and paupers were known to each other was conducive to both the effective control of expenditure and fair treatment of the poor. 'It was difficult to feign poverty amongst one's neighbours or to grind the faces of the poor if they lived next door.'⁴⁰ As figure 5 illustrates the overall trend in Monks Coppenhall in both the amount distributed to the poor and the amount collected from the poor rates, was upward. A peak of expenditure was reached in 1800 following the crises of 1795 when poor harvests and high prices in the county as a whole, combined to exacerbate the already difficult conditions. As G. W. Oxley has argued the crises tended to become permanent and the temporary measures that had been adopted to tide communities over a difficult period became permanent features of relief.⁴¹ While expenditure then fell for several years, the reprieve was only temporary and within six years increases were again being experienced. In the forty two years between 1795 and 1837, twenty one of these years witnessed an increase in

Figure 5

GRAPH TO SHOW THE AMOUNTS OF MONEY COLLECTED AND DISTRIBUTED BY THE OVERSEER OF THE POOR AND THE CONSTABLE IN MONKS COPPENHALL 1795-1837



the money distributed to the poor, and expenditure on poor relief increased by 159% between 1795 and 1834, while the population increased by approximately 22.3% during this period. In Monks Coppenhall in 1801 expenditure on poor relief stood at 14s 6d per head of the population, whereas in 1834 it had reached 17s 0d.

Crisis years occurred when the amount distributed to the poor exceeded that collected from the poor rates, usually between £1 0s 0d - £4 0s 0d: for example in 1798, 1800, 1801, 1806, 1807, 1813, and 1814 thereafter a seemingly healthy differential being maintained between the rates collected and money disbursed. However from 1815 onwards a separate record was kept of the money distributed by the Constable in emergencies to the poor, and when this is added to the poor relief disbursed by the Overseers, the period from 1815-1834 was characterised by very tight financial budgeting. When the Constables' disbursements are taken into consideration the amount distributed to the poor had increased by 228.5% between 1795 and 1834, and expenditure per head of the population stood at £1 1s 8d in 1834 compared with 14s 6d in 1801. Even though the community was a small one the pressures faced by the Overseers were no less severe than those in Nantwich and there was a discernible trend in weaning people away from permanent relief. Did these financial pressures affect the type of relief administered by the Overseers?

Different kinds of relief granted in Monks Coppenhall and Crewe.

Apart from cash being given to the poor in Monks Coppenhall there are also examples of coal⁴² and clothing being distributed continuously from the 1690s to the 1840s, and for three poor children an allowance was made of £1 1s 0d in 1794. The relief of children formed an important part of the Overseers job, as the actions taken on their behalf were, in the long term, going to have a great influence on future poor relief requirements. Therefore it has been argued that children '...presented Overseers with one of their best opportunities for constructive work.'⁴³ To give children the opportunity to acquire a trade and thereby give them the means to earn their own living in the future, assumed utmost importance according to the Overseers Accounts. From the 1690s onwards in Crewe there is evidence of the Overseers paying a man to take an apprentice, for example £1 10s 0d was given for this purpose in 1691. Judging from an entry in 1710 the Overseers of Crewe were not only willing to pay for a boy's indenture but provided cloth for new clothes, paid someone to make it up, provided two new shirts, a pair of shoes and paid for the signing of the indentures by the Justices of the Peace at a total cost of £1 8s 1d. Obviously this would be seen as an investment for the future as hopefully the boy would be able to earn his own living and not be a burden on the town.⁴⁴

There was also a 'Weavers' Girls' Account' that appears in 1795 in Monks Coppenhall where £24 10s 9d was paid to one

Josiah Moston which included:

	£	s	d
52 weeks pay @ 2d a week	5	4	0
Shoes	1	6	6
Clothes	1	10	0

Some parishes tried to reduce the costs of relief by farming out their poor and paying an entrepreneur a fixed sum per week for each pauper and then allowing him to make what profit he could by depressing the costs of maintenance. Also this scheme would have had the double advantage of teaching the children a trade and so enabling them to earn their own livelihood. The Weavers' account continued until 1801.

Sometimes the children of paupers were boarded out with other families in Monks Coppenhall.⁴⁵ The accounts of the Overseers show that for five years from 1832-1837 Richard Lindop, a farmer in the area, gave board and lodging to the child of a pauper widow, for which he received the sum of £3 18s 0d a year.

Pensions, the 'central bulwark' against poverty, were paid to the old members of the community and in 1771 they received between £1 7s 0d to £2 14s 0d a year. However by 1780 the general payment to pensioners in Crewe had increased to between £5 4s 0d to £11 14s 0d a year. From looking at the Town Book for Monks Coppenhall it is also evident which families and individuals were perpetually struggling in poverty year after year. John and Thomas Wilkinson, John Palin and Charles Davis all received relief continually from 1794. John Palin continued on relief until 1814, and in 1815

widow Palin's account appears for the first time, and relief continued every year for the widow. John Wilkinson continued on relief until 1821 and Thomas until 1822. Charles Davis remained on relief until 1817, and in 1818 Mary Davis' account appears and once again relief was continually given to the widow. When 'Old John Lingham' died in 1809 (he had continually received relief from 1795 of approximately £4 16s 0d a year) £2 0s 0d was paid towards his funeral, and a total of 4s 0d was given to his family for coal. It is also noted that in the same year Ann Stockton's child died and the following fees were incurred:

	s	d
Funeral fees	2	8
Ale at funeral	9	4
3 lb., of biscuits at funeral	4	6
Shroud		6
Coffin	12	0

This funeral entailed more than the usual expense for a child, the total being £1 9s 0d, while John Lingham's funeral in the same year only cost £2 0s 0d. Perhaps one reason for this could be that the child's death was considered a relief from further expense to the parish.

From the 1690s it is clear that families in the township of Crewe were encouraged to help care for their relatives when they fell on hard times, and money was granted to help them in this task. For example, in 1694 William Shaw was given 12s 0d for keeping his sister for eight weeks, and then John Shaw was given £2 8s 9d for keeping her for five quarters. Throughout

the years until 1710 when their sister died, the Shaw family were periodically given amounts varying between 4s 7d to £1 15s 0d to lodge or keep their sister, or for clothes for her. The final payment was made in 1710 when 17s 0d was paid for bread, drink, and a coffin at her funeral. In 1783 the Overseers gave £1 5s 0d to a man so that he could go to live with his daughter at Nantwich, and then he received between 3s 0d - 10s 0d every twelve to eighteen months to help with his keep.

Payments were also made to women for keeping their daughters' bastard children, for example 7s 6d in 1717, and £1 10s 0d a year was given so that a son could keep his old mother. Also in the 1750s there are many references to 52 weeks money to maintain a child with amounts varying from 6d to 1s 6d a week.

It is also evident that the community as a whole was expected to be flexible in accommodating the needy. In November 1792⁴⁶ the town meeting at Crewe decided that Mary Barlow should be put to live with Elizabeth Loafkin so that Margaret Barlow and her daughter could move into the other end of the same house, and then Richard Lees could move into the house vacated by Margaret. Obviously if the Overseers were paying the rent the residents could not complain and such reorganisation was thought to be for the benefit of the town.

The cost of getting married could also inflict hardship on a family, and in 1786 the Overseers contributed 5s 6d towards the expenses of John Burger's wedding. Other items that were purchased in Monks Coppenhall for the poor were large amounts of linen cloth, described variously as stripped holland and dark

holland, and in 1801 $2\frac{1}{2}$ yards cost $\frac{3}{4}$ d and this would presumably be used to make clothes for the poor, or perhaps to provide work for some parishioners on poor relief. There are also instances of money being provided to buy clothes - a coat for William Hulme cost 1s 0d in 1691, clothes for Sarah Moses' daughter 16s 7d in 1697, and an allowance of 7s 0d was made in 1813-1814 for children's clothes, and £1 0s 0d in 1825. Evidently the amount of money given to clothe a child had not varied much in 120 years. Blankets, bolsters, and sheets were also provided for the poor.

The Overseers were prepared to help maintain the homes of the poor, and in 1709 2s 4d was given for daubing, thatching, and repairs, and in 1797 400 bricks were purchased, and money was given for glazing windows. As was found to be the case in Nantwich, money was provided to help pay the rent, a typical example being £4 0s 0d in 1824, and arrears of rent were sometimes paid too. The payment of rent, especially if it had mounted up over a long period, would be one of the biggest items the poor had to budget for and consequently was the cause of many people finally having to resort to the Overseers for help. Such a payment by the Overseers made all the difference between someone surviving largely independently and a family falling permanently on relief. Also as the townships of Monks Coppenhall and Crewe did not have a poor house perhaps this was another reason why rents were paid. Even when there was a workhouse, as in Nantwich the number of people unable to pay their rent far exceeded the space available in the workhouse, and it was cheaper for the Overseers to pay the rent

than admit them to the workhouse.

In July 1819 the Overseer for Monks Coppenhall, William Davies, travelled to Middlewich to enquire about their poor house, and in 1821 William Roylance, Overseer, made the same journey 'to enquire the rates of the poor house for Samuel Charlesworth' and in 1827, 1828, and 1829, a subscription of two guineas was paid by Monks Coppenhall as an entrance fee to Middlewich Workhouse so that they could nominate an inmate. This occurred at a time of unprecedented high levels of poor relief being disbursed, with annual increases occurring consecutively between 1828 to 1834. The despatch of even one pauper to a neighbouring workhouse was an attempt to save money.

Apart from money being given to purchase food there are also examples in crisis years of measures of wheat being given to the value of 6s 6d as occurred in 1813 and potatoes being bought. The wives of militia men were supported while the men were away drilling, and the men themselves received payments from the Overseers.

As was seen to be the case in Nantwich, medicine was a commodity the poor could not afford without help from the Overseer, which he seems to have been ready to give, in the hope of preventing prolonged reliance on relief. Doctor's bills were paid⁴⁷ and money given for medicine.⁴⁸ A woman's lying in was often paid for by the Overseers, as in 1710 when one Mrs. Beckett spent three weeks at John Latham's house and he received 5s 0d for the cost of her food. 4s 0d was given for a midwife, a man and a horse to fetch her and bring her back

again, and a further 4s 0d was given for the cost of christening the child 'and for things for her from the shopp.' The Overseers of Crewe also paid for her food and rent for a further four weeks at a cost of 6s 8d,⁴⁹ and for churching the woman after the birth. However the Overseers were not always as generous as this, and by 1795 the typical amount given for a wife's lying-in was 5s 0d. Monetary help was available for the sick to have someone to look after them while they were ill, and in 1760 6s 0d was given to a man when his wife was ill and 1s 0d to have a woman to assist him when she was dying. In 1826 a woman was paid 4s 0d for attending a sick man. As G. W. Oxley has argued the provision of medical relief by the Overseers meant that:

What began as an economy measure to reduce the dependence of the sick poor, expanded to take in the whole range of the poor, and to bring within the range of the poor law others who had no claim for maintenance, but who could not afford the treatment they needed... This expansion and diversification of poor relief represents one of the greatest achievements of the old poor law. It shows how the precepts of the 1601 Act could be exploited to discover new forms of need and new methods of relief and, by bringing the two together, create a vastly improved relief service. 50

In Nantwich, and especially Monks Coppenhall, and Crewe, medical relief provided a valuable source of relief for local residents and even extended into a form of after care provision too, reflecting an attempt by the Overseers to provide a complete caring service.

Work was something the Overseers tried to provide for the poor, paying them cash no doubt in the hope that this would help them towards independence, and also get jobs done within the township, or fill a need in the community. Also relief was then seen to have been earned and not merely given out freely. In the Overseers' accounts and town books for Crewe and Monks Coppenhall there are various examples. One shilling a day was given for work in 1693, and in 1715 a woman was given £1 10s 0d a year to nurse another's child, but by 1797 widow Stockton was paid £2 12s 0d for 52 weeks work looking after her daughter's child. In 1709 women were paid 2s 0d for doing the washing for paupers in the community, and in 1759 a man was paid 1s 2d for four days work painting a house. Joseph Parks received £1 1s 0d in 1795 for instructing three poor boys and there are many instances in the 1790s of 52 weeks pay at approximately £7 16s 0d for a man and £5 4s 0d for a woman, but no indication is given as to what work was undertaken. The amounts of money given for 52 weeks work varied, perhaps relating to the type of work undertaken or the Overseer in charge at the time. In the 1760s the rate of pay for one year's work varied from £1 6s 0d to £3 18s 0d, and in 1835 from £2 12s 0d to £5 4s 0d. Where it is stated what work was undertaken manual work dominated, for example scraping the road, working in the sand pit, drawing bricks or ploughing.⁵¹ In many instances however, there was no work available and amounts of between 2s 6d and 3s 0d were paid to individuals. Setting the poor to work had been central to earlier Poor Law legislation but as J. D. Marshall has pointed out this was impracticable

in the face of structural unemployment.⁵²

Working as part of a 'team' was also common in Monks Coppenhall from the 1790s through until the 1840s which coincides with a period that P. Dunkley and G. W. Oxley have identified as a watershed in the history of the old Poor Law.⁵³ Oxley again argues that from 1795 onwards there was a permanent change in the pattern of poor relief and pension lists began to contain more able bodied men, a pattern that remained until the introduction of the 1834 Amendment Act. The requirement of team work in order to receive relief was one way of tackling this growth in the number of able bodied unemployed. It does not state what work was undertaken, just the length of time worked and money given, but team work certainly seems to have increased dramatically in the 1840s coinciding with the coming of the railways, which obviously would have meant an increase in population and more general work being required. As M. Blaug has pointed out, the fact that the old Poor Law relieved the unemployed, illustrated that it was, in essence, operating a device for dealing with the problem of surplus labour in a lagging rural sector of a rapidly expanding, but still undeveloped economy. 'And considering the quality of social administration in the day, it was by no means an unenlightened policy.'⁵⁴

Also the Overseers seemed not to have objected to giving someone money in order that he might be able to travel to find a market for his goods. In 1800 one man received 2s 6d from the Overseers of Monks Coppenhall, to go to Smallwood to sell goods that he had made. The inhabitants of the town of Crewe

also received relief in the event of the occasional natural disaster as in 1780, when two men lost everything when all they possessed was burned by lightning, and were given 2s 6d. All these examples also serve to support the point made by F. M. L. Thompson that the working class had not always associated poor relief with degradation,⁵⁵ and the provision of work for the able-bodied, the payment of cash, pensions and rent were all part of the Overseers' way of dealing with able-bodied poverty, caused by unemployment, low wages, or large families. However as M. E. Rose has pointed out it was the latter three types of relief in relation to the able-bodied unemployed poor, that attracted a lot of criticism towards the old Poor Law⁵⁶ while the Royal Commission of 1832 criticised such payments because they argued they were essentially helping to encourage poverty, the Overseers' actions had much to commend them. Such relief was simple and convenient, caused little disturbance to the family and was considered as a temporary measure until work could be found. As the problems of able-bodied pauperism developed the '... overseers' initial reaction was a crude extension of existing policies of cash relief, subject, if possible, to a work test.'⁵⁷ They were not to know that unemployment was no longer likely to be temporary.

Apart from ensuring that the poor had the purely basic necessities of life the Overseers of Monks Coppenhall and Crewe showed a genuine caring in the administration of their job, and as J. D. Marshall and E. Royle have argued the 'face to face' relationships of the village often lead to greater humanity towards those in need.⁵⁸ Also G. W. Oxley has pointed

out that the Overseers, when granting relief: '... did not see a category and determine their policy on that basis, they saw an individual with a problem to be solved in the most appropriate way.'⁵⁹ An example of this occurred in 1709 when Johna [Johanna] Scott received £2 18s 3d 'at [this] poor, sad time' and there is mention in 1826 of the Overseer for Monks Coppenhall going to Ralph Palin's funeral who had been on poor relief for many years, and in 1802-1803 John Wilkinson was given a 'Christmas box' of 5s 0d, and as mentioned earlier money was given for teaching small children.

The old Poor Law has been criticised as giving indiscriminate relief, but there seems to be no evidence in Crewe and Monks Coppenhall of wages being subsidised from the poor rate and most people that were relieved seemed to have been the old, infirm, genuine paupers, and children. The able-bodied unemployed were but one group of those seeking relief and did not swamp the system, which does not support the view held nationally at the time that the unemployed were abusing poor relief. Indeed as A. Digby has pointed out the growth in the provision of social welfare during the closing years of the old Poor Law meant that some parishes were providing services for settled inhabitants that constituted a 'welfare state in miniature.'⁶⁰

Even more so than in the Overseers Accounts of Nantwich, there is a real sense of the deep concern felt by the Overseers of Monks Coppenhall and Crewe for the plight of fellow villagers at every stage in their lives. Both communities were a great deal smaller than Nantwich and so the 'face to face' relationships which lay at the centre of the old Poor Law would have

been that much stronger. The smallest of all the local communities, Crewe gave the most to its paupers, a massive £17 6s 6d per pauper in 1815, when fifteen paupers are recorded in the settlement. The impression given by the Account books is that the smaller the community the greater the variety of relief given, even to the extent of helping to pay for a wedding. Monks Coppenhall and Crewe also shouldered heavy rate increases and escalating expenditure, and Monks Coppenhall and Church Coppenhall certainly reduced the reliance of paupers on permanent relief, but the quality of relief given to its residents not only took care of the immediate need but anticipated future requirements also. Obviously the standard of relief for paupers in Monks Coppenhall, Church Coppenhall and Crewe was very high, but did the Overseers face problems of administration such as those faced in Nantwich and the country as a whole?

Balancing the books, and the rising cost of relief

Monks Coppenhall, Church Coppenhall and Crewe townships also seem to have been experiencing some of the difficulties in administering poor relief that Nantwich were encountering on a larger scale. By 1776 Church Coppenhall expended £5 0s 0d more on poor relief than they had raised on the rates (see figure 4) and by 1784 Crewe township was spending 19% more on poor relief compared with 1776, Monks Coppenhall 25% and Church Coppenhall 39%. (see Appendix C) By 1803 the total amount expended on the poor was still responsible for devouring most of the money collected from the rates resulting in the fact that while Monks Coppenhall and Crewe managed to balance

the books, Church Coppenhall had a deficit of £9 0s 0d.⁶¹ Between 1776 and 1814 Monks Coppenhall, Church Coppenhall and Crewe witnessed expenditure on behalf of the poor increase by 213% and 276% respectively, caused by a combination of factors including increasing population, problems of trade and agriculture during the Napoleonic Wars, and bad harvests that had periodically affected the area. While these increasing costs caused concern, as in Nantwich, they do bear witness to the fact that the Poor Law was in fact managing to help certain members of the community survive what we now know to have been the trauma of a country undergoing transition from a mainly agricultural to industrial society. This transition was achieved at a cost to the ratepayers, but the concern and genuine welfare provisions provided, especially evident in the Overseers Accounts for Monks Coppenhall, Church Coppenhall and Crewe, indicate a level of care and consideration for the individual that was lost with the introduction of the Amendment Act of 1834.

Monks Coppenhall, Church Coppenhall, and Crewe, like Nantwich, had experienced a great rise in the local rates in order to pay for the increased amounts needed to relieve the poor. (see Appendix A) However by 1815 all of the townships apart from Crewe were collecting less rates than in 1814, that year having seen the rate levels reaching an all time high with Monks Coppenhall's rate levels being 534% higher in 1814 compared with 1776, and both Crewe and Church Coppenhall in 1814 were experiencing increases in the rates of between 253% and 230% respectively compared to 1776.

Crewe township seems to have taken action first and in 1814 was collecting 19% less in rates than in 1803, though 1815 again saw a slight rise in the amount they received from the rates, indicating that any cut back was hard to sustain. 1803 saw a peak locally in terms of the number of people seeking relief, but between 1803-1815 both Church Coppenhall and Crewe experienced considerable decreases in the number of paupers relieved: 26% and 40% respectively (see Appendix D). However, as had been the experience in Nantwich and Monks Coppenhall, a fall in the number of paupers did not equate with a fall off in the cost of relief, and the amount of relief received per pauper increased by 130.6% in Crewe, and by 47.5% in Church Coppenhall.

The numbers of paupers receiving permanent relief from the Overseers in Church Coppenhall declined by 50% between 1803-1815, reflecting what was happening in Monks Coppenhall and Nantwich, and the alarm felt over the continued rise of the rates, and a fear that the paupers were becoming too reliant on the parish. Consequently those occasionally relieved increased by 71% during the same period. Crewe was the only place from among the four communities where the reverse happened: in 1803 76% of paupers were in receipt of permanent relief, but by 1815 all the paupers were classed as permanent. Judging by the thoughtful and caring comments in the Overseers Accounts and the large increase in the amount received per pauper in Crewe between 1803-1815 together with the fact that 100% of the rates collected were disbursed to the poor of the small community (see Appendix E) Crewe exhibited more than the

other three local settlements the real advantage that the Poor Law could offer to the poor in a caring one to one relationship.

1813 saw the highest levels being reached in respect of the total money expended on the poor (see figure 4 and Appendix C), and these trends were mirrored in Cheshire as a whole with the number of people being relieved in the workhouse increasing.⁶² Certainly Cheshire as a whole was experiencing difficulties regarding the amount expended on the poor and registered deficits on total expenditure of £5,227 0s 0d in 1813, £4,820 0s 0d in 1814, and £3,171 0s 0d in 1815.⁶³

By 1815 sixtyfour parishes in Cheshire maintained the greater part of their poor in a workhouse, compared with sixtyone parishes in 1803 and just as Monks Coppenhall, Church Coppenhall and Crewe had experienced a fall in the number of people relieved (see Appendix D) so the percentage of people receiving relief in Cheshire fell from 12% in 1803 to 8½% in 1815.⁶⁴ It is doubtful that this meant poverty was decreasing but reflects the fact that the system of poor relief and who received it was being tightened up. Relief in the workhouse, as opposed to out-relief was becoming more extensive and as it was intended to have a deterrent effect this would obviously be reflected in the number of people receiving relief. However, it would be wrong to overestimate the impact of the workhouse as between 1813-1815 an average of only 6.3% of paupers permanently relieved received such relief in a workhouse in Cheshire.⁶⁵

By 1814 and 1815 the amount of relief given to each pauper was still increasing (see Appendix D). An average of £5 13s 0d was distributed to each pauper relieved in Cheshire, showing that relief given in Nantwich was below the Cheshire average, Monks Coppenhall was average, Church Coppenhall and especially the township of Crewe were way above average. The reason for this was because the township of Crewe distributed all the money raised through the rates directly to the poor, unlike the other three townships who deducted the church rate, county rate and highway rate before distributing what was left to the poor,⁶⁶ (see Appendix E).

Growing criticism of the old Poor Law - National investigations and local findings

Feelings of disquiet about the system of poor relief were being voiced nationally at this time, and many of the problems experienced locally in Cheshire were apparent in other areas of the country too. Also because the system of poor relief was flexible and could be adapted to local needs, problems arose in other parts of the country, like the topping up of wages with allowances, that do not appear to have been a problem in Cheshire. However, the whole system was viewed with suspicion and fear by many people who felt, like many landowners and ratepayers, that the system itself was in some way hastening the spread of poverty and that only a change in the system could help stem the flow of paupers. The advantages of the old system as seen in operation locally in Cheshire in terms of a caring attitude to fellow villagers in times of hardship was overlooked in favour of economy, and as A. Digby has argued

there was a growing trend for the '... humane relationship between men of different status and income [to be] replaced by a narrower cash nexus.'⁶⁷

A report from the Select Committee on the Poor Law in 1817⁶⁸ believed that one reason for the increase in the number of the poor was that:

...while permission to solicit support from private benevolence was given to those who were disabled by age or infirmity, it became probably extremely difficult to repress the same practice in others who as long as they might live by begging, did refuse to labour giving themselves to idleness and vice.⁶⁹

The report recommended that the able bodied should be set to work '...motivated by humanity, directed to the purpose of preventing the burden falling upon the charitable.'⁷⁰ The present system they felt '...could not fail in the process of time ...to produce the unfortunate effect of abating those exertions on the part of the labouring classes on which ...the happiness and welfare of mankind has been made to rest.'

The Committee expressed the feelings that many ratepayers had voiced locally in the 1780s:

That this system is perpetually encouraging and increasing the amount of misery it was designed to alleviate, creating at the same time an unlimited demand on funds which it cannot augment ...so it is without its beneficial effects; as it proceeds from no impulse of charity, it creates no feelings of gratitude, and not infrequently engenders dispositions and habits calculated to separate rather than unite the interests of the higher and lower orders of the community, even the obligations of natural affection are no longer left to their own impulse but the mutual support of the nearest

relations has been actually enjoined by a positive law, which the authority of magistrates is continually required to enforce. 71

The committee 'blaims' both the extension of charities and the system of poor relief itself for the increased number of people claiming relief with the resulting increases in costs. While any system will undoubtedly have its loopholes and people will always be ready to take advantage of this, it does seem that there was a determined reluctance at the time to acknowledge changed economic and social conditions could lead to increased poverty. Instead the concerted opinion was that the increased poverty being experienced was caused by some inherent weakness in the system, not to mention in the character of the recipients, the majority of whom the committee seem to have felt were abusing the system. While there is no evidence to support such arguments in Monks Coppenhall and Crewe, the Overseers of Nantwich had expressed doubts about the effect relief had on some recipients after criticism from ratepayers about the levels of relief in the town in the 1790s. Similarly the members of the above committee would themselves be ratepayers and large landowners and obviously the increased rates experienced over the last decades of the eighteenth century would have hardened their attitudes. They argued that the industrious class was 'oppressed' by the weight of contributions taken from those very means which would otherwise have been applied 'to the more beneficial supply of employment.' They argued that the system that had been in operation

for more than two centuries had 'become interwoven with the habits and very existence of a large class of the community.'⁷²

The committee could see no solution to the problem until the system was changed:

... it is apparent that both the number of paupers and the amount of money levied by assessment, are progressively increasing, while the situation of the poor, appears not to have been in a corresponding degree improved; and the committee is of the opinion, that whilst the existing poor laws, and the system under which they are administered remain unchanged there does not exist any power of arresting the progress of this increase, till it shall no longer be found possible to augment the sums raised by assessment... The independent spirit which induced individuals in the labouring classes to exert themselves to the utmost before they submitted to become paupers is much impaired.⁷³

The committee was obviously in favour of an extension of the workhouse system, which it believed could cure several of the weaknesses in the system of poor relief. The recommendations that this report believed would improve the poor law system obviously laid down the foundations for the 1834 Report, which argued along similar lines, but with more urgency. The workhouse, they believed '... for a long time acted very powerfully in deterring persons from throwing themselves on their parishes for relief, there were so many who would struggle through their difficulties rather than undergo the discipline of a workhouse.'⁷⁴

Outdoor relief was, the committee believed, an evil that should be avoided at all costs in the future. In Crewe, Monks Coppenhall, Church Coppenhall and Nantwich it has been

seen that many people benefited from the system of outdoor relief which could be flexibly adapted to local needs, apart from the fact that not all requirements could be satisfied by admittance to the workhouse. Obviously the ratepayers did not agree with this analysis as rates escalated and the commissioners issued a wary caution that:

Parishes worried by this time that the annual value of the land was not sufficient to maintain the numerous and increasing poor... and the poor will be without relief or any known mode of obtaining it, unless some assistance be speedily afforded them.⁷⁵

The committee observed that they had seen many parishes approaching this state of dereliction, and such authoritative opinion would have convinced many ratepayers that a change was needed.

In conclusion the committee commented:

By following the dictates of their own interests, land owners and farmers become, in the natural order of things, the best trustees and guardians for the public. When that order of things is destroyed and a compulsory maintenance established for all who require it, the consequence cannot fail in the end to be equally ruinous to both parties ... nothing less than the dread of the evils, which are their natural consequence, appears to be sufficiently strong in any degree to control them... but when such resources can no longer be found, then will these evils be felt in their full force and as the gradual addition of fresh funds can only create an increased number of paupers, it is obvious that the amount of the misery which must be endured, when these funds can no longer be augmented, will be greater... true benevolence and real charity point to other means. ⁷⁶

The opinions expressed in this Report echo the doubts and feelings felt in England as a whole, and voiced in Nantwich as the rates kept on rising. However one of the virtues of the old Poor Law was the variety of form it exhibited throughout the country, but examples of where the relief system had functioned with sympathetic consideration towards the poor were ignored, such positive features being cancelled out by the escalating costs which were a universal characteristic of the system. A lack of uniformity was rather seen as yet another disadvantage of the system and the argument that the able bodied were abusing the system by having their wages topped up by the poor rate, although far from being the case throughout the country, was viewed as reason enough to argue for a wholesale change in the system on the grounds that it would not be so morally damaging to the poor, or financially damaging to the ratepayers.

However, while the Report from the Select Committee in 1817 called for reform and the abuses of the system were emphasised, ultimately the prevailing opinion at government level was that poor relief was so much a part of the custom and habit of the people that the system was essentially left alone. While the 1820s did not see a repeat of the peaks of expenditure witnessed around 1813, and falling levels of expenditure were widely experienced. the Overseers books indicate that the system continued to function much as before. The Swing riots combined with climbing expenditure from 1828, however, meant that the Whig government became convinced of the need for change as the old form of social discipline via the poor law had, in

certain areas, obviously broken down and the fear was that this social disruption could spread rapidly. As the system was no longer, from the government's point of view, fulfilling one of its prime objectives, there was no longer such a barrier to change and doubts and inhibitions that had held back reform in 1817 evaporated in the early 1830s, leading to the setting up of the Royal Commission in 1832.

In terms of Cheshire, Nantwich, Monks Coppenhall, Crewe, and Church Coppenhall form a contrasting group of communities in which to examine the state of administration of poor relief immediately before the introduction of the new Poor Law. In terms of population each of the communities fall into different groups representing, in terms of size, the total range of parishes within Cheshire. Nantwich was one of the twelve largest parishes in Cheshire and Church Coppenhall and Monks Coppenhall fall into the categories representing the most typical size of Cheshire communities, while Crewe was typical of the smaller settlements.⁷⁷

The Commissioner who examined the system of poor relief in Staffordshire and Cheshire for the purpose of the 1834 Poor Law Report was D. C. Moylan. He found that in Cheshire the burden of the poor was light compared with the Southern counties 'yet that which is on all hands allowed to be the radical vice of the system (affording relief in money to the able bodied) is by no means unknown in the county of Chester.'⁷⁸ Mr. Moylan argued that considering the increase in the population in Cheshire and the total of money collected via the poor rates, that 'this must be taken as in point of fact a

diminution of the burden.'⁷⁹ One reason he attributes for this is the successful operation of Mr. Sturges Bourne's Act where those who were assessed to pay the most towards the poor rates exercised more voting rights at the vestry meetings. He draws the favourable comparison that the rate per head of expenditure for the relief of the poor in Cheshire was 7s 3d whereas the average for England was 11s 9½d.

Moylan felt that Cheshire proved the fallacy of the:

Very prevalent opinion calculated...
to weaken the force of those arguments
which may in fairness and with truth
be urged against the present system.
I do not pretend to say whether the
increase of population should or should
not be looked on as an evil, but it is
desirable that a correct judgement
should be formed as to the probable
cause of such an increase. It is attri-
buted by some to the operation of the
poor laws in the encouragement they
afford to early marriage. The county
of Cheshire must be admitted to be
lightly burdened compared with the South
and yet the increase of population is
comparably greater here. 80

Moylan posed the question should poor law jurisdiction be transferred to other hands in the light of his experience of how the system was administered in Cheshire. He was firmly of the opinion that if courts throughout Britain were directed by men of such ability as he had found in Cheshire there would be little need of reform. This view supports the evidence surviving for Monks Coppenhall, Church Coppenhall, Crewe, and Nantwich that shows that the system could be administered with compassion and local times of hardship catered for, the cries for reform coming mainly from the ratepayers.

In Cheshire, Moylan found that the chief cause of pauperism was the decrease of agricultural capital and farmers attributed this to high rents they had to pay which meant they were unable to employ as many labourers as they would like. The farmers believed this resulted in many labourers applying for poor relief 'as if the surplus [of labourers] was to be determined by the amount of their capital, and not by the field which exists for the useful application of labour.'⁸¹

In Nantwich, Moylan found that the poor rate stood at £1,500 0s 0d and that it had been at that figure for many years with little variation. The workhouse, he reported, had a few acres of land attached to it which was cultivated by any of the inmates capable of labour. Of the public charities operating in Nantwich, Moylan found that if one member of a poor family went to Church on Sunday they could claim a loaf of 4 lbs. Also every poor man in the town was entitled to a rood of ground for every member of his family able to work, on Beam Heath Common, and no more than 3d per rood was demanded in rent. Moylan commented that:

The effects are to be seen in the decent appearances of the wives and children of these poor men on the market day in Nantwich, and the other inhabitants derive benefit from the abundant supply of good vegetables at a cheap rate. 82

Moylan noted that the staple trade in Nantwich was shoe-making which employed children of both sexes, and the average wage for a good workman was from eight to ten shillings a week. He also pointed out that with the many advantages which

Nantwich possessed the poor rate was extremely high, which as noted earlier, had long been a complaint with the ratepayers in the town.

There appears to be not a sufficient degree of publicity with regard to the parish accounts: there may be nothing wrong in the mode in which they are managed and audited, but publicity is the best check, and should be required in all cases and enforced by some superintending authority. 83

Apparently there were a great many small cottages in Nantwich generally let for £5 0s 0d a year. The occupiers were rated, but in many cases were unable to pay the rate and on average 10% was not collected.

Regarding the treatment of bastards in Nantwich, Moylan found that 1s 8d was levied from the father, and in addition to this 6d was given by the Overseers to the mother, which they considered was sufficient to maintain the child. In general he found that one third of the cost of the whole expense was recovered from the father, but 'many of them contrive to escape before the order can be served or enforced against them.'⁸⁴

Moylan also found that the power to punish the mother for the first offence was not enforced in Nantwich or any of the adjoining parishes, and was very rarely enforced for even a second offence. One practice used in Nantwich which Moylan thought an advantage was that jobs of surveyor of the highways and Overseer were linked so that every applicant for relief was immediately able to find employment.

In contrast to the numerous paupers in the town of Nantwich the answers to the rural questions in the Appendices

to the 1834 Poor Law Report⁸⁵ reveal the extent of poverty in the countryside immediately surrounding the town.

William Woolley, the Overseer, stated that the population of Nantwich parish had increased by 30% in 1831 compared with 1801.⁸⁶ The poor rate had been steadily rising throughout the early part of the nineteenth century, reaching a peak in 1821 when the rate had increased by 38% compared with the figures for 1801 and in 1833 the rates were again increasing compared with preceeding years. In terms of the expense of the poor per head of the population, 1813 had been one of the worst years with a charge of 12s 0d per head of the population. By 1831 this figure had been reduced to 6s 0d per head. The township was dependant on agriculture and complained of a 'considerable excess of population' who could rely on no other work apart from the land as they were 'not sufficiently near the saltworks for men to find employment.'⁸⁷ There was no work for women and children to do except in harvest time and the average weekly wage for a man was 9s 0d.

Both in Summer and Winter there were on average six labourers out of work who would be maintained by farmers in the Summer, or in repairing roads in the Winter. No labourers in the township owned their own cottage, but seven labourers rented two acres each and kept cows on this.⁸⁸

The number of people who received poor relief in the week prior to the returns being made were six, or 2.3% of the population. As in Monks Coppenhall the Overseers served in rotation, using valuations made sixty years previously for the purpose of rental, and the Overseer and select vestry decided

on the rate to be set. When the Overseer wanted money to relieve someone he made out an assessment which the select vestry always allowed as they signed their names as a matter of course.⁸⁹ As was the case in Cheshire generally no allowance was given to any man in work either for himself or for his family and no work for individuals was partly paid for by the parish.

So, albeit on a smaller scale, Nantwich Parish's experience of the problems of relieving the poor had been similar in some respects to those encountered in the town. They too experienced an increase in the rates, tried to check this, but found they were increasing again in the 1830s. The parish had an excess of population and people found it hard to get work all the year round. However only 2.3% of the parish were on poor relief when the returns were made, and judging from the Overseer's comments this figure was maintained fairly steadily throughout the year. So in the rural areas surrounding the town the problem of poverty certainly did not appear on the scale encountered in the town. The situation described by the Assistant Commissioner confirms the view expressed by K. Williams that given the increases in population that were taking place at the time, 22.3% in Monks Coppenhall between 1801 and 1831, and 41% in Nantwich during the same period, expenditure on the poor law did not in fact involve the huge sums of money which would have been necessary if the system had been moving towards universality and away from selective relief. However this fact did not coincide with the ground swell of feeling nationally, or the conclusions of the

Assistant Commissioner.

What, in the opinion of D. Fraser, was the fact that doomed the old Poor Law was that despite paying £7 million a year nationally there still occurred the frightening Swing riots of 1830.⁹⁰ The old Poor Law had not eradicated distress in all parts of the country, and this disaffection meant that the new Poor Law Amendment Act was based on what people thought was happening i.e. the abuse of the allowance system which demoralised and pauperised the adult able bodied rural labourer, and which it was believed was spreading throughout the country. As P. Dunkley has argued the findings of the Assistant Commissioners were readily accepted because they were set against a background of riots that:

...seemed proof enough that the resources of the old order, including popular patronage discipline, were no longer sufficient to ensure the contest and obedience that were essential for the maintenance of stability in the strongholds of landed power. 91

The poor law was at the centre of government concern in relation to the spread of social conflict. As Checkland has pointed out the 1834 Poor Law Report '... was inspired by the fears of the day, guided by contemporary social philosophy and inhibited by the primitive state of social inquiry.'⁹² The Report tended to be biased against the then system of poor relief, and assumed poverty was caused by improvidence and vice, and that the system of poor relief was itself contributing to the growth of poverty. No doubt in some areas this could have been interpreted as true, but in Cheshire we do not

encounter the worst 'abuses' of the system that were evident in the South, and that the Commissioners feared would spread to the North. Indeed Hobsbawm has argued that the reason why the poor relief system was pushed to its limits and 'abused' in Southern and Eastern areas was because poverty had become so widespread there and people were desperate.⁹³

As M. Blaug argues:

The poor law commissioners of 1834 ... deliberately selected the facts so as to impeach the existing administration [of the poor laws] on predetermined lines... what little evidence they did present consisted of little more than picturesque anecdotes of maladministration.⁹⁴

The old Poor Law was seen by landowners and ratepayers as costly and wasteful. The burden of poor relief certainly did not appear to be shrinking and so Chadwick's arguments for an administrative revolution were readily approved of.

In conclusion the experiences of Nantwich, Crewe, Monks Coppenhall. and Church Coppenhall, representative of a cross section of communities in Cheshire, indicate that they all suffered steep rises in the rates between 1776 and 1814; experienced varying degrees of increased expenditure on the poor; then witnessed a fall in the number of paupers between 1803-1815 while the amount spent per head of the pauper population increased rapidly. While all the above factors fuelled the consternation and concern of ratepayers, they are not the only factors to be considered in an analysis of the success or failure of the old Poor Law. The Poor Law had evolved in an attempt to fill the gap that emerged between

the endowed charities and the vagrancy laws and in so doing, the Overseers Accounts convey a true sense of the all embracing nature of the welfare system that developed and the quality of care conveyed to fellow villagers. From the paupers point of view that was what the system was there for - to help them survive the calamities of life, and the problems encountered during sickness and old age. As to whether or not the Poor Law was in crises locally that the Royal Commission purported characterised the system in the 1830s, the evidence does reveal increasing levels of expenditure and climbing rate bills, but there is certainly no evidence of the abuse of the system in the form of allowances in aid of wages. As J. R. Poynter has questioned, were the allowances that were so criticised

... ever much more than haphazard and occasional devices adopted to meet the accidental circumstances of scarcity or later of post-war distress? Or should the 'system' be regarded as an important new social institution, born of major structural changes in the economy? 95

While it now appears allowances in aid of wages were not as widespread as once thought, the whole system was condemned because of them. What is clear is that the system of relief that developed in Nantwich, Monks Coppenhall, and Crewe did respond to economic and social changes, and in respect of the medical care offered and the care of the bereaved, old, and distressed, what ever the cause, an all embracing social institution developed whose positive features, at least to those receiving relief, outweighed the negative i.e. the cost.

The Overseers of Nantwich did voice their fears about the

system encouraging idleness and a lack of morals, and cut backs were made in order to reduce the poor lists, but inevitably with rising prices the amount of relief expended per head of the pauper population rose steadily. With hindsight we can attribute this to economic factors over which the local overseers had no control and we praise the positive virtues of this caring system, examples of which are abundant in the Overseers Accounts, especially in the smaller communities of Crewe and Monks Coppenhall. However at the time the ratepayers opinions predominated because they were hard hit by rising rates and were therefore vocal in damning the system.

Bread scales, roundsmen systems and labour rates, long considered essential features of the old Poor Law '... are seen to have had a hold that was marginal or slipping in many areas',⁹⁶ and are not recorded at all in this part of Cheshire, yet the system as a whole was condemned on the widespread assumption that such features were helping breed poverty. There is no evidence to suggest that the poverty in this part of South Cheshire was to any degree generated by the system of administering relief. It fulfilled its purpose with compassion, and only in Nantwich, the most densely populated town of the four settlements examined, did accusations of abuse of the system arise, which are far outweighed by the positive features of the system. One fact that was inescapable, but contemporaries, not surprisingly, found hard to appreciate, was that the onset of the industrial revolution had expanded the number of people who were vulnerable to able bodied poverty, through no moral fault of their own. It was this fact that had put

so much pressure on the poor relief system and the able bodied unemployed, victims of cyclical depression, together with the old, sick, and children, were to suffer even more once the relief system had been amended.

As G. W. Oxley has argued, the main achievement of the old Poor Law was the establishment of an effective, comprehensive and flexible system for the relief of the deserving poor: the aged, sick, and one parent families. Ironically this was peripheral to what the 1601 Act had been designed to alleviate - the problem of unemployment and its consequential evils which were to be tackled by putting the able bodied poor to work.

'... Two centuries or so later the failure of the old Poor Law to deal adequately with the able bodied of the industrial revolution led to its being substantially amended.'⁹⁷ As A. Digby and others have argued the old Poor Law and the relief it disbursed was a response to population growth, unemployment, and low wages rather than their cause as the Royal Commission's Report of 1834 alleged. 'Unfortunately the Report's incorrect diagnoses underlay the policies adopted in the Poor Law Amendment Act, and thus limited its effectiveness.'⁹⁸

There is evidence that the Overseers of Monks Coppenhall were preparing for the change to the new Poor Law as in 1834 they purchased a copy of the Act for 1s 6d and several letters were received from the Poor Law Commissioners in 1836-1837. The Overseer went with the Surveyor to Nantwich in June 1836 to attend a meeting 'on the Commissioners' and in November 1836 they met an Assistant Poor Law Commissioner there and early in 1837 two old and infirm paupers were moved from their cottages

(where rent had previously been paid) to Nantwich Workhouse and the first Nantwich Board of Guardians meeting on February 20th, 1837, was attended by the Reverend Robert Mayor, Overseer for Monks Coppenhall, and Edward Jackson, Overseer for Church Coppenhall.

FOOTNOTES

CHAPTER ONE

1. J. R. Poynter, Society and Pauperism - English ideas on Poor Relief 1795-1834 (1969) p. xx
2. G. W. Oxley, Poor Relief in England and Wales 1601-1834 (1974) p. 16
3. Agreement entered in the Burial Register
Cited by J. Hall op. cit., p. 130
4. The Wilbrahams resided in Nantwich at Townsend House in Welsh Row for 200 years from 1580-1780.
See also chapter 2 p. 74 for details of the families charitable endeavours.
5. J. Hall, op. cit., p. 207
quoting from Roger Wilbraham Esq.,
The Town Concernes 1682
6. ibid.
7. ibid. p. 205
8. Sir Robert Salsbury Cotton, Bart. of Combermere.
George Wilbraham, Esq. of Delamere.
James Tomkinson Junr.
William Yoxall (Attorney)
George Garnett (Cheesefactor)
Richard Wickstead (Surgeon)
George Cappur (Cheesefactor)
James Caldwell (Linen draper)
William Phillips (Innkeeper)
George Payne (Gentleman of Hospital Street)
William Foster (Mercer)
John Eddowes (Grocer)
Joseph Jackson (Maltster)
Charles Gibbons (Attorney)
Thomas Massie Two Shares (Chandler)
William Sprout Junr. (Linen Draper)
Joseph Skerrett (Upholsterer and Auctioneer)
Thomas Jackson
William Watkiss (Attorney)
Henry Tomkinson (Attorney)
Robert Taylor (Tanner)
Charles Bate (Attorney)
Benjamin Hewitt Four Shares (Shoe Manufacturer, later a Banker)
Robert Taylor Junr. (Tanner)
Samuel Hodgson Two shares (Wine Merchant)
John Tomlinson
Reverend John Kent (Grammar Schoolmaster)
Peter Bayley (Attorney)

Richard Leversage Two shares (Ironmonger)
James Foster (Stay Maker)
Samuel Barrow Esq. (J. P.)

9. From J. Howard, Accounts of Lazarottes (1789)
p. 209. Quoted in J. Hall op. cit., p. 228
10. K. D. M. Snell, Annals of the Labouring Poor
Social Change and Agrarian England
1660-1900 (1985) p. 104
11. ibid. p. 105
12. P. Dunkley, The Crises of the old Poor Law in
England 1795-1834 - An interpretive essay
(1982) p. 31, p. 33, p. 46
13. St. Mary's Parish Church, Nantwich
Vestry Minutes 1731-1777
14. The six-penny rate was levied three times in 1731;
twice in 1733; three times in 1734; three times in
1735 (one of which was ordered by the Committee
of the Poor House and was cancelled by the Vestry
Meeting), once in 1736 and not again until 1740.
In 1740 it was levied three times, in 1741 five
times, and in 1742 four times, in 1743 twice,
1744 twice and once in 1745, 1747, and 1752.
15. C.R.O. D/2891/5
16. 27 men, 62 women, and 70 children.
C.R.O. D/2891/5
17. C.R.O. M.F. 200/16 covering volumes QJB 3/18-1798
QJB 3/19 1808 p. 166
18. St. Mary's Parish Church, Nantwich
Accounts of the Overseers of the Poor 1780-1781
1784-1785
19. G. W. Oxley, op. cit., pp. 65-66
20. ibid. p. 63 and J. R. Poynter, op. cit., p. 14
21. J. D. Marshall, The old Poor Law
1795-1834 (1973) p. 15
22. M. E. Rose, The English Poor Law 1780-1930
(1971) pp. 19-21
23. J. R. Poynter, op. cit., p. 44
24. J. D. Marshall, op. cit., p. 12

25. see Figure 4
26. In 1776 Church Coppenhall had a deficit of £4 17s 7d. The county of Cheshire had a deficit of £361 0s 4d, and England had a total deficit of £8,902 9s 6d.
C.R.O. Abstracts of the Returns made by the Overseers of the Poor in pursuance of an Act passed in the 16th year of his present Majesty's reign. Acc L127
27. C.R.O. D/2891/5
28. ibid. In one week it was noted that there were the following resident paupers claiming relief: 25 widows, 32 males, 52 children, and 42 females. The relief they were given varied from 1s 0d to 5s 0d maximum. The total relief given for the week was £8 15s 9d.
29. ibid.
30. ibid.
31. G. W. Oxley op. cit., p. 17
32. C.R.O. Abstract of the Answers and Returns made pursuant to an Act passed in the 43rd year of His Majesty King George III Acc L128
33. J. D. Marshall op. cit., p. 37
34. K. Williams, From Pauperism to Poverty. (1981) pp. 38-40
35. Annual expenditure in Cheshire on account of the poor:

	£
1776	29,659
1783/84/85 (average) .	39,292
1803	69,799
1813	128,233
1815	110,765

Taken from the Abstracts of the Answers and Returns made by the Overseer of the Poor
C.R.O. Acc L127, L850, L128
36. C.R.O. Abstracts of the Answers and Returns 1803 op. cit.,
37. Two Overseers' Account Books exist for the Township of Crewe, dated 1687-1719 C.R.O. PC 14/1/1
1759-1795 C.R.O. PC 14/1/2
The Town Book of Monks Coppenhall (1792-1847)
1 volume. C.P.L. (now transferred to the C.R.O.)

38. G. W. Oxley, op. cit., p.44
39. See footnote 21 to introduction
40. G. W. Oxley, op. cit., p. 42
41. ibid. p. 113
42. Two loads of coal in 1813-1814 cost £2 0s 0d
43. G. W. Oxley, op. cit., p. 77
44. C.R.O. PC14/1/1
45. 'The Reminiscences of Richard Lindop, Farmer, 1778-1871 and his account of the Township of Church Coppenhall, near Nantwich, Cheshire.' Edited by W. H. Chaloner in Transactions of the Lancashire and Cheshire Antiquarian Society Vol. LV 1940 p. 108
46. C.R.O. PC 14/1/2
47. In 1809-1810 Ann Stockton's child died and the doctor's bill of 5s 6d was paid by the Overseer. C.R.O. Town Book of Monks Coppenhall, op. cit.,
48. In 1800 4s 6d was given for 'drops for son' and in 1809 2s 0d was given for 'physic for child' and these are just two examples from many in the C.R.O. Town Book of Coppenhall.
49. C.R.O. PC 14/1/1
50. G. W. Oxley op. cit., pp. 72-73
- 51.
- | <u>Year</u> | <u>Job</u> | <u>wage</u> £ | s | d |
|-------------|---|---------------|----|---|
| 1809 | 1 days team work | | 7 | 6 |
| 1805/6 | 1 day spreading gravel | | 2 | 0 |
| 1810 | Levelling orchard | | 4 | 6 |
| 1811 | Laying pipes | | 1 | 6 |
| 1825 | Breaking stones | 2 | 0 | 4 |
| 1830 | Picking in small lane | | 6 | 0 |
| 1831 | 7 days scraping the road | | 10 | 6 |
| 1831 | 4 days at the sand pit | | 10 | 6 |
| 1831 | 7 days scraping and levelling | | 8 | 2 |
| 1840 | 8 days letting off water and banking in | 1 | 16 | 0 |
| 1844 | 4½ days team work | 2 | 5 | 0 |
| 1844 | 12 days team work | 6 | 0 | 0 |
| 1844 | 1½ days team work | | 15 | 0 |
| 1844 | 22½ days team work | 6 | 0 | 0 |
52. J. D. Marshall, op. cit., p. 15

53. P. Dunkley, op. cit., pp. 112-113
54. M. Blaug, 'The Myth of the Old Poor Law and the Making of the New'.
Journal of Economic History XXIII (1963) pp. 176-177
55. F. M. L. Thompson, The rise of respectable society-a social history of Victorian Britain 1830-1900
(1988) p. 355
56. M. E. Rose, op. cit., p. 17
57. ibid., p. 109
58. J. D. Marshall, op. cit., p. 9 and
E. Royle, Modern Britain - a social history 1750-1985
(1987) p. 175
59. G. W. Oxley, op. cit., p. 61
60. A. Digby, The Poor Law in Nineteenth Century England
(1982) p. 8
61. C.R.O. Abstract of Answers and Returns 1805
op. cit.,

62. Number of people relieved from the poor rates in Cheshire. Amount of money expended on the poor in Cheshire.

	<u>Permanent</u>				
	<u>Out</u>	<u>In</u>			
	<u>Relief</u>	<u>Relief</u>	<u>Occasional</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>£</u>
<u>1803</u>	14481	273	7398	22152	69,799
<u>1813</u>	8901	589	10939	20429	128,233
<u>1815</u>	8422	609	8924	17955	110,765

Source: C.R.O. Abstract of Answers and Returns

63. C.R.O. Abstract of Answers and Returns 1818
op. cit.,
64. In England and Wales in 1815 $9\frac{1}{4}\%$ of the population were relieved from the poor rates.
C.R.O. Abstract of Answers and Returns 1818
op. cit.,
65. ibid.
66. The average expended on the poor in England and Wales between 1813 and 1815 was £6 10s 6½d per pauper.
C.R.O. Abstract of Answers and Returns 1818
op. cit.,

67. A. Digby, op. cit., p. 10
68. C.R.O. Acc. No. L851
Report from the Select Committee on the Poor Law
with the minutes of evidence taken before the
committee and an appendix. 4th July, 1817
69. ibid. p. 3
70. ibid. p. 4
71. ibid.
72. ibid. p. 5
73. ibid. pp. 6-9
74. ibid. p.9
75. ibid. p. 10
76. ibid. p. 10
77. Summary of the populations of the parishes in Cheshire

<u>Number of</u> <u>parishes</u>								<u>Population</u>	
1	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	under 10	
15	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	10 -	20
33	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	20 -	50
60	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	50 -	100
173	In 1831 Monks Coppenhall had population of 148						.. ..	100 -	300
103	In 1831 Church Coppenhall had population of 350						... ..	300	500
42	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	500 -	800
15	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	800 -	1,000
31	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	1,000 -	2,000
14	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	2,000 -	3,000
6	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	3,000 -	4,000
2	In 1831 Nantwich had a population of 4,886						.. ..	4,000 -	5,000
7	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	5,000 -	10,000
3	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	10,000 -	50,000

78. Report from His Majesty's Commissioners for inquiring into the administration and practical operation of the Poor Laws, 1834 Vol XXVIII Appendix A part 1 Report No. 10 p. 273

79. ibid.

Total of the Poor Rates collected in Cheshire

<u>1816</u>	98,578			
<u>1818</u>	127,460			
<u>1824</u>	86,820	1821 Cheshire Population	270,000	
<u>1829</u>	98,105			24% increase
<u>1832</u>	105,138	1832 Cheshire Population	334,314	

80. ibid. pp. 273-274

81. ibid.

82. ibid. p. 280

83. ibid. p. 281

84. ibid. p. 282

85. Parl. Papers, 1834 XXX Appendix B.1

86. Figures relating to Nantwich Parish as returned in the Answers to Rural Questions Appendix B.1 p.77

	<u>1801</u>	<u>1811</u>	<u>1821</u>	<u>1831</u>
<u>Population</u>	200	156	270	261
<u>Poor Rate</u>	£81	£94 - (1813)	£112	£79
<u>Expense per head</u>	8/1d - (1803)	12/-d - (1813)	8/3d	6/-d

87. ibid.

88. ibid. Appendix B part II p. 77

89. ibid. Appendix B part III p. 77

90. D. Fraser, The Evolution of the British Welfare State (1973) p. 38

91. P. Dunkley, op. cit., p. 106

92. Editors S. G. and E. O. A Checkland, The Poor Law Report of 1834 (1974) p. 9

- 93. E. J. Hobsbawm, Industry and Empire (1975) p. 104
- 94. op. cit., p. 177
- 95. J. R. Poynter, op. cit., p. 79 and
J. D. Marshall, op. cit., p. 17
- 96. J. D. Marshall, op. cit., p. 20
- 97. G. W. Oxley, op. cit., p. 102
- 98. A. Digby, op. cit., p. 13

Chapter 2

The Charities of Nantwich, Monks Coppenhall and Church Coppenhall their development from the seventeenth century to 1837

In order to examine the development of philanthropy from 1730 onwards it has been necessary to look at the foundations that were laid in the seventeenth century as many of the influential charities in Nantwich date from that period, The local community accepted the charities as part of their right and heritage, much as they did the Poor Law, but the financial part played by philanthropy in support of the poor as a whole, must not be over exaggerated, The charities administered their relief alongside that dispensed by the Overseers of the Poor, and several Overseers also acted as trustees of various charities in the town. However the only official contact that appears to have taken place between the two forms of relief was when several of the almsmen had to be transferred to the workhouse because the value of their allowance had fallen so greatly it was impossible for them to continue any longer as almsmen. Such an incident serves to emphasise that while Nantwich was considered to be well served by the number of charities it possessed, the fact that many had been initiated in the seventeenth century meant that their value and capacity to offer relief to ever increasing numbers was becoming difficult by the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. An increase in the population, rising prices, economic fluctuations, together with increases in the poor rate all put pressure on the charities of Nantwich.

As S. G. and E. O. A. Checkland have pointed out, it had traditionally been assumed the responsibility of the better-off

to assist the less fortunate through charitable giving.

'Indeed, the poor performed a social and religious role by challenging the wealthier to remember that fraternal duty.'¹ Similarly W. K. Jordan had argued that up to the late seventeenth century the belief in the need for, and efficiency of, private charity was one reason why charitable endeavour was more important than relief granted by the Poor Law, which tended to be resorted to only by those who fell through the safety net offered by the charities.² However, as is evident in Nantwich, this position changed as population growth continued and the scale of private charity could not keep pace with providing for all those in need. Hence the charities of the town assumed a position where they were propping up a system of poor relief that was, in its turn, coming under increasing pressure from an ever growing number of applicants.

Contemporaries accepted the existence of charitable endeavour alongside the provisions of the Poor Law as, in essence, they were seen as fulfilling different needs. The education of the poor and orphans, providing almshouses in order to supply food and shelter for the old was permissible as the relief provided by the state was seen as fulfilling the needs of a fairly narrowly prescribed group. Private charity met the needs of those suffering hardship but for whom the Poor Law did not cater, and just as it had been argued that a caring dispensation of the old Poor Law helped cement social stability and understanding between different classes, at least where such relief was administered with compassion and understanding, so the existence of charities could help achieve the same respect and

understanding between classes. As J. R. Poynter has argued capitalist progress could continue behind the 'public defences' provided by the Poor Law, while the role of private charity and self-help was seen as elevating the character, improving conditions and securing the loyalty of the labouring classes.³ How far these aims were satisfied in Nantwich can only be assessed by a close examination of the charities and the reactions of the inhabitants where these exist. The fact that many families in Nantwich had relatives who were dependent on the charities of the town led to accusations that malpractices by the Trustees were tolerated by residents for fear of retribution on charity recipients if complaints were made.

Many questions suggest themselves about the development of private charity in Nantwich. What groups of people were identified as being in need of charitable help and what form did such help take? Were these charities administered to anyone who claimed them or were strict rules and regulations observed relating to who could or could not receive relief, and if so with what ulterior aim in mind? Did certain patterns or trends emerge in the type of charities that were established in different centuries, and what can these tell us about the type of poverty that existed in the society that generated them? The fact that charitable endeavour flourished in Nantwich has been emphasised by historians such as J. Hall and E. Garton, but in relation to the amount of relief dispensed by the Poor Law how great was the financial contribution of the Nantwich charities to the maintenance of the poor? Similarly did such charities face a crisis in financial terms when confronted by rising

population and inflation that steadily eroded the value of bequests?

The growth of new charities in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries illustrates the response Nantwich people made to the changing economic and social climate which created new areas of need together with a new scale of poverty. A survey of the various charities that emerged will not only indicate the variety of methods employed but will also clarify the common threads that run through, and link together bequests made by different people at different times.

As D. Owen has argued philanthropy in all its forms illustrated the dramatic acceptance of social responsibility by both the affluent and successful and those of more modest fortune:

... these donors not only helped to ease the country through a hazardous and complex transition, but they also contributed to the "fashioning of an ethic of social responsibility which was to be the hallmark of the liberal society." 4

Both the affluent and the modest left legacies to the poor of Nantwich, but questions must be asked about how far this tradition of social responsibility was continued from one century to the next? Was there in fact a sense of continuing social responsibility for those who fell on hard times, or did other factors come into play to deflect such feelings?

The trends that emerged in Charitable Relief in Nantwich from the Seventeenth Century to 1834

The overall pattern reflecting how people saw fit to dispense their charitable offerings varied from century to century as economic and social changes created new strains

and therefore emphasised different groups who were in need of relief. During the seventeenth century the bequest of money or doles dominated legacies in Nantwich, and accounted for 32% of all bequests. Following closely in popularity were those charities aimed at supplying bread, almshouses, money to a particular street, and education for the children of the poor at the Grammar School, each of the above accounting for 12% of bequests. The augmentation of almshouses accounted for a further 8% of legacies, indicating that once established these institutions were always in need of further finance to keep up their maintenance, and were considered a valued form of charity by contemporaries who obviously wanted to see them continue.

Several types of charity established in Nantwich during the seventeenth century remained unique to that century, and they were concerned with setting up apprenticeships for the children of the poor and granting loans to tradesmen and poor people in order to help them back to prosperity. These three forms of bequests were centered around a strong element of self-help;

If charity was a response to human need, it was also an instrument for inculcating approved social attitudes... and [philanthropist] tended to judge charitable efforts by their success in encouraging recipients to stand on their own feet. 5

Charity centered around apprenticing the children of the poor to tradesmen tended to be overtaken by the development of the Blue Cap School in the eighteenth century, which proved to be an easier charity to administer. The idea of providing a loan

to a poor person in order to enable him to regain independence and prosperity also proved ineffective. The provision of cash did not cure all the problems and the difficulties involved with paying back the initial sum often incurred further hardship for those concerned. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries this form of philanthropy died away as economic fluctuations, over which the individual had no control, became more widespread and ruled out the effectiveness of this form of relief.

The seventeenth century also witnessed seven Nantwich men making their fortunes in London and later establishing charities in their native towns, a familiar trait in philanthropy as D. Owen has pointed out. They built almshouses for the aged, encouraged loans to be made to the poor, provided bread and established the Grammar School.⁶

Eighteenth century charitable bequests in Nantwich largely mirrored those made in the seventeenth century, confirming D. Owen's argument that eighteenth century testators did not show much inclination to 'branch out into new fields of philanthropy' and if 'one compares the charity landscape of 1700 with that of 1800, the difference seems to be one of degree rather than of kind.'⁷ So rather than the eighteenth century yielding a host of new charities it was the old ones that continued to attract bequests. 32% of new bequests were directed to the educational charities based on the Grammar School and Blue Cap Charity School. Of the remaining bequests 21% and 17% respectively were concerned with granting financial help to certain parts of the town and doles for the poor generally.

As D. Owen has argued eighteenth-century philanthropy was typified by:

Puritan piety, a benevolently humanitarian outlook and concern for the national interest... [and charity schools were] a gallant attempt to meet the challenge of ignorance and moral delinquency among the children of the poor, but as an organised effort it offered a striking example of the new associated philanthropy in action.⁸

The eighteenth century witnessed the first large-scale venture into associated philanthropy, and in Nantwich this took the form of providing the Blue Cap Charity School, a common example of associated philanthropy '... and a convincing demonstration of what could be accomplished by the pooling of individual effort.'⁹ It was this characteristic of individuals joining together or augmenting old established charities that came to be relied upon more and more as the numbers claiming charitable relief increased while the original value of the bequests could not hope to keep pace with the demands made upon them.

The early nineteenth century saw a relative drying up of new bequests in Nantwich. The augmentation of existing charities held the key to the survival of valued old established charities that were finding it hard to serve their recipients well in the face of rising prices and increased population. In Nantwich each century revealed new charitable 'solutions' to an old problem that was getting worse by degrees. Having examined the overall trends that emerged in Nantwich, each generation building on the foundations of their predecessors, it is only by looking in detail at the different types of

charities that developed, and who they were aimed at that will reveal the concerns of the local population and how they saw fit to tackle the problems of their community. Such an examination will also reveal the underlying common threads of charitable benevolence that ran through each century and illuminated common areas of concern.

The Wilbraham family and philanthropy in Nantwich

Roger Wilbraham had been instrumental in setting up the first workhouse in Nantwich,¹⁰ and was the first person to draw attention to the fact that in 1665 the collection in the parish church was not enough to relieve the poor. One of the reasons he put forward to explain this was that many of the 'better-quality' people in the town frequently did not go to church on the Sunday when the collection for the poor was made, emphasising that not all of the local gentry were as concerned as he was about the plight of the poor.

The Wilbraham family as a whole expressed concern about the poor. Roger's Uncle, Ralph Wilbraham, left the whole of his estate to the poor, and Roger procured a share of this for the town of Nantwich¹¹ which was used to find work for the poor. However, as there was no house of correction or workhouse at Nantwich at the time of his Uncle's death in 1657¹² the interest of the money was distributed to the sick, aged, and poor, as the need arose and £14 0s 0d was distributed annually at Christmas to provide clothing for those in need. A list was drawn up by an agent 'assisted by some of the ladies residing in the town' and this list was renewed every year. The value

of clothing given to each family varied from three shillings to six shillings, and about three shillings to individuals. Either linen or woollen was chosen as blankets were too expensive where applicants were so numerous.¹³ However as the Charity Commissioners pointed out ¹⁴ it had always been very difficult for the vicar and churchwarden to select people to receive charity in Nantwich and the neighbouring village of Acton, because many poor people belonging to Acton lived elsewhere and yet still presented themselves for a share of the charities. As the Charity Commissioners pointed out, very little documentary evidence had been preserved relating to charities founded in early times, especially those bequeathed by the Wilbraham family which in regard to distributing charity 'must of course render their [the churchwardens] task a difficult one.'¹⁵

The interest of the Wilbraham family in the plight of the poor was not limited to the male members of the family. Alice, the wife of Roger Wilbraham, who died in 1676, left a legacy to the poor in new half crown pieces and new shillings, to be distributed to poor widows in Welsh Row, where the Wilbrahams lived. It was this legacy that stimulated Roger Wilbraham to look at the problem of the poor and aged widows:

I thought of erecting a monument that might transmit the memory of my dear wife to posterity... that I had in our own street, three well built houses, under a roof, with convenient apartments, that might easily be converted into an almshouse, for half a dozen poor aged widows, and thought better to devote something of this nature to the Honour of God and to her memory that had been mindful to lay something

by, to be distributed to poor widows in her own street. ... I made all possible haste to fitt the houses wch were now in my possession for the reception of six aged widows, that I had there in my thoughts. I endowed the same by deed executed with Livery, with lands [in Betchton] to the value of £26 13s 4d per ann; for a constant and perpetual maintenance for so many poor aged widows for ages to come.

Each house accommodated two people 'who by co-habiting together might mutually succour and solace each other.' After buying them gowns in which to go to Church, Wilbraham notes to his satisfaction that the day after moving into their homes in 1676 they:

... took their places in a seat wch I had provided for them in the face of the pulpit; dined with me that day that I might have the opportunity to Blesse God with them and to begg His Blessing upon that which He put into my Heart to do for ye poor, sith it hath pleased Him to favour mee so far as to let me see it effected to my Hearts content.¹⁶

In 1836 the Charity Commissioners described the Almshouses in the following manner:

There are three tenements, consisting of one room each upon the ground floor, and a room over each. Two widows reside in each. There is an open yard at the back, common to the whole, with a small pantry to each tenement... and are in a very good state.¹⁷

The almshouses were continually supported by the Wilbraham family through the generations and were obviously thought to successfully fill a need in the town as in 1705 Roger Wilbraham established another almshouse for two old maids in Welsh Row, consisting of one room with a pantry below and a large

convenient bedroom over it, but there was no garden. The almshouses also seemed to attract charitable contributions from other wealthy people in the town who obviously wanted to see them continue in the nineteenth century when the poor were increasing, but money to support them was not increasing in the same proportion.¹⁸ As G. W. Oxley has stressed the relief of the deserving poor was seen primarily as a task for charity, legislation being passed to encourage the establishment of endowments to support almshouses and supply doles to the poor.¹⁹ Also the fact that private charity was widely believed to be morally and socially preferable to receiving relief by law persisted between 1660-1760 and encouraged, as J. R. Poynter has indicated, the further development of private charities such as that founded by the Wilbrahams.²⁰

Some of the problems concerning the poor in Nantwich seemed to have recurred over the centuries, indicating that despite efforts to alleviate the situation the nucleus of the problem remained; as Roger Wilbraham stated:

... ye Liberty that owners of cottages in Town take to admit strangers and Inmates into such cottages, without regard of secureing the Towne. [i.e., from becoming chargeable as paupers to the town] I myselfe have undertaken to be responsible for my Tenants, if any of them sholde become burdensome: others promise faire, but performe nothing.²¹

This problem had been tackled by Thomas Wilbraham, Roger's father, in 1631²² but as the town continued to grow and trade flourish it was not something that could be stopped and charitable endeavour increased in a response to alleviate its effects on the residents of the town.²³

The role played by the Wilbraham family in philanthropy represents the largest contribution by any of the local gentry. When examining the remaining charities founded in the town they tend to fall into several identifiable groups. Even though established during different decades and even centuries, their founders shared a common feeling that these 'areas' of concern urgently needed financial help. When examined together these different 'threads' combine to reveal the poverty that existed in Nantwich.

The establishment of charities to help certain areas of Nantwich

First, there were legacies left to a particular area of the town. For example, Bridget Wood bequeathed that the interest from £350 0s 0d be distributed to the poor in Beam Street and Wall Lane.²⁴ This bequest was dispensed in clothing once every two years during the worst weather. People were selected by the trustees and money apportioned to them according to their circumstances and the size of their families. Tickets were then given to them, which they had to produce to the tradesmen who supplied them with clothing. In 1782 Bridget Wood's capital of £350 0s 0d was combined with £70 0s 0d from John Broomhall's charity and £10 0s 0d from Mary Hickson, and this sum was lent by the trustees to finance the new Nantwich Workhouse. This example illustrates the point that the trustees of the various charities did have occasion to associate with the Overseers of the Poor and that money left for private charitable purposes was readily transferred or combined for the 'public good'. The Overseers paid the trustees

£11 0s 0d annually in interest which was then applied to the original purpose.²⁵

Mary Swan in a will dated 1st January, 1837 (she died in 1846) bequeathed to the minister and churchwardens £1,000 the interest from which was to be distributed to the poor who lived in Hospital Street, in bread, clothing, or money. Hospital Street was an area where poverty was prevalent as since 1633 Sir Thomas Crewe of Steane, had given farm rents totalling £22 0s 0d per annum to the poor inhabitants. From 1662-1695 the money was distributed to the needy, used for putting out apprentices and providing clothing. Between 1695 and 1711 there was a deficiency in the books and there were no entries for that period, but another member of the family continued the benevolent tradition from 1711 when Sir John Crewe of Utkinton gave £10 0s 0d per annum to the same street. Hospital Street had been the native street of Sir Thomas and Sir Ranulph Crewe, the grandfather of Sir John Crewe, and this charity was distributed until 1733. In 1767, John, 1st Lord Crewe, diverted the donors original intentions by erecting and endowing seven almshouses for married men with families, preferably 'decayed tradesmen' on Beam Heath on the site of the old House of Correction, 'endowed with the whole of the proceeds of the property described in the fore-going accounts' (rents amounting to £22 7s 2d in 1642). The almshouse was described as a 'substantial brick building under one roof with good bedrooms above. They have small flower gardens in front, and kitchen gardens at the back' and when the Commissioners made their inquiry in July 1836 the almshouse was in their opinion

'in a very good state having been well and substantially built.'²⁶ The inmates of the almshouse also received £45 10s 0d which was divided equally among them every quarter. Lord Crewe's Almshouses are a good example of how one type of charitable endeavour could be modified to better fulfil the demands of present need but, once established, the endowment was supported by the family down the years. Other areas in Nantwich that were often bequeathed small amounts of money for charitable distribution included Pillory Street,²⁷ Welsh Row, Barker Street and Mill Street.

Charities for natives of the town only

The second identifiable theme that attracted a charitable response was directed towards natives of the town and householders. In the past poor migrants coming into the town from neighbouring areas had been seen as a problem to be guarded against²⁸ as they jeopardised the condition of the indigenous poor. For example as early as 1530 Margaret Slade bequeathed 18 acres of land in Bunbury, the rental value being £36 0s 0d which was to be distributed to sixty poor householders in two equal payments at Easter and on St. Thomas' day.²⁹

Similarly the Beam Heath estate, comprising about 400 acres produced an annual income of about £1,600 0s 0d which was assigned to any householders in the town who had resided there for not less than seven years. This charity was however unusual because it was given generally to qualifying householders regardless of their financial state, and the sums distributed varied from fifteen shillings to twentyfive shillings annually. (see figure 6) There was however some dispute in regard to

the management and administration of the Beam Heath Estate. Thomas Dunning³⁰ states that when he first came to Nantwich in the 1830s his attention was drawn to the management of the Beam Heath estate as everyone was talking about it and suspecting the Trustees of wrongdoings. Small meetings were held on the Barony to discuss the subject and the trustees were denounced, but no resolutions were moved or deputations sent to see the trustees.

In those days of Church and Tory rule rule none of the working class dare 'bell the cat' ... and if persons who talked loudly about the abuses were asked to assist in reforming them, they would probably reply that some of their relatives were in almshouses, or in receipt of some other of the charities, and they would rather not interfere. And so the charities made cowards of a great many of the bred and born Nantwichians.³¹

As E. Royle has pointed out charities placed a useful weapon of social control in the hands of the clergy and local dignitaries, and recipients and members of their families were obviously well aware that in order to receive continued relief they should not cause trouble.³² This of course, worked to the advantage of the trustees in the above case where 'wrong-doing' was suspected. However Dunning had not been born in Nantwich and had no elderly relatives there and so was not frightened to challenge the trustees. As a ratepayer and a radical he described himself as part of a new generation who could attend vestry meetings and assist in the election of Beam Heath Trustees without the restraint of knowing elderly relatives might be penalised as a result.³³ Originally there

had been 32 trustees, and any vacancy was supposed to be publicised at the next general vestry meeting. In 1840 Dunning became entitled to vote at vestry meetings and at this time there were only six or seven trustees left, but they opposed all attempts to increase their number. Dunning began a single-handed movement to correct the abuses that had crept into the management of the estate - the first being the distribution of the surplus monies. Apparently for many years the provisions of the Act relating to the £500 0s 0d had been overlooked and only one pound every two years had been distributed. The trustees agent had no cheque book to show to whom he had paid the money, and the public balance sheet stated 'paid to so many claimants, so many pounds.'³⁴

Dunning felt it would be fairer if the money was distributed every year or whenever there was a surplus of £500 0s 0d, but he found no help or encouragement from other townspeople and he had to proceed on alone. He wrote a series of resolutions relating to the management of the estate and then held a public meeting and the resolutions were carried unanimously. Dunning together with another man, were appointed to go to present the resolutions to the trustees who were apparently surprised at the deputation. One liberal tradesman and trustee, Mr. Edward Harrison, a grocer, who Dunning thought would support their resolution, was quick to point out that no one could prove the trustees had £500 0s 0d in their possession. Dunning asked that an accountant be allowed to go through the books, but the trustees argued that the books must not leave their hands as 'We cannot always get the rents in to the day.'

A few weeks after the meeting Mr. Thomas Johnson, an assistant Overseer of the Poor for Nantwich, was appointed distributor, and recipients of the Beam Heath charity received 12s 6d each, instead of 10s 0d as before, in spite of the fact that the trustees had spent a lot on tree planting on the estate. From then on the dividends gradually increased as higher rents were obtained.

Another good example of a charity for the benefit of natives of the town were the Meakin and Delves Almshouses in Love Lane. They were set up by Mrs. Ermine Delves in 1722 who gave several houses in Barker Street and houses and a barn in Love Lane, so that an almshouse for poor men, all natives of Nantwich, and their wives, could be built. The recipients of this charity had to be over fifty years of age. These almshouses were administered by the trustees of Sir Edmund Wright's Charity, and in 1797 they were in the fortunate position that the funds of all the different charities in their management showed a considerable surplus, and so two new almshouses were built on the site of Chine Hall Barn in Love Lane for two poor men and their wives and their survivors with an annuity of £5 0s 0d per annum. Finances also allowed an increase of pay to the other four almshouses in Love Lane from £3 15s 0d to £5 0s 0d per annum.³⁵

The rule about these almshouses being for natives of Nantwich only was strictly adhered to. For example in March 1827 John Latham, aged 70, was successful in a ballot to reside in one of the houses in Love Lane.³⁶ There was some doubt about where he was born but at a later meeting the house was

given to him provided no one could prove within two months that he was not born in Nantwich. In June 1827 it was resolved by the trustees that John Latham was not entitled to live there any more as a birth certificate was produced from Acton Church showing he had been born at Hurleston, three miles outside Nantwich. So John Latham had to move out of the house and a new candidate was selected. This example serves to emphasise that while the charities were benevolent they were inflexible, and even though the man was originally deemed poor enough to take up residence in the Almshouse the fact that he was born three miles outside the town was justification enough to eject him from the almshouse. The priority of looking after 'natives' of the town came first.

Sir Edmund Wright's Almshouses

Thirdly, one of the most famous and influential of all the charities set up in Nantwich was Sir Edmund Wright's³⁷ Almshouses in Hospital Street. The organisation of this charity influenced the running and organisation of many charities set up in later years, and continued to attract financial bequests in support of its work well into the nineteenth century. This charity was aimed at helping several identifiable groups. The inmates of the almshouses had to be men of at least fifty years of age, they had to be of the Church of England, single, natives of Nantwich, unable to earn their living by honest labour, well behaved, and preference was given to anyone who had the surname of Wright.³⁸ If there was more than one applicant, lots had to be drawn and the successful person was the man who drew the

lot saying 'Praise God for thy Founder'. The rule relating to almsmen having lived in Nantwich for a minimum of three years was strictly adhered to, and in 1835 one Joseph Sant was admitted but received no pension from the charity for three years because he had not lived there for the required length of time.

The almshouses themselves were described as very substantially built, and consisted of two rooms to each almsman, one above and the other upon the ground floor, each with a small garden attached 'where potatoes and other vegetables are grown.'³⁹ This charity relieved several of the groups identified previously as often being in need of charitable relief and the important theme of religion is seen as a prerequisite requirement to be met before charity was administered. For example, when a vacancy arose for an almsman in 1835 the only candidate for admission was Peter Bolis, but he was refused residence because he was not a churchman. He tried to gain admission on five different occasions and was at last admitted in 1836, but only after he had become a member of the Church of England.

Altogether six poor men lived in the almshouse which was established in 1638. Each inmate received £4 0s 0d yearly and a grey gown faced with red, every three years, in addition to the value of the rent of a farm in Middlesex to the value of £32 0s 0d yearly. Every Christmas day each almsman also received a new shirt, a pair of stockings and a pair of shoes, the total cost for each man being forty shillings.⁴⁰ Between 1600-1900 the Wright almshouse received several further

legacies to aid its financial position,⁴¹ indicating that on the one hand the institution maintained the support of the local community and was seen as providing a valuable service. Secondly, and of crucial significance for many charities, was the fact that the value of the initial bequest could not maintain the charity efficiently in the face of rising prices and the addition of new legacies were vital if its work was to continue.

Thirteen trustees were put in charge of administering the almshouses⁴² and they met at the almshouse every year on the 24th November (the anniversary of the Founder's Baptism) at 8 a.m. 'to view' the almsmen, this day becoming known in Nantwich as the Almsmen's Feast. The trustees went to the Church in Nantwich with as many of the almsmen as possible, to hear divine service and a sermon, reinforcing the religious overtones of the charity. After the service the trustees had dinner to the value of twenty shillings, and they read to the almsmen certain 'orders' and punished by suspending the allowance, or expelling anyone who broke the orders, and discipline was strictly enforced by the trustees. For example, in February 1782 the trustees ordered that Richard Wicksted should be suspended for three months and his allowance stopped, because he was absent from Church, and he apparently committed other misdemeanours which are not specified.⁴³

Once in receipt of charity in the almshouse the almsmen had to abide by a strict set of orders outlined by the founder to maintain dignity and discipline - but obviously some of the men found such rules hard to adhere to. For example, they were

expected to go to Church regularly, and every morning and evening, pray for their founder, never swear, be drunk, or commit scandalous vices, never take in lodgers, and always care for other almsmen. Begging was forbidden as they had to 'content themselves' with the allowances given by the founder and once they had become an almsman they were not allowed to marry or keep a woman.

Men were obviously desperate when they became an almsman and could not expect an affluent existence once they were accepted. Even the gowns that they were given to wear were passed on from previous almsmen that had died. The Wright's Almhouse provided an existence but there was a price to be paid as all individuality had to be terminated when almsman status was assumed. Money was obviously not wasted on what the trustees considered to be luxuries, although others might have considered them essentials. If any of the rules of the almshouse were broken the almsmen were immediately punished either by fines, suspension, or expulsion and in 1828 on Founder's Day, Peter Moss was fined one-quarter of his salary for drunkenness and bad language; other instances of fines and suspension for drunkenness also occur.⁴⁴ Furthermore in the 1730s and 1740s several men had money stopped from their pensions because they would not actually sleep in the almshouses which leads one to deduce that perhaps the strict discipline had driven them out, or that conditions were poor in the almshouse. In these instances the main attraction of being a Wright Almsman was the allowance it provided. Even this was not always automatically given. In 1818 permission was given

to a man to live in a vacant almshouse but without an allowance as the funds were inadequate until the next vacancy occurred, when he would be entitled to it without a ballot.⁴⁵

Clearly private charity required strict deference from the recipients in exchange for the bare essentials of life. Indeed there seems to have come a point where it could be argued the Wright's Almshouses did not fulfill this need as there was an interchange between the work of the almshouse and the Nantwich Workhouse. In 1772 William Boweray was transferred to the workhouse due to old age, which meant that he could no longer care for himself. However, old age was not the only reason for an almsman to transfer to the poor house. It gives some indication of the conditions that life in the almshouses had deteriorated to, that in early nineteenth century some almsmen, owing to the insufficiency of income (the endowment being exactly the same as 245 years ago), voluntarily left the almshouse and went to the workhouse, while other almsmen died in great poverty and neglect. For example, it appears that in June 1804 the almsmen's pay was reduced to twentyfive shillings for a period of sixtytwo weeks in order to repay a bill for carpentry work that had been carried out at the almshouse at the instigation of the almsmen, but without the consent of the Treasurer. As the trust was in arrears, and in the Treasurer's opinion, more urgent work than this was still waiting to be done, the almsmen had to pay the bill themselves.⁴⁶

It was only William Sprout's gift in 1829 that enabled the almsmen's pay to be increased to £10 0s 0d per annum, and with other small bequests the pensioners were better sustained in

the 1830s than at any former period. To move voluntarily from the almshouse to the workhouse emphasises that the almsmen must have been in a worse plight than when they originally entered the almshouse. To be driven to such a recourse suggests that before William Sprout's gift the original endowment was, not surprisingly by the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century, inadequate to deal with an increased population, rising prices and changed economic conditions. The almshouses themselves needed repair as well as increased allowances for their inmates and it was only Sprout's gift in 1829 that eased the crisis situation. This came too late for many though, as the crisis had not risen overnight but had been progressively emerging in the previous century when the weight of poverty was obviously proving too great a strain for the charitable network existing in the town.

Such almshouses as those established by Wright and all the other charitable foundations, many financed on amounts considered suitable one hundred or so years previously, were faced with an impossible task in the nineteenth century, and it is no wonder that almsmen are described as dying in great poverty.

Apart from the strict discipline imposed at the almshouse, and the obvious financial problems that they faced, there does seem to have been sympathy and compassion too. Even when a man had been suspended from the almshouse because of his behaviour, he would not be left destitute. For example, William Cartwright was expelled in September 1661 for 'Grosse Misdemeaners', and he had previously been fined five shillings

for drunkenness in June 1661. He was re-admitted into the almshouse again in June 1662 when he received his gown and one quarter's pay, but was finally expelled in June 1663. Afterwards it is noted in Wright's Trustees' Accounts that some of his debts were paid off from the fines he had paid for drunkenness, and a small sum was given to him when he was expelled, and at several intervals afterwards.

Apart from receiving charity themselves, the almsmen, poor as they were, were expected to give to charity too. There is one incident referred to in March 1661 where six almsmen 'freely' gave two shillings each to Margerye Salmon, a niece of the founder, who was in great poverty.⁴⁷ Later in the same and subsequent years she received similar charity, but one wonders how much pressure was put on the almsmen to give money, as she was a niece of Sir Edmund and his charity could only be dispensed to males. One suspects that this is another example of the deference expected from recipients of charity.

The trustees of Sir Edmund Wright's Charity held a responsible position in that it fell to them to administer many other charities in Nantwich apart from their own, and the Charity Commissioners had this to say about their role:

The Trustees of this charity have been subsequently made the Trustees of many other bequests; and they have now the management of some of the most important charities in the town; and they appear to have justified the confidence so generally reposed in them by discharging their duties with great care and discretion: their charities are better conducted than any others in the place. 48

When examining the list of names of people who made up the Trustees of the Wright's Almshouse it is interesting to note that up to 1779 the trustees were mainly gentlemen from the important families in the town, followed in their turn by their sons, but after 1779 there is a noticeable increase in people belonging to the growing trades in the town, for example, a silk mercer, tradesmen, surgeons etc. Involvement in charitable work, a field previously dominated by the landed gentry, gave such people a respectability not formerly possessed.⁴⁹ This trend also coincides with the tendency of the local gentry to move away from Nantwich to live in the surrounding countryside, and the growing interest of ratepayers in the escalating cost of the poor rates.

Around the 1820s the custom developed of inviting tradesmen in the town to dine with the trustees at the annual almsmen's feast. It cannot be a coincidence that it was in the early nineteenth century that the almshouses were in dire poverty and were hardly able to make ends meet with the original bequest left by the founder; indeed in 1825 the charity was in debt. This attempt to interest tradesmen in the charity appears to have been a desperate attempt to increase funds.

The Role of Religion and Charity

As Brian Harrison has argued⁵⁰ religion played a vital role in stimulating social reform and social welfare as people believed poverty was largely the result of moral failure and religion could reverse this. Religion in the form of the Church of England, obviously played an important part in Sir Edmund Wright's Almshouses but a charity set up in 1704

by his daughter, Mrs. Martha Chorlton, expressed diametrically opposed religious views in its founder's instructions.

Mrs. Chorlton, a Baptist, specifically stated that no one should be excluded from her charity because they were not a member of the Church of England, and she gave £200 0s 0d which was invested in land in Stapeley and Wybunbury, the rent from which was paid every six months to the treasurer of her father's almshouses. Between 1707-1756 twenty-nine people had received help from Martha Chorlton's charity.⁵¹ Again in contradiction to her father's bequest, her charity helped widows, a group specifically excluded from her father's almshouse.⁵²

The Methodists in Nantwich also offered help to the poor and sick. In 1806 membership of the Methodist Church had increased from one hundred and twenty-seven to two hundred,⁵³ and non-conformity held quite a sway in the town. The people receiving monetary help from the Methodists were by and large Methodists themselves and were obviously encouraged to go to chapel as they received their money at the 'Love Feast'.

Usually the amounts they received varied between one shilling and five shillings, and were made approximately every month.⁵⁴

Familiar names continually appear in the record books and the Methodists obviously had people in the congregation who were constantly in need of help, but there is also the occasional reference to 'a friend who is sick', with amounts of around two shillings and sixpence given to members of the community who were in need. The amount of money disbursed annually to the poor and sick varied, reaching high points in 1814-1815 years characterised by cut-backs by the Overseers, and

1817-1818 when between £15 0s 0d - £22 0s 0d was disbursed, and it reached a peak between July and November 1820 when £36 2s 3½d was granted in the four month period. Thereafter the amounts given tail off to a few pounds until 1839-1840 when they jump again to £25 0s 0d, a period coinciding with the introduction of the Poor Law Amendment Act.

Religion was seen as playing an important part in the moral reformation of the weak characters who were, it was believed, most likely to fall into poverty. The very fact that a person did not hold a particular faith could mean disqualification from charitable relief and so where relief depended on recipients following that particular faith a form of social control was also being effectively exercised.

Charitable provision for widows, spinsters, and children

The care of widows and spinsters is another identifiable group in Nantwich that received several charitable bequests. For example, Miss Elizabeth Walker in 1793 left her personal estate:

... to be invested for the purpose of paying £5 0s 0d yearly to as many aged maiden women as the produce shall admit of.⁵⁵

... due regard being had in their selection to the morals and character of the annuitants.⁵⁶

Some money from this charity was diverted to help Mrs. Chorlton's charity for widows mentioned earlier.⁵⁷

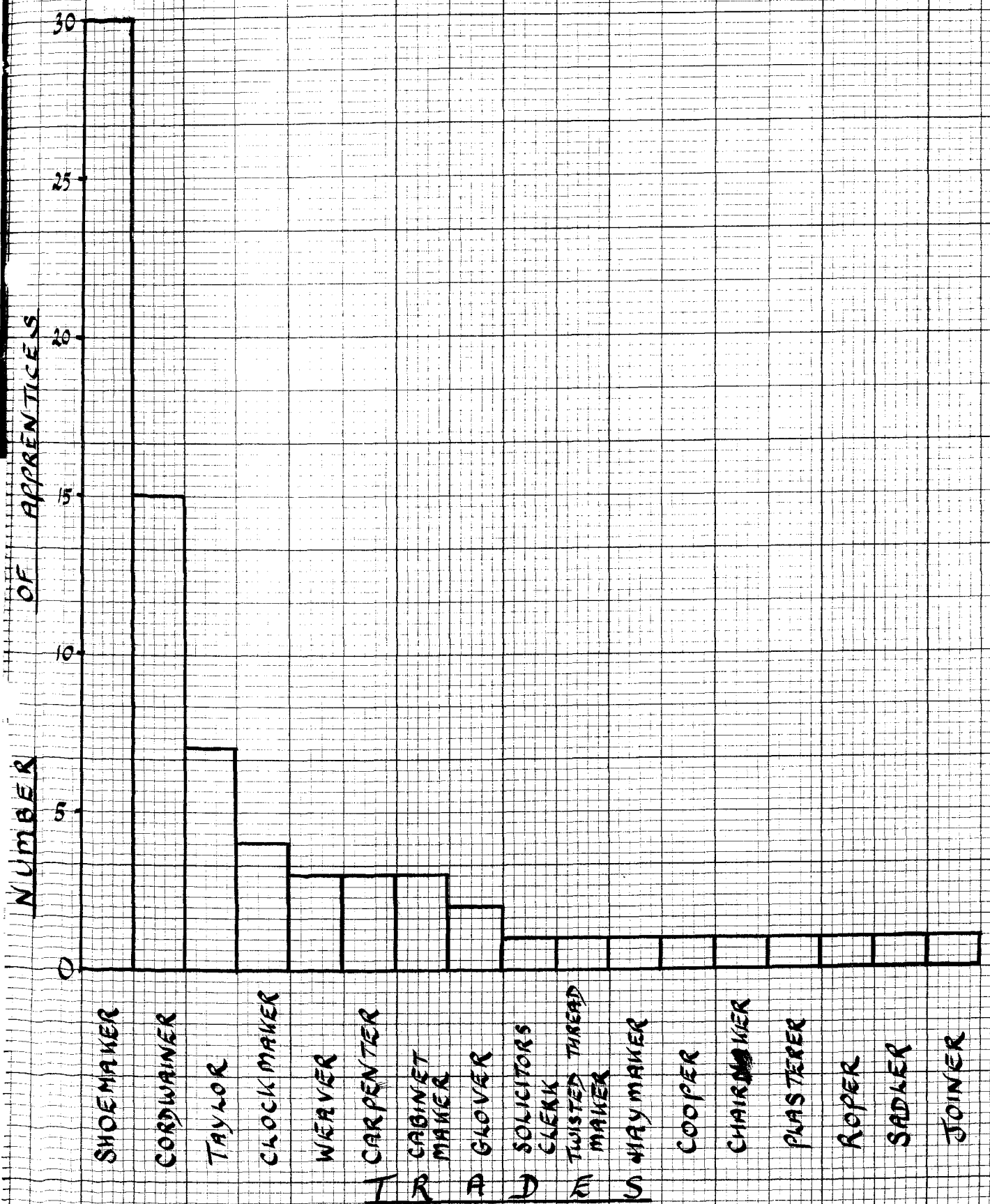
To educate the children of the poor at school or to apprentice them to a trade attracted charitable endowments in Nantwich from an early date. This type of charity reinforced,

as J. R. Poynter has argued, an 'existing moral preference for self-help',⁵⁸ as the recipients, it was hoped, would be enabled to earn their own living and ultimately be able to escape from the need to claim relief in the future.

William Hodgkins, in his will dated 1689, gave land in Alvaston the rent from which was to be used to apprentice children into a trade, the children, once again, had to be natives of Nantwich. In 1736 it was decided that no Treasurer should put out any apprentice without the 'approbation' of a majority of the said trustees, presumably to avoid any abuse of the system.⁵⁹ Between 1800 and 1801 £3 0s 0d was given with each apprentice when he was indentured, this sum increasing to £5 0s 0d in 1803.⁶⁰ The terms that the children were to serve as apprentices in their respective trades varied. In most cases it appears to have been seven years, but two boys were apprenticed for long periods in 1801, one for seventeen and the other for thirteen years, both as apprentice glove makers. It was also decided in 1802 that no boy receiving Hodgkin's charity should be placed out under the age of ten, and £5 0s 0d should be sent with him.⁶¹ (See figure 7) Between 1800-1808 59% of Hodgkin's boys were apprenticed to shoemakers, the staple trade of Nantwich and where, upon completion of the apprenticeship, a job was likely to be secured. The rest of the boys were sent to tradesmen typical of a market town such as tailors and cabinet makers. Conditions were once again stringently adhered to in the selection of boys for apprenticeships:

A GRAPH TO SHOW THE NUMBER OF APPRENTICES PLACED OUT TO DIFFERENT TRADES UNDER HODGKINS CHARITY BETWEEN 1800 - 1808

KEY = 3 squares = 1 person.



The said children so to be put forth to be born in the town of Nantwich, and in lawful wedlock and being inhabitants of the same, which said children should be elected, chosen and put forth by the said trustees or a major part of them ... the said trustees should take security from such masters to whom the said apprentices should be put, for the maintaining and keeping them with sufficient and convenient meat, drink, washing, lodging, and apparel, during the respective terms of their several apprenticeships...⁶²

In 1812 the ruling on the age of apprentices made in 1802 was revised so that no boy could be apprenticed before the age of twelve, and they were not to be sent to anyone who could not pay the levies or who had ever applied for poor relief.⁶³

Apprentices could be sent out of Nantwich to be placed with a master and some boys were apprenticed to their own fathers. A premium of £10 0s 0d was given with the boys, half paid at the time the indentures were executed and the rest at the end of six months:

This regulation was found to be necessary on account of fraudulent and collusive conduct between the parent of the apprentice and the master. The apprentices are clothed and fed by the master ... [In July 1836 the charity had a balance of £148 0s 4½d.] This accumulation was owing to disputes between the trustees and some of the masters on account of unfair practices by the latter, and it was wished to adopt some mode by which they could secure themselves against similar practices that the trustees had kept back the money. ⁶⁴

It is clear that Hodgkin's charity did have some problems with 'fraudulent and collusive' practices, and one example appears in 1823 when a master from Runcorn who was training one of Hodgkin's apprentices informed the trustees that his apprentice had absconded and that he wished his father to be informed. He had apparently looked for the boy and asked around the town to see if anyone knew of him but 'I believe his Father knows of him and encourages him.'⁶⁵

Apart from apprenticing the children of the poor, the local Grammar School provided eight free places so that an education could be given to the poor, albeit a small number. The school had been established in 1572 by two natives of Nantwich, John and Thomas Thrush, who subsequently made their fortune in London and thereupon set up the school. The Wilbraham family gave £4 0s 0d a year in order that four boys could attend 'free' and the churchwardens gave a variable amount, usually around £6 0s 0d per year, in order that four more boys could attend.⁶⁶

The charity or Blue Cap school was established specifically for the children of the poor. Donations to the value of £700 0s 0d were received in 1721 to help finance the school, together with the support of the Wilbraham family who elected 'free' boys. Mistress Anne Crewe Offley was influential in the founding of the school and was an annual subscriber to the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, which 'canalized' the widespread interest in the provision of charity schools.⁶⁷ Many features of the school illustrate the views of the S.P.C.K. which believed in ... subject[ing] the children of the poor

to discipline, train[ing] them in habits of industry and inculcate[ing] in them moral attitudes and the teachings of the Protestant religion.'⁶⁸ An emphasis was placed on religious teaching (the Master always had to be a member of the Church of England) manners and behaviour, reading, writing and basic arithmetic, all of which it was hoped would help the pupils to take up apprenticeships. Forty boys attended the Blue Cap school between the hours of seven to eleven in the morning and one to five in the afternoon in Summer. In Winter the school day ran from eight to eleven in the morning and one to four in the afternoon. Many of the boys received training that would enable them to enter the shoe-making trade, again emphasising the practical nature of their education, coupled with the ideology of self help as a means of overcoming their poverty.⁶⁹

D. Robson has emphasised the fact that the enthusiasm for establishing such schools lay in the fact that the middle classes believed the only way to combat social disorder was through social discipline, and that schooling would prepare the poor to overcome the two great evils of idleness and ignorance.⁷⁰ No special school was built to house the Blue Cap boys, despite the large endowment, instead the upper story of a house was rented from the Churchwardens for £1 0s 0d a year, and the boys wore their distinctive blue caps '... to enable people to observe their behaviour abroad.'⁷¹

As D. Robson concludes:

The Nantwich allowance [for clothing at the Blue Cap school] only a little over eleven shillings per boy, seems

meagre. Yet, however small the allowance was, the very existence of such charities enabled poor children to be clothed, fed and shod. But the wearing of the uniform would also be a constant reminder of that charity and generosity, and of the benefactors who provided them with free education, free food, and free clothing.⁷²

Between 1796 and 1850, £5 0s 0d was donated annually to the funds of the Blue Cap school from Hodgkin's charity, as this charity had encountered administrative problems and the charity school was in essence preparing children to take advantage of the apprenticeships that Hodgkin's had envisaged would be their means of achieving an independent livelihood.⁷³

D. Owen singles out the example of the charity school as being the first major scheme that '... enlisted the personal efforts and financial support of thousands of English, Welsh and Scots [in] ... a far-ranging system of free schools for the children of the poor.'⁷⁴ Charity schools also encouraged the development of the collective effort in fund raising that was to be crucial in the later eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as the extent of charitable need far outstripped individual resources. As D. Owen has argued the middle class tended to favour these schools as the poor could be:

... immunized against the contagion of Popery, which was insidiously working to corrupt the faith of individuals and destroy the Protestant Succession, and drilled in habits of industry and sobriety, the gain in social stability would more than justify the comparatively modest financial outlay. Religious training was the prescription and the charity school the instrument.⁷⁵

Religion, as evident in so many of the charities, had a strong role to play in the charity school. It was seen as a means of exercising the social control considered so necessary in order to both control the poor and set them on the right path to overcome perpetual poverty. And as witnessed in so many other charities the moral weakness of the individual was seen as the root cause of poverty, not the vagaries of the economy.

The Consolidated Charities

Charitable endeavour was firmly established in Nantwich in the eighteenth century, and the residents were obviously well aware of its value and wanted to preserve this. However, by 1704 a large number of small and diverse legacies were being separately administered and there seemed a danger of their value diminishing and even some of them being lost altogether, or the money being unprofitably used. Over the years twenty-one people had given money to the value of £503 0s 0d which had been entrusted to the churchwardens. It was Randle Wilbraham⁷⁶ who originated the idea of a consolidated charity scheme where all the money from the various charities was directed into one 'pool'. This money was then used to buy land which could be easily administered, the profits from which were to be given to the various causes outlined by the original benefactors. In 1706, £500 0s 0d was spent on purchasing land and in 1713 the annual rent from this land was £20 18s 0d. However, even though the scheme began with the intention of improving the efficiency of the way the charities were run, the churchwardens were heavily criticised for not spending all the

money from the rents on charitable purposes, and for keeping a large surplus for the use of the parish in aid of church levies. However by 1836 the Royal Commissioners found that the whole of the rents from the property were applied to charitable purposes, and a weekly supply of bread was given away in church every Sunday from a list of eighty names - threepenny loaves in Summer and sixpenny loaves in Winter.⁷⁷ Further money was obtained for the consolidated charities during the nineteenth century when, for example, the Liverpool and Birmingham Junction Canal Company purchased land owned by the charities to build a canal on the outskirts of the town.

William and Peter Sprout - brothers who diverted a financial crisis

William and Peter Sprout assumed an important role in local charities at a time when the problem of how to cope with the poor had never been more paramount. William was an Overseer of the Poor and a Wright's Trustee, and in 1829 left approximately £6,000 to augment major charities in the town. £1,000 was left to the Governors of Chester Infirmary so that poor people from Nantwich could be recommended and 'be received therein as inmates and partake of all the benefits and advantages thereof.'⁷⁸ The widows of Miss Chorlton's charity, the men of Meakin and Delves charity and the 'eight old maids' of Miss Walker's charity received £5 0s 0d each annually from William Sprout's legacy which helped raise their allowances to a bearable level. The religious upbringing of the children was not forgotten either and £20 0s 0d was given annually to supplement the work of the Church of England Sunday School.

Perhaps one of William Sprout's most far sighted ideas was to lend £1,000 to the trustees of Sir Edmund Wright's Charity to enable ten young men of respectable character, living in Nantwich, to borrow for the term of six years an amount of money (not exceeding £100 nor less than £20) '... for the purpose of enabling them to set up in trade or business on their own account' and by so doing enabling them to become independent.⁷⁹ However it was feared that the value of William Sprout's estate would fall considerably short of Mr. Sprout's expectations because of some debts due to the estate that were unlikely to be recovered. It appears the executors feared there would be a deficiency of nearly £2,000 if all the charities specified in the will were to be augmented. All the bequests were in fact made, except for the £1,000 left for setting up young men in trade. There were no applications for this:

... and in consequence of the deficiency in the testator's estate, it will perhaps be advisable that no such class of applicants should be created. Experience has proved it to be the least beneficial and the most troublesome of all charities, and if it can only be established at the expense of more useful ones already in existence also, by drawing upon each rateably, it will surely be best, if it can be done, to discourage it altogether.⁸⁰

Peter Sprout bequeathed £2,200 in 1835:

And the Trustees were earnestly desired to choose and select impartially ten poor housekeepers or inmates, (not being servants) widows, widowers, maiden women, or decayed tradesmen, whose misfortunes were not caused by their own misconduct, sober, honest, and best deserving such assistance;

of upright character and good morals and not under the age of 50 years and without distinction of sect, residing in the town or township of Nantwich and natives to be preferred to strangers who might become inhabitants. To each of which ten persons the said trustees were directed to pay in equal quarterly payments, during their respective lives, an annuity of 1/10th part of the aforesaid remaining interest ... But in no case should either native or stranger be entitled to or allowed any benefit from the bequest if they received parochial relief, or did not reside in the town or township of Nantwich aforesaid. Also people who had committed crimes were not eligible.⁸¹

Peter Sprout also gave £500 towards helping to support the six widows and two maiden women living in the four Wilbraham almshouses in Welsh Row, and in 1836 £6 8s 4d was paid to each recipient.

The Sprout brothers stand out in early nineteenth century Nantwich as being two of the few people who tried to prop up the already failing system of charitable relief. William's experience as an overseer of the poor and a Wright's trustee would obviously have made him well aware of the problems the town was facing in regard to the numbers of poor people applying for relief. He would have been well aware of the strain both the system of poor relief and charities were under, trying to cope with increasingly difficult conditions that the individuals themselves had little control over.

The large amounts left by both men not only testify to their wealth, but to their perception of the scale of the problems faced locally. They obviously felt that many of the old

established charities in the town could no longer function efficiently on the meagre amounts of money bequeathed in the previous century, and were indeed breaking down under the strain of present conditions. While on the one hand both men's donations were sizeable, and would have made the running of many charities a lot easier, so much came too late for many. The charities had been struggling to survive in terms of cash for a long time, and had not been able to properly provide for the poor as originally intended. Indeed the charities that the Sprout's money augmented had never been originally founded to cope with the problems that they faced in the nineteenth century.

The targets of charitable donations 1613-1834

Although each century appears to have had its own characteristic 'trend' regarding the type of charities established, reflecting the needs of that society, each generation built upon the foundations laid by their predecessors and so by 1834 a clear pattern had emerged of the targets of charitable bequests in the previous two centuries. The degree of poverty had increased as the centuries passed, but the remedies identified as offering the best cure maintained a sense of continuity:

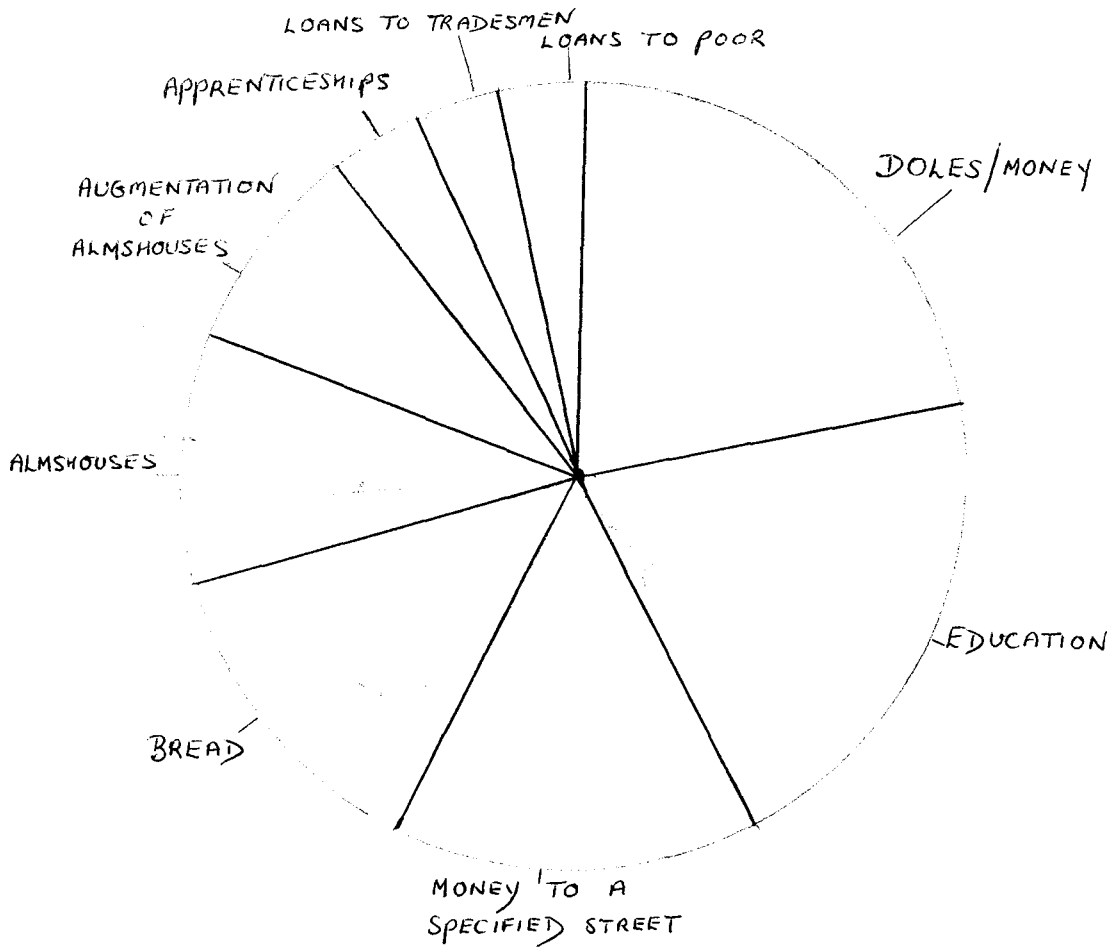


Figure 8

Money either in the form of a cash handout in time of stress or a regular pension to an almsman or woman, together with money specified for a particular poverty stricken street in Nantwich, amounted for 37% of bequests between 1613-1834 and educational charities accounted for 20% of legacies. The bequest of money to the poor was an immediate form of relief and the onus was increasingly on the churchwardens or trustees of the charity to make sure that only the 'deserving' should receive it. As such almsgiving was much easier to administer in a one to one situation where close personal contact was maintained, such legacies characterised the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

The popularity of such bequests were overtaken by the provision of education for the poor as not only could it be more closely regulated, but a combination of self help and insurance for the future was bound together in this bequest that would, it was hoped, help reduce the need for its recipients to fall back on charities in the future. Bread was an immediate and necessary form of relief for the poor, and as it was given directly to the poor the administrators had no worry that their relief was being squandered. Also the fact that the bread was given out in church after the Sunday service assured an element of religion in their lives too.

The foundation of almshouses and their augmentation, built upon the seventeenth century belief that the aged should be cared for, but, without the further financial help of future benefactors the original bequests were proving totally inadequate to sustain inmates in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. All of these targets for relief had one thing in common - that by the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century many recipients were experiencing grievous hardships because of a lack of new bequests and dwindling legacies. All of this occurred at a time when the Overseers, under pressure from the ratepayers, were seeking to make economies in poor relief. What was the exact scale of the financial crises and what steps were undertaken to relieve the hardships that were befalling the poor in the wake of economic and social flux?

Growing financial problems

By the 1830s the number of people seeking relief and the amount of money required to deal with the problem was far above what local efforts could provide within the system in which they were working. Indeed considering the state of the crisis that must have prevailed locally among charities concerning the scale of the problem, there are surprisingly few new charitable bequests made during the early nineteenth century in Nantwich. Perhaps people felt that the problem was already so out of hand that any new bequests would just begin to scratch the surface of the problem. D. Owen has argued that around 1800 charitable effort '... was suffused with a mood of pessimism and imbued with an emotion, unadmitted and only partly conscious, akin to fear of the poor.'⁸² Population growth, mounting poor rates, and fluctuations in the economy all combined to raise awareness of the poor, and as the problem seemed to be an ever increasing one it was to be expected that the traditional methods of dealing with the poor should be questioned. Some people obviously hesitated to add to the number of charitable bequests while there was a general doubt as to whether they were in fact helping or encouraging the very problems they set out to alleviate. Contemporary writers aired their views of this subject and in 1806 Colquhoun questioned what charities had actually accomplished in the way of preventing indigence '... The indigent have been clothed and fed; but few, very few, have recovered their former useful station of independent poverty.'⁸³ The

expense of maintaining charitable endeavour combined with the loss of labour of those who were indigent led Colquhoun and his contemporaries to question the wisdom of a prodigious outlay on private charity, which, some argued, had produced only trivial benefits. It was at the end of the eighteenth century, and early nineteenth century that some of the visions of eighteenth-century philanthropists were questioned and a sense of social pessimism developed. By comparison during the eighteenth century there had been a total of thirtysix bequests to the poor, usually several in each decade, many made by those who had become landed gentry, having moved out of Nantwich to the nearby countryside, but who continued to support charities that their families had initiated. While many tradesmen were active as trustees and administrators we do not have any evidence of them making any great financial contribution in terms of establishing new charities in the nineteenth century. By attending Vestry meetings and acting as trustees they could safeguard their vested interests as ratepayers and satisfy their social ambitions, but they did not initiate any new institutions to tackle the obvious problems of poverty that were facing the town, probably persuaded that they had contributed their share of financial help through the rates. Indeed as it has been pointed out by S. G. and E. O. A. Checkland, a new individualist ethos was developing at the very time when society was imposing unprecedented strains on '... the mass of its members, the concept of the need of the individual for group support was being lost.'⁸⁴

However while there is evidence of a growing individualistic ethic among some members of society many people were still confident, as F. Prochaska has argued, that voluntary social action was the most reliable remedy for individual ills and social distress.⁸⁵ There were only three large bequests made in Nantwich between 1800-1835 and they all appeared between 1829-1837 in the crisis years just before and after the new Poor Law was introduced.⁸⁶ These new bequests did ease the situation but proved to be so much too late and the palliatives applied merely tried to cope with the casualties, but could not hope to bring financial stability to all the charities considering the scale of the problem by that time. As D. Owen has argued by the early nineteenth century the regeneration of British society no longer seemed within the resources of private benevolence.⁸⁷ All that could be hoped was that their efforts, together with the relief offered by the Poor Law was better than nothing. The problem was to find a better solution and none readily offered themselves.

Throughout the eighteenth century the value of money left to be administered by local trustees was dwindling in relation to rising prices and the increased numbers in need, hence the number of bequests made to augment existing charities. As early as 1704 it was the fear that the value of so many small bequests would be lost in the face of present need that led to the consolidated charities being formed. Also many charities in Nantwich were amalgamated with others in order to increase their financial value, for example the Meakin and Delves charity. So it is evident that throughout the eighteenth century the

amount of money being distributed through charitable endeavour was falling short of what was required. By 1825 the alms-houses in Nantwich were in debt, the almsman's allowance was still what it had been 245 years previously, and many inmates were described as being in dire poverty with some almsmen being forced to take up residence in the workhouse.

By the nineteenth century the scale of poverty in Nantwich was outgrowing, in monetary terms, what could be coped with by parish relief and the numerous bequests and charities which existed as legacies from previous centuries. There was also the problem of maladministration as pointed out by Dunning in the 1830s in relation to the Beam Heath estate where it was proved that money which should have been distributed to householders was withheld. The problem of making sure that such money was available from charities did in fact reach those most in need was a perpetual problem in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in Nantwich. The churchwardens who administered the consolidated charities were criticised for keeping large sums aside to pay for church levies and in the 1830s Hodgkin's charity did not distribute all its funds because disputes between the trustees and masters resulting from fraudulent practices between parents, masters, and apprentices. Such maladministration obviously hurt those most in need and was a symptom of the general malaise that crept over the subject of the treatment of the poor in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

While emphasising the variety of different charities in Nantwich and the role they had to play, their contribution

to total relief has to be kept in perspective. For example in 1665 the total for charitable donations in Nantwich was £115 8s 8d and with an estimated population of 1,500 one shilling and sixpence per head of the total population was disbursed in relief. By 1786 the gross amount of capital given to benefit the poor had accumulated to £2,625.⁸⁸ However it was only in 1793 with Miss Walker's bequest of £959 and the two large legacies by the Sprout brothers together with the £1,000 by Mary Swan, that brought the total amount bequeathed between 1657-1846 to £12,546 (excluding the initial cost of building the almshouses).

In 1815 charitable donations for Nantwich accounted for 6% of all charitable donations within Cheshire.⁸⁹ The annual average of charitable donations for Nantwich between 1813-1815 was £232⁹⁰ which represented 14.5% of the total money distributed by way of poor relief in Nantwich. For the 29 almshouses in the town in 1815 the total endowment was £138 1s 8d per annum or £4 15s 0d per almshouse.⁹¹ Considering that there were usually two or more people in each almshouse, it is little wonder that many almsmen and women were reported as being in dire poverty.

By the early 1840s £302 per annum was being distributed to the poor which represented 1s 1d per head of the population. When the total amount of money disbursed by the charities is compared with that given in poor relief, it is evident that far greater amounts were distributed by the Overseers. In terms of the evidence relating to Nantwich the claim made by E. Royle that 'Private charity in the eighteenth and nineteenth century

was far more important than the poor law in the day-to-day relief of poverty,' has to be disputed.⁹² That charities were important, both to the subscribers and relieved, cannot be denied but in monetary terms they could in no way compete with the resources of the Overseer. Relief from charitable bequests, even in Nantwich which had a reasonable variety of charities, formed only a relatively small proportion of the total relief available. The scale of the problem of poverty simply outgrew the charitable resources available.

The charities of Monks Coppenhall, Church Coppenhall, and Crewe

In contrast to the history of charitable endeavour in Nantwich, Church Coppenhall, Monks Coppenhall, and the township of Crewe had a relatively small number of charities, reflecting the scattered population that lived there before the development of the area by the London and North Western Railway Company. By 1786 the total amount of money that had been given for charitable purposes amounted to £136 0s 0d resulting from five legacies. Annually this produced £6 16s 0d to be disbursed to the poor. With an estimated population of one hundred people in 1786 charitable relief amounted to approximately 1s 4d per head of the population per annum.⁹³ In 1815 the total of charitable disbursements for Church Coppenhall represented 4.3% of the total expended on poor relief, and in Crewe township charitable donations represented 0.6% of total expenditure on the poor,⁹⁴ once again illustrating that in relation to the amount of relief granted by the Overseers charitable relief paled into insignificance.

The few charities that were in operation usually followed the pattern of Joseph Bleaumire's charity in Crewe township where money was bequeathed and the interest was spent on providing bread which was given out every Sunday morning after church. In 1786 the interest amounted to £3 0s 0d a year.⁹⁵ There was also the occasional gift of money to the communities poor as in January 1795 when Mr. John Crewe gave £10 10s 0d to the Overseers as a gift to the poor, and various amounts of money were distributed ranging from 3s 0d to 10s 0d, and thirtytwo people received relief. Money was also used from this gift to provide clothes, coal, and shoes. Such gifts seem to have been rare as this is the only one mentioned in the Overseers Accounts and was perhaps prompted by the severe Winter weather, and the fact that the Overseers disbursed £84 12s 10½d between October 1794 and April 1795, the highest quarterly total recorded in the volume since it began in 1759.⁹⁶

In conclusion the provision offered by charities provided, as D. Owen states, 'a principal weapon of the nation during the age of intermittent crises,'⁹⁷ and he goes on to argue that private charity fulfilled a dual importance in that it pointed the way to state action, and illustrated the ultimate inadequacy of private philanthropy when measured against the requirements of industrial-urban society.⁹⁸ Ultimately poverty was viewed by many as being caused by individual moral failing, rather than in consequence of economic fluctuation and change over which the individual had no control. As a result private charities, many dating from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, having been conceived to fulfil far less in terms

of supporting the poor than was being asked of them by 1830, simply could no longer fulfil people's expectations. Private philanthropy was not physically capable of supporting the casualties of economic and social change, not to mention the aged and children who had always called upon them, without an injection of new sources of income.

Frequently the number of applicants for charitable relief in Nantwich was described as 'numerous' by the Charity Commissioners in 1837 and it is clear that from the seventeenth century to the 1830s several identifiable threads were discernable in the history of charitable endeavour in Nantwich.

- 1) Charity aimed at a particular area of the town.
- 2) Charity specifically designed to relieve natives of the town and householders.
- 3) Charity that could only be received by members of the Church of England.
- 4) Charity aimed specifically at men, widows, spinsters, and the very old.
- 5) Charity to provide apprenticeships for children or places at the Grammar School or Blue Cap School.
- 6) Relief of tradesmen who had come on hard times, either through age or economic conditions.
- 7) Charity freely given with no discrimination on religious grounds.

Also the augmentation of old established charities assumed growing importance during the nineteenth century because of dwindling finances together with the consolidation of small bequests in order to achieve more efficient administration. The Sprout brothers, who were well aware of how several of

the smaller charities in the town were struggling to survive, enabled by virtue of their bequests, several long established charities to continue operation. It was inevitable that local philanthropy would encounter a crisis situation, when old established charities failed to have new bequests added to them in order to keep pace with the ever growing demand. The era of questioning and doubt that coincided with the beginning of the nineteenth century was a period dominated by the growing influence of the tradesmen in Nantwich rather than the landed gentry. The tradesmen's influence was mainly felt in the committee room rather than in the establishment of new charities and the addition of extra cash, and this fact merely compounded the problem locally. It was only with the advent of the two Sprout bequests in the late 1830s together with Mary Swan's legacy, that charities in Nantwich could begin to administer a meaningful amount of relief to recipients.

It is clear that charities within the town were in crises at a time when the poor law was being tightened up under pressure from the ratepayers. All this spelt out hardship for those trying to claim charitable relief only to find that the funds could not accommodate them. It also meant that those in receipt of allowances from the various charities were finding it increasingly hard to manage as rising prices eroded the value of such payments.

The role of associated philanthropy began to assume growing importance as it was no longer within the financial sphere of many individuals to establish a charity that would be financially viable. However apart from the financial dilemmas

that faced the poor in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, there was also the harsh realities associated with who was eligible to receive relief. It is clear that strict rules of discipline applied to almsmen and women, and anyone who received an allowance had to be law abiding, well mannered and, in many cases, religious too. Not only did it have to be the 'right' religion but at the merest hint of gossip the allowance might be stopped. Although the financial security of many of the Nantwich charities was looking more favourable in the late 1830s the poor themselves were facing a new, unknown threat in their lives: the introduction of the new workhouse and the strict operation of the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act.

FOOTNOTES

CHAPTER TWO

1. S. G. and E. O. A Checkland, The Poor Law Report of 1834 (1974) p. 11
2. W. K. Jordan, Philanthropy in England 1480-1660 (1959) chapters IV - V
3. J. R. Poynter, Society and Pauperism - English Ideas on Poor Relief 1795-1834 (1969)
4. D. Owen, English Philanthropy 1660 - 1960 (1965) p. 2
5. ibid. p. 98
6. ibid. p. 76
Men from Nantwich who made their fortunes in London and returned to set up charities in the town:

1570s	J. Thrush and T. Thrush Established Grammar School.
1638	Sir Edmund Wright Established almshouses and £32 p.a.
1662	Alderman Walthall Loan to tradesmen £100.
1665	Oliver Wilkes Loan to poor £10.
1665	Samual Goldsmith Bread to poor £50.
1665	Richard Venner Bread to poor £1 10s 0d.
7. ibid. pp. 74-75
8. ibid. p. 15, p. 20
9. ibid. p. 30
10. J. Hall, A History of the Town and Parish of Nantwich (1883) p. 203
Charitable endeavour in the local area can be established within the Wilbraham family as early as 1613 when Sir Roger Wilbraham of Dorfold Hall (1553-1616) established almshouses for six poor men, four from Nantwich and two from Acton, at Welsh Row Head. They were apparently low one-storey buildings consisting of one room with a small garden. The men were given a coat faced with blue and a cap once

every two years, and a pair of shoes every year, and 40s 0d per annum.

C.R.O. - DSW 2116/109 p. 650

Roger Wilbraham of Townsend House was born on 3rd November 1623 and was educated at Repton School, Derbyshire and at St. Catharine's Hall, Cambridge. He was admitted to Lincoln's Inn in 1642 and was called to the bar in 1649. When his elder brother died in 1649 he gave up his law practice to live as a gentleman at Nantwich. His charitable acts were numerous including the setting up of a Town School or Grammar School for children whose parents were not able to keep them at school. There is also this entry in the Commonplace Account Book, May 23rd, 1689: 'To Mr Stringer, our Minister, and W. Hale, Churchwarden, for relief of ye distressed protestants driven out of Ireland, £5 0s 0d.' and on August 14th, 1693 he gave £1 10s 0d 'for ye Christian Captives.' During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries Turkish pirates of Tunis and Algiers were active in European seas robbing ships of their cargoes and sailors and passengers were taken as prisoners. Collections in Churches to raise funds for purchasing freedom of these 'Christian Captives' seems to have been common in every parish in England, and Roger Wilbraham's charitable feelings obviously extended beyond the needs of his own parish. In 1669-1670 he was the High Sheriff of the County and he died in 1707.

J. Hall, op. cit., p. 431

11. Ralph Wilbraham's will, dated 1661, gave all his estate to the poor in general. £50 0s 0d was left as a legacy to the Grammar School and Roger Wilbraham obtained £400 0s 0d for Nantwich and the rest of the money from the estate was put into the hands of the Churchwardens of neighbouring parishes to be used for their poor. The interest from the £400 0s 0d amounted to £14 0s 0d yearly and was paid every Christmas through R. W. Wilbraham of Delamere for the purpose of providing clothing for the poor of Nantwich.

Kelly's Directory of Cheshire 1892 p. 368

The amounts given to other neighbouring areas were as follows:

	£.	s.	d.
Baddiley	10	0	0
Audlem	63	6	8
Wrenbury	50	0	0
Wybunbury	50	0	0
Acton	185	0	0

J. Hall op. cit., p.359

12. A workhouse was not provided in Nantwich until 1677.
see pp. 5 - 6 supra.
13. C.R.O. DSW/2116/109 Reports of the Charity
Commissioners 1819-1837 p. 655
14. ibid.
15. ibid. p. 621
16. J. Hall op. cit., pp. 428-430, quoting from the
Wilbrham Family Journal.
17. C.R.O. DSW/2116/109 p. 649
18. Peter Sprout, after the death of his wife, gave
£500 0s 0d, the interest of which was to be
divided equally among six widows and their
successors for ever who might be living in the
Wilbraham almshouses in Welsh Row.

Also in 1856 Mary Bennion and Elizabeth Bennion,
two Nantwich spinsters, added to the Wilbraham
almshouses with the sum of £738 13s 7d.

G. Ormerod, The History of the County Palatine
and City of Chester (1882) vol. 3 p. 436
19. G. W. Oxley, Poor Relief in England and Wales
1601-1834 p. 16
20. J. R. Poynter, op. cit., p. 3
21. J. Hall, op. cit., p. 211
22. See p. 3 supra.
23. Apparently there was once a table showing the
charities that were administered in the town,
situated in the parish church. It showed the
names of the benefactors and the charity given,
but it was painted over during the nineteenth
century and then removed from the church.

Details of legacies relating to Nantwich can be
found in the 31st Report of the Charity Commis-
sioners 1837, pp. 644-664 and G. Ormerod, op. cit.,
pp. 525-534 vol. 3, which shows an abstract of
returns of charitable donations 1787-1788
(1862-1863) and mentions Nantwich charities from
1600-1846.

24. In 1784 Bridget Wood's charity distributed clothes and money to the value of £33 6s 0d.
C.R.O. DSW 2116/3/1 Minutes and Accounts of Wright's Charities 1656-1801
25. C.R.O. DSW 2116/109 p. 657
26. ibid. pp. 648-649
27. ibid. p. 658
Masterson's Charity left £20 0s 0d, the interest from which was to be distributed in bread to the poor of Pillory Street. A sum of 16s 0d was given annually to the Wright's trustees to provide bread for 26 people in the street.
28. See p. 3. *supra*
29. Kelly's Directory op. cit., pp. 364-367
see also footnote 77
30. Thomas Dunning (1813-1894) a working-class radical who was prominent in local affairs and local reform movements in Nantwich. He pursued several jobs during his life as a page, shoemaker, and a news-agent, but always defended the rights to trade unions and emphasised how politics involved the entire working class community and he used statutes and bye laws to attack local vested interests.

Autobiography reprinted in Testaments of Radicalism-
Memoirs of Working Class Politicians 1790-1885
Edited by D. Vincent.
31. ibid. p. 144
32. E. Royle, Modern Britain - A Social History 1750-1985 (1987) p. 180
33. The Beam Heath Trustees administered land in Alvaston, and when the surplus of income from the land amounted to £500 this was to be distributed in equal shares among the inhabitants who were eligible, i.e., lived there for seven years.

In 1879 1,250 people received 22s 0d per head
34. T. Dunning op. cit., p. 145
35. C.R.O. DSW 2116/3/1
It seems that in common with many charities in Nantwich, this charity was amalgamated with others in order to increase its financial value. In 1738 Mr Matthew Meakin gave £200 to maintain a

poor man and his wife and this money was directed towards the Delves charity. The Delves almshouse also received money from William Sprout's bequest, 1829.

G. Ormerod, op.cit., p. 436

36. C.R.O. DSW 2116/3/2

37. Sir Edmund Wright was born in Nantwich in 1573 and the Wright family were influential in Nantwich from the middle of the sixteenth century to the early part of the eighteenth century. Sir Edmund was a merchant in London, rose to be an Alderman and in 1640-1641 became Lord Mayor of London. Apart from establishing the almshouses in Nantwich he gave 12d weekly in bread to 12 poor people for nearly twenty years.

J. Hall, op. cit., p. 355

G. Ormerod, op. cit., p. 436

Also 'Extracts from the wills and information appertaining to the administration by the Trustees of Sir Edmund Wright' and other charities'.
(Nantwich 1967) passim.

38. During the seventeenth century the surname Wright was the most frequently occurring name in Nantwich Parish Registers, and they lived in every street of the town and belonged to every group in society from gentlemen to cottagers. It is, then, surprising to note that in spite of their proli-
ference, that no one with the name of Wright was an inmate of the Almshouse from 1666-1705. Between 1705-1801 sixteen people with the surname Wright were relieved.

C.R.O. DSW 2116/3/1

39. C.R.O. DSW 2116/109 p. 647

40. An example of the expenditure for Sir Edmund Wright's Charity for 1679:

	£	s	d
To Almsmen in money	24	5	0
for 34 yards of cloth for the gowns	4	2	2
for gowns		13	2
17 yards of cloth for shirts and making	1	8	6
6 pairs of stockings and 6 pairs of shoes	1	10	2
for the dinner and sermon, making			
6 gowns	2	2	6
for mending the almsmen seats in Church	0	0	6

	£	s	d
Paid to 6 almsmen this quarter	6	0	0
Paid Robert Gough for repairs to gowns		6	8
Paid to 6 almsmen 20 shillings a piece	6	0	0
Paid to John Smithington 3 days work		3	6
Paid John Smithington Labourer 3 days work		2	6
for a load of lime		3	4
for gutter bit and other bits		1	8
Paid 6 almsmen 20 shillings a piece	6	0	0
Paid for cloth for almsmen shirts		18	5
Paid for 6 pairs of shoes	1	3	0
Paid for 6 pairs of stockings		9	0
	55	10	1

C.R.O. DSW 2116/3/1

41. For example in 1684 Sir John Trott and Dame Elizabeth (his wife) of London bequeathed the sum of £32 0s 0d to Sir Edmund Wright's almshouses.

C.R.O. DSW 2116/3/1

In 1829 Williams Sprout's legacy provided £14 0s 0d yearly for each almsman, which was paid in quarterly instalments and on every 24th November the almsmen were given a special dinner, again under the bequest of William Sprout and Miss Elizabeth Walker (died 1793).

Kelley's Directory, op. cit., pp. 364-367

42. The original trustees in August 1638 were as follows and include many of the leading townspeople of the time:

Thomas Maisteron, Esq.
 Thomas Wilbraham, Esq.
 Alexander Walthall, the younger, Esq.
 Thomas Bavand, Esq.
 Roger Wright, the elder.
 Richard Wright, son and heir of Roger Wright
 Lawrence Wright, the elder, Gentleman.
 Randle Church, the elder, Gentleman.
 Jeffrey Massey, Gentleman.
 Ralph Woodnoth, Gentleman.
 Richard Wright of Stone, Gentleman.
 William Grafton, Gentleman.
 John Saring, Clerk (minister of Nantwich Church).

C.R.O. DSW 2116/3/1

43. J. Hall, op. cit., p. 367
44. ibid. p. 368
45. C.R.O. DSW 2116/3/2
46. ibid.
47. Extracts from the Treasurers (Wright's Trustees) Accounts quoted in J. Hall, op. cit., p. 369
48. C.R.O. DSW 2116/109 p. 648
49. List of 13 Trustees elected on November 24th, 1786 with a new emphasis on tradesmen.

George Wilbraham Esq.	(re-elected)
Samuel Barrow Esq.	
James Tomkinson Esq.	
George Garnett	Cheesefactor
Thomas Yoxall Junior	Gentleman
Richard Wickstead	Surgeon
William Wrench	Surgeon
William Kent	Apothecary
William Philips	Mercer
Joseph Skerrett	Upholsterer
Richard Liversage	Ironmonger
Geoffrey Dutton	Ironmonger
Benjamin Hewitt	Merchant

Between 1637-1736, 103 people had been received into the Wright's Almshouses and by 1801 the total had reached 149.

C.R.O. DSW 2116/3/1

50. B. Harrison, 'Philanthropy and the Victorians' Victorian Studies IX (1966) pp. 353-374
51. Some of Miss Chorlton's land was also rented out and the money raised was used to augment the Widow's Mite so that from 1809 25s 0d a quarter was given out by this charity.

C.R.O. DSW 2116/3/2

£3 10s 0d yearly was given from the William Sprout bequest to augment Mrs. Chorlton's Charity in the 1830s.

C.R.O. DSW 2116/3/1

52. In 1717-1718 a special memo was issued from the trustees of the Wright's almshouse stating that 'by a good majority' the trustees had decided to reinforce the rule that no married person could become an almsman, as the founder had originally specified this. Perhaps one of the reasons for this was because in the 1670s a married man had been admitted but he died a few days before receiving his quarterly allowance and his wife subsequently claimed this. Moreover a married man's family might continue to be an expense to the trustees long after the almsman had died.
53. C.R.O. EMS 27/7/16
Triple Jubilee Souvenir Handbook (1808-1958)
of Hospital Street Methodist Church, Nantwich p. 6
54. C.R.O. EMS 27/2/1
Society and poor stewards' accounts, Hospital Street Chapel, Nantwich. 1808-1824
55. Kelly's Directory, op. cit., pp. 364-367
56. C.R.O. DSW 2116/109 p. 658
57. Again any surplus from this charity was directed towards helping pay for the almsmen's feast at the Wright's Almshouse on the 24th November and remainder was put into the general funds for the almshouse.
58. J. R. Poynter, op. cit., p. 85
59. C.R.O. DSW 2116/108/2
Charity Return for Nantwich Parish 1786
To Hodgkin's bequest was added one by John Broomhall who in 1731 left £50 to purchase land, the profits from which were to be paid to the charity school in Nantwich.
60. C.R.O. DSW 2116/83
61. C.R.O. DSW 2116/10
Rentals and Registers for Nantwich Charities 1797-1848 p. 89
62. C.R.O. DSW 2116/109 p. 655
63. C.R.O. DSW 2116/3/2
64. ibid. p. 655
65. C.R.O. DSW 2116/83

66. D. Robson, Some Aspects of Education in Chehsire in the Eighteenth Century
Remains Historical and Literary Connected with the Palatine Counties of Lancaster and Chester
Vol. XIII Third Series (1966) p. 46, p. 59
and parl. papers 1837-8 XXIV (103) p. 645
67. D. Robson, op. cit., P. 19, p. 31
68. D. Owen, op. cit., p. 21
69. D. Robson, p. 39, p. 115
70. ibid. p. 17
71. ibid. p. 34 quoting from the S P C K Reports 1717 pp. 22-41
72. ibid. p. 119
73. C.R.O. DSW 2116/83
74. D. Owen, op. cit., p. 23
75. ibid. p. 24
76. Randle Wilbraham 1663-1732. The son of Roger Wilbraham. One of the town's foremost county gentlemen of the period. He was a Wright's Trustee for 30 years and with his brother, Stephen, endowed the Blue-cap Charity School in Nantwich.
77. C.R.O. DSW 2116/109 pp. 661-662
The following charities were administered by the Churchwardens of Nantwich:
Consolidated charities
The income from these investments was used to supply bread which was given out by the Churchwardens every Sunday (80 loaves). Large 6d loaves were given in Winter and small 3d loaves in Summer. The people who received bread were expected to attend Church every Sunday morning if possible.
Harwar's charity
Yearly income from property amounted to £15 0s 0d
Hickson's charity
Hannah Hickson left £10 in her will, the interest from which was to be distributed annually on St. Thomas' day to five poor people in Barker Street. This sum was added to other sums in 1779 for the

erection of the Workhouse and the Overseers paid 9s 0d interest per annum out of the poor rate to the Churchwardens, and 1s 0d each was given to nine poor persons in Barker Street.

Roger Praer's Obit

Founded by the Wilbraham family. Annual charge on cottage distributed on Easter Monday each year to poor widows in Hospital Street.

Proudman's charity

Thomas Proudman gave 20s 0d annually to be given in bread to the poor in Welsh Row on St. Thomas' Day.

Slade's charity

In 1530 Margaret Slade left various lands, the rents from which were to be paid to the Churchwardens of Nantwich. This money was to be divided equally amongst 60 poor householders in Nantwich at Easter and Christmas each year. If the money was not distributed properly, it was to pass to Acton parish. The land was eventually sold for £1500, which was invested.

Peover's charity

About 1734 Peover gave 40s 0d a year, the rent from a meadow, for a monthly sacrament.

Folliott's charity

The income of £4 12s 2d is distributed in coal every Christmas and St. Thomas' day.

Williams' charity

The interest from £300 was distributed each Christmas to 20 poor widows over 60 years of age, resident in Nantwich.

William Sprout's charity

Part of William Sprout's bequest (see ^{p102} p422 of thesis) was to be administered by the Rector of Nantwich. This concerned the £1000 given to the Governors of Chester Infirmary on the condition that the Rector should have the 'privilege' of sending poor persons to the Infirmary as inmates. Money was paid on 23rd May, 1832.

- 78. C.R.O. DSW 2116/109 p. 658 (see footnote 77)
- 79. ibid. pp. 658-659
- 80. ibid.
- 81. ibid. p. 660

82. D. Owen, op. cit., pp. 97-98
83. P. Colquhoun, Treatise on Indigence (1806)
op. cit., pp. 101-102
84. S. G. and E. O. A Checkland, op. cit., p. 21
85. F. Prochaska, The Voluntary Impulse, Philanthropy
in Modern Britain (1988) p. 21
86. William Sprout, 1829, £6000
Peter Sprout, 1835, £2200
Mary Swan, 1837, £1000
87. D. Owen, op. cit., p. 112
88. Parl. Papers 1816 XVI pp. 140-142
89. C.R.O. Abstracts of the Answers and Returns, 1815
op. cit.,
90. ibid.
91. ibid.
92. E. Royle, op. cit., p. 180
93. Parl. Papers 1816 XVI pp. 134-135
G. Ormerod, op. cit., p. 528

The money for the poor in the Monks Coppenhall area
was left by:

William Malbon	£65
Matt. Cartwright	£50
(to be given in 12 x 1d wheaten loaves)	
Sarah Turner	£10
John Turner	£6
Thomas Pickering	£5

Enclosure of the waste land was carried out in
Monks Coppenhall and the land was rented out. The
money from this was distributed in 16 x 2d loaves
given away every two weeks at Church. The remainder
was added to the sacrament money and given away
twice a year at Easter and Christmas in small sums
from 2s 0d to 2s 3d to each family.

C.R.O. DSW 2116/109 pp. 639-640

94. ibid.
95. C.R.O. PC 14/1/2
96. ibid.,

97. D. Owen, op. cit., p. 4

98. ibid. p. 6

Chapter 3

The operation of the New Poor Law in Nantwich Union

With the introduction of the Poor Law Amendment Act in 1834, the government, Commissioners, ratepayers and supporters of the Act all hoped that it would herald the start of a period of new stringency and more effective discipline in the treatment of the poor. As M. E. Rose has argued the 'New Poor Law was seen as the final solution to the problem of pauperism which would work wonders for the moral character of the working man.'¹

In this chapter comment will be made on how far the 'general impression' of the condition of the poor, as promulgated by the Commissioners in the Poor Law Report, was representative of conditions prevailing in Cheshire and the Nantwich Union in particular.

The annual reports of the Poor Law Commissioners together with the Minute Books of the local guardians will be used as a yardstick to compare this district with the rest of the country. It is only through investigation of local and regional differences that the diversified nature of poverty can emerge and the assumption on which the Act was based can be tested. One of the questions to be posed is how far the 1834 Amendment Act, albeit based on the findings of local investigations coped with the diverse situations existing throughout the country. Indeed how well did this new centralised act, geared to introducing 'uniformity' throughout the land, cope with poverty in South Cheshire? Secondly the Act was to affect the majority of the labouring population at some time in their lives, more

often than not through absolute necessity, and not as a result of idleness. How far did the Act fulfill their needs and how far did the local guardians need to adapt its implementation to local circumstance and the needs of the local people in order to make the system workable, thereby moving away from uniformity. Thirdly for those who could not escape the Nantwich workhouse, what were the living conditions like? How 'less eligible' were its inmates made to feel, and what problems were encountered when the sick, elderly, infirm, and children had to be dealt with under the same roof?

M. A. Crowther states that the 'workhouse myth' was created during the years of the Poor Law Commissioners and it was from this period that the workhouses gained their reputation as places of oppression. How far does the reality of life in Nantwich Workhouse confirm or modify this view of oppressiveness?²

The development of the workhouse from a general institution to one offering specialised services will be examined, together with the reaction of the Guardians to such a change in their role. Did they help or hinder the process of change? In this context the development of medical care within the workhouse will be highlighted and the role of a campaign such as that mounted by The Lancet will be considered, and the findings compared with conditions prevailing in Nantwich Infirmary. The need to provide an education for the children will also be focused upon: what form did this education take and what special problems were associated with providing a basic education for the children who were frequently discharged and then readmitted to the workhouse?

Central to any discussion of the quality of life for the inmates in the workhouse, was the role played by the Master and Matron, around whom the largely self contained world of the workhouse revolved. How were they selected and what qualities were looked upon by the Guardians as indicative of a good Master and Matron? Examples of both the good work that could be exercised, together with the physical hardship that could arise from maladministration on the part of the Master and Matron, will be examined.

D. Fraser has argued that there were three essential principles explicit in the origins and creation of the New Poor Law: uniformity, abolition of out-relief, and less eligibility, and that in practice the poor law severely compromised all three features.³ How true was this in Nantwich Union? Also F. M. L. Thompson has argued that workhouse conditions were not inferior to those on an independent labourer in material things but that the institutional discipline was itself the deterrent: 'less eligibility was not a question of gruel, but of prison-like regimentation.'⁴ How far does the evidence relating to Nantwich Union support this view?

The basis of the reform put forward in the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834 was really the reform of a system of supporting the poor in an economic environment which was ceasing to exist in the 1830s. However the very reform that was supposed to update and improve the system failed to take account of the reality of the present situation, let alone the future. This fundamental flaw in the Amendment Act was to have a far reaching effect on the lives of the poor; as analysis of the

operation of the poor law in Nantwich Union will reveal one Union's approach to tackling this problem.

The impact of the New Poor Law in Cheshire

What was the reaction of communities in Cheshire and particularly Nantwich, to the idea of introducing the New Poor Law? A. F. Young and E. T. Ashton have described the Act as the 'charter of the ratepayers',⁵ and judging from the Annual Reports of the Poor Law Commissioners the introduction of the new Poor Law throughout the country was eagerly anticipated. A. Brundage has argued that by the 1830s there was a '... new willingness to accept a comprehensive reform, the need for which was underscored by the Swing riots',⁶ and P. Thane has argued that '... the desire to maximise the labour force and to reduce government expenditure in order to stimulate economic growth',⁷ hastened the reform. The Commissioners hoped that once and for all they would be able to get to grips with the problem of the poor, especially the able-bodied poor, and that the new Poor Law was the means with which to do it, a means of 'social control for the poor.'⁸ However not all areas of England and Wales displayed the eagerness of the Commissioners to adopt the new system. Many areas of the north of England and certain towns within Cheshire were reluctant to adopt the new law when the old Poor Law had met all their needs without the need to antagonise the poor with the threat of the workhouse. Chester is a good example of an area that deliberately dragged its feet regarding the transition, whereas the Nantwich Guardians were eager to prove the new Poor Law could be successfully administered, to the satisfaction of

all concerned. The Nantwich ratepayers were more concerned to guard their vested interest in keeping the rate bill down. If the new Poor Law could help them do this, then they were at least in favour of the new act.

There was, however, confusion up and down the country as the transition was made to the new Poor Law, but the first annual report from the Commissioners explained that confusion only arose from 'ignorance' of the changes made in the administration of relief. Fear and suspicion prevailed among the board of guardians in Cheshire as they had not encountered to any great extent, apart from the rising costs, the worst evils of the old Poor Law as witnessed in the south of England. They distrusted a system which would be enforced centrally, and feared a loss of control over local matters. As M. A. Crowther has argued, the 1834 Amendment Act was seen by many as a violent intrusion of capitalism into the 'moral economy' of the countryside.⁹ The Chester Chronicle repeatedly reported the disturbances taking place up and down the country against the new Poor Law, and local boards of guardians were obviously anxious to avoid such occurrences in their own parishes. Many Cheshire guardians considered the rising price of relief a small price to pay for a system that had been administered humanely, with few major drawbacks.

In May 1834 the Chester Chronicle reported that the Poor Law Amendment Bill had created a great sensation in the Metropolitan areas '... which however, is not confined to them.' and that the power proposed to be given to the central board was so great '... as to amount to a most formidable despotism, utterly opposed to the British constitution.'¹⁰

The Chester Chronicle went on to comment that the commissioners appointed to supervise the Acts implementation might well have been of high moral character ' ... but these considerations have not so far prevailed as to ensure the ultimate success of the measure ...',¹¹

By 1836 45% of England and Wales had undergone the transition to administer the new Poor Law: the first Poor Law unions in Cheshire were declared during the summer of 1836 and affected a total of 21% of the county's population.¹² In Cheshire during July 1836 ' ... few subjects more engaged public attention ... than the Poor Law Amendment Act.'¹³ and the second annual report of the Poor Law Commissioners stated that:

... it could not be expected that an Act ... which of necessity changed the source from which a large portion of the inhabitants ... derived their customary means of subsistence ... opposed itself not only to the interests, the prejudices and the fears of a large portion of the population ... could possibly be carried into effect without difficulty and resistance.¹⁴

By 1836 the new Poor Law was a 'fait accompli' and the Chester Chronicle took on the role of reassuring its readers of the benefits of the new system, drawing attention to the 'misunderstandings' and 'prejudices' which some people still held towards the new act. By the summer of 1836 the Wirral Union had been in operation for just two months but was held up as a shining example as it had already made a saving equal to the whole amount of Union charges for the current quarter just by revising its pauper list. Readers were

encouraged to compare the working of the old system with what had been witnessed of the new:

... As to the advantages of district over petty township management, he [Commissioner Neave] proved that great savings might be effected by economy whilst the relief to the poor might be great and humanely extended. I went to the meeting [at Runcorn] an opponent, and I left it a convert; and such was the case, I believe with three-quarters of the persons present, the meeting comprising not less in number than one hundred and twenty.¹⁵

Within three years the emphasis of the local press had shifted: initially there had been an air of resentment at the speed with which the act had been passed through Parliament and a fear of too much central control, reflecting the views of The Times and its owner John Walter, who was bitterly opposed to the introduction of the new centralised system of control. By 1836 there was an emphasis on the savings resulting from the new system, together with a belief that the new act could be humanely administered. The opinion that no-one should 'of right' expect to be supported by the town was frequently expressed in the county press and the Annual Report of the Poor Law Commissioners echoes this in 1836:

Everything about us was paralysed by pauperism; the land was cultivated by it, the children were nursed and rocked in the parish cradle, and medicancy was the first thing they were instructed in, by clothing them in rags and turning them upon the high roads without restraint. ¹⁶

The central authorities were anxiously arguing for the urgent, general implementation of the new law, writing as

many testimonies to the success of the Act as possible. In December 1836 a case appeared in the local press of a man in the last stages of destitution who had travelled to Chester from a town where the new Poor Law was in operation. He came before the magistrates and stated that as a result of the new Poor Law he had 'suddenly been deprived of parish assistance' and was consequently reduced to such extremity that if he were not allowed to beg, or instantly relieved 'he should be driven to do a deed that his soul abhorred.' The Mayor gave him a few shillings ...

... and after a suitable admonition against giving way to despair, asked him what dreadful deed he would have been impelled to, but for this seasonable relief, 'to work' said the man with a deep sigh as he left the court.¹⁷

While Cheshire did not experience the violent show of ferocity experienced in some counties by the Anti-Poor Law movement, the transition to the new Poor Law was not immediate and was not without its problems.

The formation of the Nantwich Union

It was against this background that on the 18th February 1837, Nantwich Union was formed, five months before the deadline set by the Commissioners for the whole county to have implemented the new act.¹⁸ The population of the new Nantwich Union was 31,357 which represented a 582% increase compared with the combined populations of Nantwich, Church Coppenhall and Monks Coppenhall in 1831. Nantwich Union was also unusual in that it covered a greater area than any other union in Cheshire, with a population 'diffused over an area of

113,135 acres divided into 86 townships.¹⁹ The increase in sheer number and scale which the new union represented posed a daunting challenge to the new board of guardians. Previously the overseers had only dealt with their own townships which had caused problem enough. However, the commissioners assured everyone that it had been the very 'smallness' of the previous parishes that had been part of the problem and that the larger unions would 'neutralize' obstructions previously encountered because of 'adverse and conflicting interests.'²⁰

A building was purchased and enlarged to form the workhouse at a cost of £6,000. Loans from the estates of six women from the town accounted for 83% of the cost.²¹ Just as women had often helped charities during the eighteenth century, so in the nineteenth century the trustees felt that with the changes afoot in the field of poor relief, helping to establish a workhouse was a worthy 'public' cause as opposed to either augmenting or establishing yet another private charity. Indeed it had become clear during the eighteenth century that many charitable bequests had been greatly devalued as prices increased and the number of paupers accelerated. By helping to fund the building of the workhouse the trustees were acknowledging the Poor Law Commissioners' belief that many charities unless properly vetted, could do more harm than good. The very scale of the problem of poverty in the 1830s led the emphasis away from encouraging private attempts to alleviate hardship to public action which was centrally controlled. The Poor Law Commission argued that any property or money left by well-meaning benefactors should be invested in an efficient

workhouse, thereby ensuring recipients underwent a real test of indigence.²²

However the purchase of the new workhouse did not proceed without controversy in Nantwich. A lay payer expressed his feelings strongly in the Chester Chronicle²³ pointing out that despite difficult times in the trading and commercial world there were only 92 people in the old poor house²⁴ and that with a few alterations it would easily accommodate 150. At Newhall, a few miles away, there was another workhouse which he argued, in an emergency could accommodate people on a temporary basis at a comparatively small cost. He stated his horror at the fact that the alterations to the Nantwich workhouse were to cost £3,000 pointing out that this figure could well double before the work was completed and he suggested another meeting to consider the costs for the new union:

Is it right with such breathless
haste to spend so large a sum?
Will it not be right to pause and
act as a prudent tradesman would
in similar circumstances, meet the
evil prudently and considerately?
... Rather than incur such an enormous
expenditure would it not be
much wiser, more considerate, more
humane and Christian like to allow
old widows and old unfortunate
tradesmen who have seen better days-
and who in their more prosperous
circumstances contributed to the
support of the poor - to finish
their course, which cannot continue
much longer, in the circumstances
in which they are, and thus soothe
in some small degree the close of a
sorrowing journey? 25

Ratepayers had always expressed concern about the amounts spent on relieving the poor, and the large initial costs involved in establishing a new union were likely to cause

consternation. However, the writer was also registering disquiet about moving the old and infirm to the workhouse in order to receive relief, a new departure made necessary by the new act. This fact generated uncertainty and fear amongst the tradespeople in Nantwich, who nearing old age, had never considered that they might themselves have to enter the workhouse, after having grown accustomed to out-relief for the old in times of need.

Despite complaint the purchase of the workhouse went ahead, and Nantwich, as in 32% of unions in 1839 in England and Wales, used an old building in which to set up their workhouse.²⁶ It is not surprising that the first two people to be removed from Monks Coppenhall to Nantwich workhouse were two old and infirm paupers who had had their rent paid by the overseers for many years.²⁷ As R. Digby had pointed out the payment of rent by the overseers had been common in Cheshire and 'breaks down the distinction between labourer and pauper.'²⁸

The transition to a fully operative poor law union went smoothly; so much so, in fact, that Nantwich was held up to the rest of the county as proof that the new system could work successfully, despite previous protests within the county about the loss of local control and increasing costs:

... Notwithstanding the systematic run that had been made against the law by the Tory press, we were aware a day would come, when their misrepresentations would be practically refuted by experience and all the promised boons of that measure be as faithfully realised here as in other parts of the kingdom.²⁹

The Chester Chronicle went on to describe the Nantwich Union

as:

... testimony to the integrity of the principle... [and a] decisive refutation of the charges against the measure ... but also as proving that it is equally adapted for agricultural and manufacturing districts and that wherever it is brought into full and faithful operation it confers equal benefits.³⁰

In answer to critics of the new Poor Law the newspaper went on to argue that Cheshire farmers and tradesmen have not lent their support to anything 'unworthy of them', and that the example of Nantwich shows that the respectable yeoman and tradesmen of all political parties administer the law and bear 'their testimony to its beneficial tendency on the interests of the landlord, the tenant, the labourer, and the pauper.' No one, the newspaper argued, could have the 'hardihood' to say that the Nantwich Guardians '... are the slaves or the subservient tools of any set of men or that they are guilty of any oppressive conduct' in carrying out the new Poor Law: if the law was odious as its opponents suggested, clergy, yeomen and tradesmen would not administer it, 'much less bear a testimony in its favour...'

Clearly the Chester Chronicle was reassuring its readers that the new Poor Law was being responsibly administered by people, who through virtue of their position in the local community could be trusted to do what was best both for the pauper and tradesmen alike. As for the activities of the Anti Poor Law movement in neighbouring manufacturing districts, they assured readers that the numbers of petitioners against the law was less than one might imagine:

They were in fact so few compared to those on other leading subjects as to afford the best evidence in favour of the law ... what better proof could there be that the people were satisfied with it?³¹

Assuring its readers of the savings to be made under the new system and the 'merits' of the system both in Cheshire and neighbouring counties, the Chester Chronicle could not understand why some districts including Chester, were still resisting the law's implementation, as the interests of property owners, tenants, and paupers could only gain under the new system, whose main aim, was to 'abolish pauperism - not by oppression but by an enlightened policy; in fact to convert the dependent pauper into an independent labourer ...'³² The prevention of future poverty was the aim of the new act and '... we are sure that the unfortunate industrious will hail the new light.'

The 'promised boons' of the new Poor Law in Nantwich

As A. Digby has argued:

Less eligibility in this 1834 reform was conceived in psychological rather than material terms, since the conditions of life of the independent labouring poor was so low that further deprivation under a publicly administered scheme could only have produced scandalous conditions. ... The real deprivation was less in body than in mind.³³

These psychological deprivations included isolation, classification, wearing a uniform, purposelessness, and monotony, all of which were apparent but the fact that 'scandalous conditions' did exist as a result of the guardians determination to apply less eligibility was no less apparent in Nantwich.

After the first twelve months of operating the new Poor

Law, what impact had the new system of relief had on Nantwich? Through a positive public relations campaign in the county press, the Nantwich Guardians were held up as a shining example of a new union who had wholeheartedly embraced the new law and from experience could now dash any fears and uncertainties about its consequences. In 1838 the Nantwich Board of Guardians declared itself to be 'satisfied' with the results and that they felt:

... permanent good [had been] derived from the working of the Act ... founded on equitable principles and framed with such due regard to the relation existing between the different classes of the community that a careful examination of its provisions seems alone necessary to secure to it the approbation of every candid and unbiased mind.³⁴

The guardians argued that from the experiences of their union the system could be successfully adapted to the needs of a diffused agricultural peasantry or to the needs of '... a condensed population in a manufacturing district.'³⁵ In the Nantwich union the guardians felt the transition from the old system to the new had gone well for all concerned - the landlord's property was enhanced in value, as rates had diminished; the burdens of the tenants were less due to '... being released from the necessity of yielding an unwilling compliance (often extorted through fear) to the renewed importunities of the idle able-bodied pauper.'³⁶ Lastly they referred to the condition of the pauper who,

... no longer tied down to servile dependence on the ratepayers in his own township, feels himself, if able-bodied to be thrown on his own resources.³⁷

In times of sickness or infirmity the guardians argued the advantages of the pauper not having to bring his case before a small tribunal, but before one from a wide district, made up of men:

... whose decisions prove that they do not visit infirmity as a crime, or withhold a seasonable aid from the widow and the orphan or from the sick and aged poor.³⁸

Despite the discussion that took place about the cost of enlarging the workhouse at Nantwich the guardians expressed their satisfaction at its purchase and repair 'at a moderate expense.'³⁹ Initial expectations as to the amount to be saved during the first year of operation had been 'more than realised' by a saving of 40% in expenditure on the poor.

It is not however the cold calculation of £. s. d. which this board looks at with so much satisfaction (though it is of some moment to many of the ratepayers) but the moral and religious character of the poor which it hopes to see elevated in the scale of society by strictly carrying into effect the proper classification of the inmates of the workhouse; more particularly as it regards the children, whom the board considers to be consigned to its peculiar care, regarding them as wards of the public, by whom they have been hitherto greatly neglected.⁴⁰

During 1834 the county newspaper had expressed its 'distrust' of the central board, fearing its role as an isolated autocratic body, out of touch with the differing needs of local communities. The same fears had existed in various areas of Cheshire, especially Chester, where this very complaint led the overseers to obstruct the implementation of the new law. By 1838 the Nantwich Guardians reassured the people of Cheshire

that having a central board had, in their experience, proved an advantage because it was 'unfettered by local prejudice and guided by fixed and settled rules.'⁴¹ However as A. Digby has argued '... conflicts over policy and finance arising from the duality of local and central administration'⁴² did prove to be a problem.

As K. Williams has suggested the strategy of the 1834 Report was to use a '... blind, repressive discipline so as to reduce able-bodied male pauperism.'⁴³ Indeed the evidence relating to Nantwich Workhouse reveals that it was the old, sick and young who came to dominate the institution and caused the most problems for the local guardians to deal with. In respect of the able-bodied, as A. Digby has pointed out, their low numbers in the workhouse '... might either show the success of the policy or the preference of the guardians for an alternative - that of granting cheaper outdoor relief.'⁴⁴ However the problem of poverty was far greater than just the able bodied males, and it was this fact that undermined the very premise on which the 1834 Act had been based. The composition of the inmates in the workhouse was proof of this fact, and as M. E. Rose has argued the problem of poverty caused by physical or mental ill health, old age, loss of parents, settlement and finance '... were questions which were to harass Poor Law administrators and social reformers for the next hundred years.'⁴⁵ Despite the enthusiastic welcome of the Act by the Nantwich Guardians, the period up to 1914 saw them battling to apply its strictures.

At face value the assurances of the Nantwich Board of Guardians were used to placate anxiety. The role played by

the central board in the administration of relief was intended to have been crucial, supposedly implementing national standards thus 'protecting' the poor and averting abuse of the system as witnessed in the case of the old Poor Law. A. F. Young and E. T. Ashton have argued that:

From the point of view of administrative history the Act of 1834 was momentous in setting up a powerful central body, having unsurpassed control over local authorities.⁴⁶

However time and time again in Nantwich Union from the 1840s until the 1870s, and beyond, evidence emerges in relation to medicine, education, the selection of officials, standards of hygiene, and dietary tables, which challenges the view that the central board did exercise great power. Their potential power was forestalled when confronted by the intransigence of local guardians, described by R. G. Hodgkinson as generally 'dilatory and capricious ... who carried out recommendations as they desired.'⁴⁷ As D. Ashforth has argued an 'intense dislike of centralisation' united many board of guardians whose 'parsimony was pervasive.'⁴⁸ It was the local guardians who effectively disrupted a pivotal part of the 1834 Amendment Act - that the new central board was to have been at the heart of the system. For the first forty years of its existence the central board was still battling to achieve this status. As M. E. Rose has argued⁴⁹ after 1834 the central authority was weak and divided and as a result of this failed to abolish many abuses of the old Poor Law system, hence the continued use of outdoor relief and the general mixed workhouse. However in an area like Nantwich where the ratepayers were eager to adopt the new law

the weakness of the central body led to the new law being implemented in a way that was to result in physical danger and hardship beyond that called for by the Act, affecting for example the sick who were not supposed to be a target of the new stringencies. A. Brundage has also pointed out that prohibiting orders from the central board were 'riddled with exceptions' but he argues that this illustrated a willingness on the part of the central board to see a continuance of local discretion:

This politic recognition of the impossibility of going beyond what local feeling would countenance... is a good illustration of how the nature and essence of the new Poor Law was shaped in its initial encounter with local interests.⁵⁰

Brundage argues that the central board were well aware of their ineffectualness in the face of local opposition, and adapted accordingly.

The evidence for Nantwich Union reveals universal standards did not become the norm, which meant abuse of the poor relief system still operated, but this time not in favour of the recipient, as the Commissioners argued had been the case under the old Poor Law. For reasons of economy the local guardians argued against following central directions and the evidence reveals, ultimately, that the local guardians rigorous implementation of 'less eligibility' in fact impeded the directions of the central board. Ineffectual central direction, coupled with the parsimony of local guardians led to physical hardship for many of the poor who entered the workhouse.

In reference to this area of discussion A. Brundage has

argued that new boards of guardians tended to resent any attempt at interference by the central board, not because of parsimony but '... the resistance to central control was a measure of the concern of talented and dedicated local administrators at seeing their authority eroded.'⁵¹ The evidence which follows for Nantwich Union tends to support the argument that economy dominated every decision to the exclusion of considerations of health, hygiene, and safety.

In relation to the northern industrial towns M. E. Rose has argued that the new Poor Law failed '... to develop into anything but a pale shadow of what its framers intended.'⁵² For different reasons the central board failed to achieve any better results in Nantwich.

The role of the Master and Matron in the life of the workhouse

As M. A. Crowther has argued, the establishment of the workhouse was the first national experiment in institutional care,⁵³ and the Poor Law Commissioners always stressed that:

The habits of many of the inmates of the workhouse will often be coarse and depraved, but the conduct of every officer ... should correspond with what those habits ought to be, rather than with what they actually are.⁵⁴

This proved a hard standard to live up to and one of the early problems encountered by Board of Guardians was the ability to find responsible officers, especially Masters for the new workhouses.

It was frequently the case that workhouse officers were '... selected at worst through nepotism, at best because they were honest, [and they] ... had to serve an institution which

was hospital, school, and reformatory.' As M. A. Crowther has pointed out 'amateurism' and 'scandals' were inevitable.⁵⁵

What effect did the Masters and Matrons at Nantwich Workhouse have on the treatment of the poor? Nantwich was dogged by the problem of selecting a suitable candidate. For example in 1842 Mr Bryan, Master of the workhouse, was alleged to have sexually assaulted several female inmates.⁵⁶ He was suspended from duty pending an enquiry and was accused of several other charges, apart from sexual assault, including refusing to furnish a list of the indoor paupers or permit copies or extract therefrom, and for keeping dogs, horses, and poultry, contrary to the wishes of the guardians and at the alleged expense of the union.⁵⁷ That the Board of Guardians dealt quickly with this matter is unquestionable, the Master was suspended on the 15th October 1842, and on the 5th November it was moved that his suspension be removed. The motion was carried and no reasons were given,⁵⁸ the only recommendation for the future was that both the chaplain and schoolmistress should have immediately passed on the complaints against the Master to the visiting committee.

The job of Master of the Workhouse was a responsible one, and one which required a person of irreproachable character as by the nature of the job the Master was living among many young women. That many Masters could have taken advantage of their position is highly probable, but many inmates must have been too frightened to make a complaint in case they jeopardised their position in the workhouse. The Nantwich Board of Guardians were obviously prepared to accept the word of the Master against the charges made by the two women, and Mr Bryan

resumed his position as Master immediately. However after this incident it was decided that in future the visiting committee should meet every Saturday morning at the workhouse,⁵⁹ and that when any three or more members of the visiting committee attended the workhouse the Master should deliver his safe keys to them and should not accompany the committee through the house '... but shall await the return of the committee in his own or some other convenient apartment unless requested to accompany the committee.'⁶⁰

Another complaint against the same Master followed in November 1842.⁶¹ Opportunity was given for the woman to go to the town magistrate and when she did not, she was called before the Board where she swore her charges were truthful.⁶² Summonses were once again issued and four witnesses called,⁶³ however this was the last mention of the matter in the Minute Books.

Inattentiveness on the part of the Master and Matron directly led to problems in every part of the workhouse. After the inspection of Nantwich Workhouse in 1854 Mr Doyle, the Poor Law Inspector, states that the sanitary defects of the house were 'aggravated' by the failure of duty shown by the Master and Matron.⁶⁴ It was disclosed that the Master did not inspect the wards as he '... delegated this part of his duty to the porter for a considerable time.'⁶⁵ As a result the bedding was in an appalling state and '... I observed other similar indications of neglect in other parts of the house.'⁶⁶ This, however, was partly attributed to the indisposition of the Matron.

Irregularities on the part of the Master were frequent during the 1850s and charges made by the Poor Law Board in 1856 are typical of many instances when the actions of the Master were investigated. Firstly he was questioned about not having a pauper examined by the medical officer before he was received into the proper ward. Secondly he was rebuked for allowing the female receiving ward to remain 'in a very dirty state' and thirdly he was cautioned regarding the admission and diet of vagrants.⁶⁷ However the Board of Guardians, as was typical after so many investigations of this nature accepted the explanations offered by the Master and after -

taking into consideration the uniform regularity and attention displayed by him in the discharge of his duties are perfectly satisfied with the manner in which these duties are discharged.⁶⁸

Whatever the Master had done or had not done as the case maybe it seems that the Board of Guardians regarded his actions as acceptable and backed him to the hilt. No doubt behind the scenes, warnings were given, but they were loathe to dismiss the Master, perhaps because it caused such upheaval to appoint another or because they felt that such living conditions and oversights on the part of the Master were acceptable for the poor. As M. A. Crowther has argued '... if the Master maintained disciplines and economy, guardians were disinclined to interfere.'⁶⁹

The efficiency of the Master and Matron did not improve greatly at Nantwich Workhouse as in 1860 Mr Doyle once again visited the workhouse and found it 'in tolerable order' but the bedding in the aged women's room '... did not appear to

be regularly examined by the Matron,⁷⁰ and he hoped that the changes he suggested 'some time ago' would be adopted by the guardians. That his ideas for improvements were not in fact adopted promptly is suggested by the fact that in October 1860 Mr Doyle again wrote to the guardians suggesting certain alterations and complained once again of the inefficiency of the Master and Matron.⁷¹ It was only in October 1865 that the Board of Guardians considered that the Master and Matron '... were incapable of discharging the duties of their office with efficiency by reason of old age or infirmities,⁷² after a period of twenty years.

That the applications for the job of Master and Matron were received from all over the country was evident when the job was advertised in 1872. There were five applicants in total, one of which came from a Nantwich couple.⁷³ Three candidates were shortlisted and the couple from Aberystwyth were appointed at a salary of £50 for the Master and £30 for the Matron, together with apartments in the workhouse, maintenance and washing. However the couple had to pay the Board 2s 0d per week for the maintenance of their child in the workhouse.⁷⁴ The inadequate salaries offered commensurate with the level of responsibility involved, has been blamed on the local guardians rather than the central authority who, in the 1840s, tried to prevent guardians reducing officer's salaries '... below the point where honest men would apply for the post.'⁷⁵ The Nantwich Guardians were obviously aware of this dilemma, and rather than lose efficient officials, Mr and Mrs Griffiths' salary was increased just eighteen months later to £62 10s 0d

and £37 10s 0d respectively⁷⁶ which represented an increase of 25%. As a result the Local Government Board queried why their salaries were to be increased, to which the guardians replied that Mr and Mrs Griffiths were:

... very valuable officers whose services it was in the interest of the Union should be permanently retained which was not probable at the present salaries which the Guardians considered were really inadequate.⁷⁷

The guardians made the comparison with the neighbouring union of Whitchurch where the workhouse was smaller, but the salaries of the Master and Matron were higher than in Nantwich Union. The new salaries were as a result agreed. On occasions the Master of the workhouse could also add to his salary small items of value from deceased inmates. For example in 1879 it was decided that: '... the ring on the woman lately deceased in the workhouse be retained by the Master.'⁷⁸

That workhouse officials who were employed in the everyday running of the workhouse could aspire to positions of responsibility and authority was illustrated when owing to the sudden resignation of the Assistant Matron, who was called to a dying friend, the laundress was appointed to the position on the Master's recommendation.⁷⁹ The fact that the guardians allowed a laundress to take on such a responsible position supervising conditions not only in the workhouse but in relation to the sick too, had obvious implications for standards. Her starting salary was £27 10s 0d per annum which was to be increased to £30 0s 0d in six months, with an allowance of £2 10s 0d per annum for uniform.

After the large increase in salary for the Master and Matron in 1873 their salaries did not increase again. In fact when an advertisement was placed for a new Master and Matron in 1897 the salary of the Master showed an actual decrease of 4%, while the Matron's salary had increased by 6.6%⁸⁰ However once appointed the new Master and Matron only stayed for three years, and in March 1900 when a new advertisement was placed, the total number of applicants for the jobs reached 145.⁸¹ The guardians also expected the Master to be somewhat of a handyman too, as he was to '... repair [the] slight damage caused by recent gale.'⁸²

Once appointed the Master and Matron had to live under the strict control of the Board of Guardians and when the new Master and Matron requested to have two children living with them at the workhouse it was questioned why, on the application form, it stated they had no children.⁸³ Obviously to the Board the best candidates were those without commitment and family ties that might impair their efficiency, and perhaps the prospective applicant had realised this and decided to conceal his responsibility until he had secured the job. When he was questioned about this he replied that his eldest child had been adopted by its grandparents at birth and, at the time of the appointment '... he was quite of [the] opinion that [the] child was not dependent on him.'⁸⁴ However circumstances had arisen which prevented this arrangement continuing. The second child had been born quite recently in the workhouse. It was decided that officers who had children living with them in the workhouse should repay the following:

<u>Age of child of workhouse official</u>	<u>Amount to be repaid</u>
2 to 3 years	1/-
3 to 6 years	2/-
6 to 9 years	2/6
9 to 14 years	3/-

85

An occasion even arose when the Labour Master had to ask the permission of the guardians to marry the Assistant Matron and that they still be able to keep their jobs.⁸⁶ One month later Mr Attwell had received no reply to his query and so he asked again and was told:

the guardians have no power to prevent it, but owing to lack of proper accommodation in the house they cannot consent to it.⁸⁷

The Labour Master was married on 23rd November 1906⁸⁸ and six weeks later the newly married couple were told:

... that their appointment would be terminated at the end of three months if they have not obtained another situation before that time.⁸⁹

The officers as well as the inmates lived under the strict supervision of the guardians who controlled not only the working lives of officers but their private affairs too. This fact affected the calibre of applicant for the job and consequently the kind of treatment administered to the poor.

By 1907 the joint salary of the Master and Matron was £130 which represented an increase of 30% compared to 34 years previously,⁹⁰ and in 1912 their joint salary reached £150.⁹¹

The role that the Master and Matron played in the life of the workhouse could be either one of positive caring, an all too familiar characteristic, or one of negative indifference to the wants and needs of the inmates. It was this attitude that all too often helped to exacerbate overcrowded wards and insanitary conditions. Ironically, Master Saxon, the only Master to have positively defended the rights of the inmates, especially the sick, against inadequate treatment in 1896 received no support from fellow workhouse officers, and due to the worry of the ordeal of the Special Committee set up to investigate his claims, was forced to resign through ill health.⁹² By 1914 '... untrained Masters still dominated the whole institution.'⁹³

Conditions in Nantwich Workhouse, medical relief and the implications of The Lancet enquiry

While the workhouse had been conceived as the ultimate deterrent for the able-bodied, in reality it became clear that the inmates consisted largely of young children, the infirm and elderly, which put a great strain on the facilities provided within the workhouse for medical relief. As M. A. Crowther and M. W. Flinn have both pointed out the 1832 Commission had included no medical men and had virtually ignored the subject of medicine in the final report. 'It assumed that medical assistance to the poor would continue, but made no specific recommendations.'⁹⁴ However as F. B. Smith has argued the fact that the 1834 Act transferred power over the rates from magistrates to the ratepayers meant that '... men wholly interested in saving expense' came to the fore and it was 'Their meanness

[that] shaped the pattern of Poor Law Medical expenditure.'⁹⁵
 However the fundamental problem concerning poverty and sickness was, as M. W. Flinn has argued:

... [for] a large section of society whose incomes were so low or so irregular that any kind of regular provision for sickness through thrift was totally out of the question.⁹⁶

Independence in regard to times of sickness was an 'unattainable ideal.'

By the late 1850s and 1860s the treatment of the chronically sick within the workhouse was a real problem as M. E. Rose has pointed out:

It had never been intended that sick people should be admitted to the workhouse, its infirmaries being designed only for inmates who were taken ill in the workhouse. Inevitably, however, the poor who fell sick and had no one to care for them had to be admitted.⁹⁷

The workhouse infirmary received the chronically ill, the incurable and the dying - all those people which no other institution would take. In times of epidemic they became, in effect, fever hospitals, none of which they were designed to cope with effectively. As R. D. Hodgkinson has argued Poor Law doctors did much to encourage institutional treatment,

... and in some unions they fought a constant campaign to have patients removed to the workhouse ... [arguing] that the poor rates could be reduced by curing the sick more quickly ... with the superior treatment obtainable in the institution.⁹⁸

The old Poor Law had provided money for the poor to obtain medicines and other comforts in times of illness, lying in and convalescence. Indeed the overseers in Monks Coppenhall,

Church Coppenhall, Crewe and Nantwich had shown themselves to be considerate to both the sick and their families.⁹⁹ However as F. B. Smith has argued '... the Act of 1834 probably made life harder for the pauper sick',¹⁰⁰ a view confirmed by the evidence of medical provision in Nantwich Workhouse. The local evidence available tends to conflict with the view of E. Royle that in providing medical care the guardians '... were merely following with greater efficiency and resources the practice of the old Poor Law.'¹⁰¹ The efficiency aspect was to be brought forcibly to the public attention by The Lancet investigations of 1865 and coupled with penny-pinching economy measures the medical provision of the new Poor Law exhibited the potential for cruelty and neglect that had not been a prominent feature of the old Poor Law.

In 1836 the new Poor Law Commission was anxious to reaffirm that it was 'our wish and intention to provide adequately for that important branch of pauper relief' in answer to criticisms that medical relief for the poor had been 'inadequately provided for' under the new act.¹⁰² The Commissioners did acknowledge that after 1834 there was a change in the way that medical relief was administered as compared with the old Poor Law. Under the old system everyone had been directed to the local medical officer as general contracts were used for the treatment of the sick poor. The liability of the medical officer had been indefinite as each additional case did not cost the parish anything. This was no longer the case under the new Poor Law as relief in times of sickness was now 'restricted' to such people as were 'really destitute of the means

of providing it for themselves.'¹⁰³ To the Commissioners, this was the 'real' change in medical relief.

However, as M. W. Flinn has pointed out sickness has 'always been a prime cause of poverty',¹⁰⁴ the impact of which the Commissioners and local guardians failed to fully anticipate. As Flinn has argued the expansion of medical services was:

unintended and unplanned, a spontaneous development in which neither legislators nor central administrators played any part. It was an accident of history which only the most pressing social need could have engineered.¹⁰⁵

As D. Fraser has suggested the key factor was how to reconcile decent medical treatment with the principle of less eligibility.¹⁰⁶ The Commissioners, and in turn the local board of guardians, pondered the dilemma faced in other areas of 'life in the workhouse' they wanted an effective system of medical relief for all paupers but:

... its very completeness and effectiveness, however beneficial to those who are its objects, may have an influence which ought not to be disregarded on other classes of society. If the pauper is always promptly attended by a skilful and well qualified medical practitioner [who] is liable to reprimand or dismissal from office in case of neglect or error; if the patient be furnished with all the cordials and stimulants which may promote his recovery; it cannot be denied that his condition, in these respects, is better than that of the needy but industrious ratepayer who has neither money nor influence to secure equally prompt and careful attendance. ¹⁰⁷

How did the Nantwich Board of Guardians cope with the problem of making sure that they did not place the pauper in a superior

condition to that of the independent labourer? Medical and any other types of relief were to be so constructed as not to 'encourage a resort to the poor rate for medical relief, so far as it is given out of the workhouse and will thus tempt the industrious labourer into pauperism.'¹⁰⁸ The idea of the able-bodied paying for medical relief by way of a loan was suggested as a means of separating relief in times of sickness from 'true' pauperism - an idea that never came to fruition.

In order to look after the sick in the workhouse properly the Nantwich guardians soon experienced the dilemma that if serious problems were to be avoided, inmates had to be treated in a way that would economically surpass what an 'independent labourer' could have enjoyed, which in reality would have been very little. It was a dogged determination to be governed by the principle of less eligibility in the sick wards that led to great problems in the 1850s and 1860s, not only in the metropolitan areas but in unions like Nantwich which was representative of many country towns adjacent to growing industrial areas. As A. Digby has pointed out '... the overlapping of sickness, infirmity, and poverty was such that a harsh ideology on the relief of poverty tended to inhibit the development of more humane facilities for the sick.'¹⁰⁹

The first mention of any provision for the sick at Nantwich workhouse came in 1842 when the 'erection of the new hospital' is referred to and:

... the floors of the two men's sick rooms in the hospital be boarded instead of being laid with tiles and that the walls of the same rooms be plastered as conducing to the comfort of the rooms.¹¹⁰

However when Mr Doyle, the Poor Law Inspector, visited Nantwich Workhouse in January 1854 the standards of hygiene had declined to such a state that he directed that the use of the female venereal ward should be absolutely prohibited as, 'It is not in a proper state for occupation by anyone who was ill of whatever description' and anyone could 'communicate with the boys in the boys' yard from this ward.'¹¹¹

Mr Doyle also found the privy in an 'objectionable state' and that it was impossible to carry out classification in the hospital which was a 'great and obvious defect' the only remedy for which was 'such an enlargement of the hospital premises as might effect complete classification' which he believed might be done '... at a comparatively small outlay.'¹¹²

The Master of the workhouse had overall charge of the hospital. Accordingly the defects found in the hospital were, Mr Doyle believed, 'aggravated ... by the inattention of the Master' as the bedding in the venereal ward was in a filthy condition, and had not been inspected by the Master '... who seems to delegate this part of his duty to the porter, for a considerable time.' Also inmates of the hospital, as well as the rest of the house generally had to '... eat their dinner on meat days with their fingers' because there were no knives and forks.¹¹³ Knives and forks were ordered for the inmates the next month and to improve classification '... a door [was to] be put up at the entrance to the upper rooms from the ground floor and that a partition be erected against the staircase.'¹¹⁴ Such improvements by the Nantwich Guardians only paid lip service to the criticisms made by the Poor Law Inspector and the

'filthy' conditions referred to in the venereal ward and the 'objectionable privy' were never mentioned again in the minutes.

As M. W. Flinn has argued instances such as those occurring in Nantwich Workhouse bear witness to the fact that

... a health service of the degree of comprehensiveness attempted after 1834 was simply not compatible either with the underlying ideology of the New Poor Law or the willingness, let alone capacity, of the ratepayers to finance it. Finance and ideology ... stood between the Poor Law medical service and efficiency.¹¹⁵

However as D. Fraser has pointed out scandals and poor conditions in workhouses were '... invariably the result of local rather than central policy.'¹¹⁶ The above incident at Nantwich gives an insight into the general lack of zeal exhibited by the guardians. Their main concern was to spend as little of the ratepayers, and consequently their own, money as possible. The recommendations of the Poor Law Inspector in relation to general hygiene were recorded, but no positive action was taken to remedy the situation. This attitude was to result in the accumulation of greater problems in the future concerning health and hygiene that would endanger lives. Such an incident also suggests that the authority of the central board was negligible in that such conditions were allowed to proliferate during the 1850s and 1860s. Indeed as M. A. Crowther has argued the central authority eventually stopped trying to impose a rigidly uniform system of poor relief: 'They still aimed at uniform standards, but hoped to achieve them through lengthy private correspondance with each union.' Even with this personal approach the guardians still proved intransigent, and in many respects '... the Commissioners were more progressive

than many guardians.,¹¹⁷

The role of the Master of the workhouse in attending to the needs of the sick was of paramount importance, as he had ultimate power over the whole workhouse and over the medical officer and hospital facilities. His could be an influence for good or evil, and he could either help and assist the medical officer or hinder his work.¹¹⁸ However, when the Poor Law Inspector visited Nantwich Workhouse in 1856 he alleged 'irregularities' on the part of the Master in reference to not having a newly admitted inmate examined by the doctor before admitting him into a ward.¹¹⁹ The doctor's assistant examined the man some two days later, coincidentally when the Poor Law Inspector was visiting the workhouse. The Master claimed the doctor knew of the man's arrival, having issued a certificate to the relieving officer and he had spoken to the Master about him on an earlier visit saying he would come to see him when he arrived. Having heard the criticism against the Master, the guardians decided that they were 'perfectly satisfied with the manner in which these duties are discharged.'¹²⁰ Once again this incident confirms that the guardians chose to overlook misdemeanours in the Master's conduct, despite the fact that peoples lives may have been placed in jeopardy, and such conduct was in direct violation of instructions from the central board. The fact that too much disruption would have been caused if a new Master had been selected, who could have again proved to have been no more efficient than the last, tended to minimise the effectiveness of the central board instructions, and the Master knew that reprimands were unlikely to be severe, if any at all.

It was as a direct result of the proliferation of such criticisms about the condition and operation of workhouses and accusations of neglect that led to The Lancet holding its enquiry into workhouse hospitals. Its findings however reflected the conditions existing in the workhouse generally and illustrated how doctors gradually came to influence the treatment of all inmates. Workhouse medical officers not only treated the sick but helped classify all paupers to assist the Master in determining their work and diet. He also had to estimate a pauper's fitness to withstand punishment, and so the doctor's duties 'overlapped' into all areas of workhouse life and affected all inmates.

The most worrying aspect of the enquiry into the death of Timothy Daly that initiated The Lancet enquiry was that he had not died from an uncommon disease and had received 'fully average care, kindness, nourishment, medicine, and skilled attendance',¹²¹ within the workhouse: 'In many ways it is evident that Daly had advantages which are not always within the reach of others of the sick poor who enter the infirmaries of workhouses.'¹²² What he and every other sick person needed but did not receive were:

... paid nurses, air and water cushions, abundance of wine, brandy and bark, beef-tea and beef-jelly, the most costly medicines and the best food. ...There was no case against the surgeon; but there was a strong case against our union infirmary system. The typical faults of that system were laid bare: ... Here we see the surgeon pitifully underpaid and bound to find costly medicines out of his salary ... Certain it is, however, that the pinching system of unions - the constant warfare of guardians against their medical officers ...

to cut down the expenses, and to diminish all the comforts which sickness is everywhere else held to require.¹²³

Workhouse infirmaries exhibited deficiencies in diet, nursing, medical supervision and lay care, not to mention the general fittings and construction of the workhouses themselves, which tended to be small, overcrowded, and badly ventilated with little suitable light and heat. There was a general lack of furniture for patients, coupled with a poor water supply and drainage.

The Lancet disclosed the 'cold neglect varied by harsh refusal' of the Poor Law Commission to listen to the medical profession and spoke of the 'supremacy which is accorded to questions of expense.' They declared that: 'The workhouse hospital system is a disgrace to our civilisation... This state of things cannot continue.'¹²⁴ By June 1865 The Lancet was arguing that:

The whole system of workhouse infirmaries needs to be altered, including the ward arrangements. the nursing, the classification of patients and many other matters.¹²⁵

and the practical working of workhouse infirmaries was, they feared, rapidly coming to a dead-lock,¹²⁶ and was a national scandal. Indeed they emphasised in their reports that local guardians could save money on the rates if patients were nursed back to health and could then leave the workhouse and no longer be a burden. The workhouse infirmaries were, they argued, 'the real hospitals of the land',¹²⁷ and it was a disgrace to find water-closets infrequently available and when they were, causing a 'dangerous nuisance.'¹²⁸ Bathrooms were few and far between.

The treatment of the insane was poor, and they were generally allowed to mingle with the other patients, and sick wards were in turn mixed up with the body of the house. Neglect and mismanagement was evident throughout and it became clear that the ill were not just in the sick wards but throughout the infirm wards of the workhouse. Isolation wards were badly needed as often inmates with contagious diseases mixed with other patients and doctors and assistants suffered from being overworked and underpaid which in turn led to neglect, and a lack of the necessary medicines and prescription cards.

How did the findings of The Lancet enquiry reflect conditions prevailing in Nantwich infirmary and the workhouse generally? The enquiry obviously affected the image of the Poor Law Board and in many instances their findings were met with cries of indignation as boards of guardians staunchly denied that there was anything fundamentally lacking with the infirmaries and workhouses in their unions. On the 16th October 1865 the Poor Law Inspector visited Nantwich Workhouse with the ongoing enquiry of The Lancet fresh in his mind. Indeed the Nantwich Guardians expressed their 'astonishment and regret',¹²⁹ that after twenty years of regular inspections without any special comments to the guardians that 'such great complaints' should now be made about their workhouse, especially now that 'extensive alterations and improvements' were being made to the workhouse and hospital.¹³⁰ Obviously both inspector and guardians were very sensitive to the implied criticism that either was not doing their jobs properly, and the local board of guardians set up a special committee to consider the findings of Mr Doyle.¹³¹

The hospital accommodation at Nantwich Workhouse was described by its medical officer as 'ample' for the number of sick people in the house.¹³² However, bearing in mind The Lancet's findings that sick patients were to be found amongst every class of workhouse inmate, especially the aged and infirm, and were not confined simply to the number of people in the sick wards, it is debateable how ample this accommodation really was. New water closets and drains were being built in November 1865, and in 1866 the open ditch carrying sewage from the workhouse to the River Weaver was replaced by a pipe sewer. Up until this time, some twentyeight years after being opened as the union workhouse, proper lavatories and drainage systems had been lacking.

If an infectious disease broke out in Nantwich the medical officer proposed to use the whole of the hospital to treat such cases, the other sick inmates being moved into the rest of the house, a move hardly conducive to good practice.

It was suggested that a bath be made available in the receiving wards so that all inmates could be bathed to help with the treatment of the 'itch' which was a common problem in workhouses. Previously no such bath had been available, illustrating a common defect discovered by The Lancet. Similarly additional ventilation was required in the men's vagrant ward.

The implications of The Lancet enquiry were obviously being felt in 1866 when further alterations were made to the workhouse in order to improve classification and facilities for women, children, and nursing mothers who were however 'always to have access to their children to suckle them.'¹³³

The morals of the children it was hoped 'would not be so much injured by the influence of the young women' and children's clothes could be washed and dried outside 'instead as heretofore ... where the effluvia had no escape except to the day and sleeping apartments.'¹³⁴ Also small cradles and beds for infants were purchased for the first time.

The inmates' attitude towards work was also singled out for improvement after Mr Doyle's visit. The room formerly used as a nursery was changed into a work room for able-bodied women '... instead of their sitting with an infant on their knee from morning until evening.'¹³⁵ When not attending to the children the women were to be '... engaged in washing, sewing or knitting during working hours.'

After the fateful inspection of the 16th October 1865 Mr Doyle directly criticised the Master, James Holland, and the Matron of the workhouse and questioned their ability to efficiently run the establishment, due to the fact of their age, which was at no time stated. Again this criticism reflects a common fault uncovered by The Lancet, that far too many workhouses were run by people who were too old and unsuitable for this responsible job. In response to this criticism the committee of local guardians agreed that '... they [the Master and Matron] were incapable of discharging the duties of their office with efficiency by reason of old age and infirmities' and recommended them to resign. As the Master and Matron had been with the union for twenty years they were granted an annual allowance of £38 13s 4d and £13 6s 8d respectively.

This decision prompts the question whether James Holland's

old age was used by the local board of guardians readily to explain and justify their position relating to the faults found in the workhouse. Yet his services had proved satisfactory for the previous twenty years, and many of the faults identified in the workhouse had not arisen overnight and had obviously been present, and judged acceptable in the previous decade. As the local board pointed out the workhouse had met with Mr Doyle's approval previously, implying that his standards had changed in the wake of The Lancet enquiry. The workhouse had not suddenly deteriorated in the 1860s as James Holland had advanced in years, however new standards and attitudes were beginning to be applied that had never operated previously in reference to workhouses and the condition of its inmates, prompted by the revelations in The Lancet.

The guardians were forced into making improvements for the inmates, but 'quality' was of no great importance. As J. M. Treble has argued the '... contemporary obsession with economy ... resulted in the pauper medical service being starved of funds.'¹³⁶ At Nantwich, for example, it was recommended that for comfort's sake chairs for the sick inmates should have backs attached to them. Rather than incur additional expense for the inmates, chairs in the Masters' office were 'repaired and appropriated' for the sick, and six new chairs were bought for the Master.¹³⁷

Despite the 1865 inspection which had referred to the lack of sanitation and the problems that could result from this, and the fact that new sewers were being laid in 1866, the workhouse still suffered from '... a very offensive smell from the

cesspool at the back of the house' the remedy being to throw 'some powerful disinfectant' into it together with 'fresh earth ... [which was the] best deoderiser that could be used.'¹³⁸

Such problems had been forcibly drawn to public attention by The Lancet, but the solutions adopted were inevitably cheap ones. The hygiene of workhouses could not be improved without persuading guardians to spend large sums of money. The irony was, as M. A. Crowther has pointed out, that the :

... middle class public who deplored the horrors revealed by The Lancet's widely publicised report, also objected to all efforts to increase the powers of the central authority. It required steady pressure from critics in the 1860s to produce legislation.¹³⁹

That the inmates themselves should have been the machinery to complain about conditions in the workhouse was seen as desirable, in the idealistic hope that wrongs could be righted and atrocities and mismanagement, as revealed in The Lancet, could, in theory, be avoided in the future. In order to facilitate this a printed notice was hung up in each ward stating that complaints should be put in writing, or made verbally, to the visiting committee. The effectiveness of this gesture prompts several questions: how many inmates could actually read the notice? and if an inmate had been desperate enough to enter the workhouse in the first place would he dare to criticise the house and by implication, the Master and guardians? If anyone had complained how far would the complaint go after the initial airing? Suffice to say that in all the minutes relating to Nantwich Workhouse there is no record of any complaint being made by an inmate and in the reports of the Poor

Law Inspectors it always states 'Nobody complained during visits to wards.'

Reflecting the concern generated by The Lancet it was the hospital accommodation of Nantwich Workhouse that still caused consternation among the Local Board of Guardians in 1866, resulting from the report of Dr. Smith, the medical inspector to the Poor Law Board, who visited the workhouse in September, 1866. In 1865 Dr. Smith had been the first qualified medical man to become an inspector for the Poor Law Board. The Lancet had seen his appointment as a small victory in itself, as medical inspectors would, they believed, secure for the sick proper attention, advice, medicines, and other comforts, and that as a result 'The many evils of the present system would be removed by degrees.'¹⁴⁰ His appointment also acknowledged for the first time that '... questions must constantly arise [in workhouse infirmaries] requiring medical experience and hospital insight.'¹⁴¹ Dr. Smith would be able to inspect infirmaries with an insight lacking in the typical visiting committee. The need for such medical insight was especially needed as The Lancet had found that:

... The present workhouse system is a thing of shreds and patches, which has slowly grown up to its present form with all manner of miscellaneous additions and alterations from time to time, and the buildings in which the in-door paupers are housed ... partake of this patchwork character. Originally, no doubt, the workhouses were designed principally for the custody of sturdy ne'er-do-well vagrants, whose pauper tendencies required to be discouraged and the necessity of providing for the genuinely sick and feeble was an afterthought, an appendage to the main scheme...¹⁴²

As The Lancet had widely found to be the case in London, the hospital accommodation at Nantwich did not separate the two sexes and recommendations were made by the local board to divide the hospital at a cost of £185 and make two new wards. Additional alterations and enlargements¹⁴³ amounting to between £520 - £560 were suggested by Dr. Smith but the visiting committee hesitated to recommend them:

... because they consider from all past experience, from the evidence of their medical man, and from the fact that the present time is so unfavourable to the outlay of money (unless absolutely necessary) that they cannot advise the serious expenditure which any of the plans for enlargement would necessitate ... [and that it would be] inexpedient in the present depressed state of the agricultural interest arising from losses by the cattle plague to incur any additional expenditure ...¹⁴⁴

The evidence relating to Nantwich Workhouse illustrates that while The Lancet had revealed shocking conditions, consciences had been pricked, and the central board pursued local investigations and employed medical men to give advice, the real stumbling block to improvement lay in the fact that local guardians were reluctant to accept advice, no matter how well informed, if it meant additional expense. Financial considerations dominated all. The Nantwich Guardians were rebuked by Dr. Smith and the Poor Law Board because their proposed alterations did not meet the requirements of the workhouse to provide adequate accommodation for the sick of all classes: receiving wards were substandard and a yard was not going to be provided for the vagrants. However the local visiting committees' recommendations were 'unanimously' adopted.¹⁴⁵ Further letters were exchanged on the subject and the committee

described themselves as '... desirous of meeting the views of the Poor Law Board as far as possible [but] they do not see their way to come to any decision ...',¹⁴⁶ They asked that an officer from the board meet them and point out 'what is really required and how it is to be carried out' and on the 2nd March 1867, after much procrastination and delay, the improvements and enlargements suggested by Dr. Smith for the workhouse infirmary and receiving wards were agreed to at a cost of £600, to be provided from central funds.¹⁴⁷

As P. Wood has argued:

... the time between the exposure of a problem and its being tackled by the administration of the Poor Law could be surprisingly long. The forces promoting an expansion in expenditure on poor relief faced powerful opposition.¹⁴⁸

However the reluctance of the Nantwich Guardians to embark on expensive building improvements, despite their importance from a health standpoint, contrasts sharply with the evidence available in some urban unions which, as D. Ashworth argues, once the obstacle of building the workhouse had been overcome, the guardians were less reluctant to spend money on further enlargements and improvements. In some cases unions had to be restrained by the Poor Law Board from extravagant expenditure.¹⁴⁹ The Nantwich Guardians showed no such tendencies and the local guardians, dominated by local tradesmen and the gentry clung to their stringent, frugal policies. The local visiting committee were eventually 'overruled' or 'persuaded' that the improvements were necessary, this incident further illustrates the point that while the central board might be willing to

improve conditions they constantly had to 'battle' with entrenched local opposition. When this was eventually overcome it had effectively delayed by many months vitally needed improvements, which in the case of Nantwich, had obviously been wanting for many years. Only intervention from London and the perseverance of Dr. Smith wore down the stubborn opposition of the local visiting committee. Medical opinion did win through in the end, but the local guardians did not simply bow to Dr. Smith's informed medical opinion regarding good practice. The Lancet had heralded the appointment of a medical man on to the Poor Law Board as a great milestone towards improvement on the grounds that previously a lack of medical knowledge had contributed towards the disgraceful conditions that had developed in workhouse infirmaries. However even when medical advice was given the local guardians chose to dismiss it on the grounds of cost and local economic conditions which they felt they were better qualified to judge. Herein lay the real stumbling block to progress. It was around this dilemma that so many of the problems revolved in relation to relief in the workhouse, and as M. E. Rose has pointed out '... the hostility to a central authority who wished to interfere with [local administration] was one of the most powerful obstacles to the success of the new Poor Law.'¹⁵⁰ Similarly R. G. Hodgkinson has stated 'The central administration also was never strong enough to dominate the local authorities, and legislation in accordance with popular political ideas had indeed never intended this to be effected,'¹⁵¹ and as a result as N. McCord points out 'relations between central and local authority were frequently strained.'¹⁵²

Despite these 'improvements' the situation was not much better for the patients in 1869 when the Nantwich Infirmary still lacked a proper supply of water '... the smell in some wards was so bad as, in my opinion, to be injurious to health.'¹⁵³ Without a proper supply of water it was impossible to preserve the thing most sacred to the workhouse - proper classification - as there was a constant communication between the children and the adults.

As The Lancet had found to be the case in many London workhouse hospitals, inmates lacked the extra comforts, indeed some would argue the essentials, to help the recovery of the patients. The inspector suggested that the Nantwich Union should purchase a water bed, two air cushions, and waterproof sheets for patients. However such suggestions were considered of dubious value by the local board, regardless of the merit attached to them by informed medical opinion. The local guardians were worried that a pauper might '... stick a pin in the water bed, and they were also very expensive ...',¹⁵⁴ and they did not think these things should be bought just because the inspector recommended it. The cost of a water bed was £8 0s 0d and the local guardians stressed that their main aim was to make sure that all inmates were well cared for but '... they would not even buy one for themselves.'¹⁵⁵ This statement once again confirms the fact that in relation to providing facilities for the institution a personal yardstick was continually relied upon by the Nantwich Guardians, which was proving increasingly inadequate in regard to provisions for a large institution, where many sick people were gathered together. Once again it also underlines the difficulty of trying to apply principles

of less eligibility to the sick wards of the workhouse and the intransigence faced by the central board when finally trying to raise standards. The feelings of the local board towards Inspector Doyle's suggestions are adequately summed up in the following statement:

They [the local guardians] had carried on the house for a great many years, and it seemed strange to him [the Chairman] that such a great flood of light should come upon them all at once, they of course having been in the dark all those years.¹⁵⁶

The public outcry and indignation at the revelations in The Lancet had not affected the judgement of the local guardians and they resented what they considered to be the meddling and interfering of Inspector Doyle; his suggestions were not viewed positively and were simply seen as a way of generating more expense - a tendency which the Nantwich Guardians tried hard to avoid in every facet of workhouse life.

This contention between the inspectorate advocating improvement on the one hand, and local guardians justifying inadequate conditions on the other hand, encapsulates the contentions encountered again and again during this period. Sometimes the influence of one person could soften the attitude of the guardians and so help provide slight comforts for the inmates. Mr M. Heath, a member of the Crewe Local Board, stressed that however much he wanted to save money, he did not wish to bring people to the workhouse to punish them and suggested 'a little matting was required between the beds as it '... was rather hard on these sharp mornings for the old men to have to put their bare feet on the cold tiles the first thing on getting out of bed,'¹⁵⁷ and the motion was carried. However such

instances are few and far between and in the main the Nantwich Guardians reflected the attitude of many guardians whose '... whole administrative effort was directed to keeping down the poor rate in the interests of the petty bourgeois class, farmers, shopkeepers, and small manufacturers, from which they were largely drawn.'¹⁵⁸

By the end of 1869 the facilities of the workhouse infirmary was so overstretched that sick paupers were only sent to the infirmary when 'absolutely necessary' otherwise they received relief in their own home.¹⁵⁹ This situation was hardly satisfactory for the sick poor: the workhouse infirmary, which should have offered care and medical relief, was in no state to do so. The relief he received in his own home could hardly have been adequate, although considering the state of the workhouse infirmary in terms of overcrowding and sanitation, he may well have been better off at home.

The Lancet had identified the following cause of the malaise in workhouse infirmaries in 1865 and it was still applicable at the turn of the decade in Nantwich:

Nor, under the administration of unpaid guardians of the class commonly in power in London workhouses, is it at all likely that a full satisfactory system can be introduced ... they [the infirmaries] must be administered under a regime which is not intent upon cruel cheese-paring, but which looks upon the sick poor as objects of tender and merciful care.¹⁶⁰

At times improvements were made at the workhouse, following the instructions of Inspector Doyle and Dr. Smith, only to be ignored later. One such example occurred in 1872 when after the visit of an Assistant Inspector of the Local Government Board, it was revealed that proper isolation was not being

provided for infectious cases. The board of guardians argued that infectious wards had been provided according to plans recommended and approved by Mr Doyle and Dr. Smith '... but that the provision made being more than was required for that class of cases.' As a result isolation wards had been reverted for use by the ordinary sick and infectious cases mingled in with the rest of the sick. However '... it was now intended to confine the upper rooms in the two wings [consisting of two rooms] exclusively to infectious cases,'¹⁶¹ and to disconnect them from the lower rooms.

Once again good hospital practice had to be imposed on the workhouse infirmary from outside agencies. This incident also serves to show how recommendations from poor law inspectors could be implemented for the good of the patients and then later ignored. Indeed it was only during 1873 that a separate wash-house for washing the bedding and clothing of infectious cases was provided and a committee was formed to meet with Dr. Munro, the medical officer of the workhouse, to make any alterations '... for the better accommodation of the sick and infectious cases' which included separate yards for the convalescents of the infectious wards - but the cost was not to exceed £43.¹⁶²

It was not until August 1879, that a moveable bath was used in the new receiving wards at Nantwich, some fourteen years after being first suggested as of the utmost importance in maintaining a healthy workhouse, in the furore that followed The Lancet enquiry and local inspections.¹⁶³ Indeed the necessity for a bath had not originally been catered for and it was only included when plans for the new receiving wards were returned from the Local Government Board indicating that they

would not be passed until the bath, a lavatory, a room for storing clothes, and a waiting room were added.¹⁶⁴ Indeed the Local Government Board's solution to the problem of providing a waiting room for prospective inmates was to suggest that the relieving officer's room be used for the purpose and he could then share the clerk's room. For the first time the Local Board appeared to be putting the needs of the inmates before the traditional requirements and convenience of the officers of the workhouse. In the 1880s repairs and improvements in both the medical wards and workhouse generally were neglected for long periods in spite of the danger this posed to inmates; for example new treads were fixed to the main stairs in the workhouse 'they being dangerous in their present worn state.'¹⁶⁵

While conditions in the workhouse and infirmary were still far from perfect it was in 1885 that sickness was technically separated from pauperism in the respect that the receipt of medical relief ceased to be a grounds for disqualification from the franchise - for those that had the vote. As A. Digby has argued the social treatment of the sick 'did not reflect their moral status' and the Act showed recognition of that fact.¹⁶⁶ Another effect of the Medical Relief (Disqualifications Removal) Act was, as P. Thane has pointed out, to further increase the use of the infirmaries by working people, which had the knock-on effect of encouraging their willingness as ratepayers to finance them.¹⁶⁷ Also the Act meant that further strain, in terms of numbers, was put on a service that was already overstretched and far from efficient.

Sanitation in the workhouse hospital was still causing problems in 1880 when the lavatory in the hospital had to be

cut off from the drain because of the offensive smells that pervaded into the wards; a typical problem encountered in so many infirmaries investigated by The Lancet fifteen years previously. However no mention was made in the minutes of remedying the situation by fitting a new toilet and drain. That the infirmary needed a toilet was unquestioned and was indeed acknowledged by The Lancet to be a necessity in a properly run ward. However when this necessity began to malfunction it was eliminated to remove the nuisance, but no substitute or improvement was made and so the original 'need for efficient sanitation' returned.

During the 1880s the old infirmary facilities continued to prove increasingly inadequate for the number of sick and infirm in the workhouse, and in 1890-1891 a new union infirmary was erected at the cost of £4,500.¹⁶⁸ It could accommodate 70 people and the two-storied building consisted of wards, day rooms for convalescents, and separate wards for special cases, as well as bathrooms and lavatories on each floor.¹⁶⁹ In effect it had taken twentysix years to implement many of the urgently needed 'necessities' recommended by The Lancet in 1865. However even in the new hospital, improvements were not to be taken for granted and the cost was still uppermost in the guardians' minds. Hot water for the women's hospital was to be 'considered',¹⁷⁰ and when the wards in the new hospital were ready to be painted the labour was provided by the inmates¹⁷¹ and it was as late as 1898 that the water supply was connected to the bathrooms on the second floor of the women's hospital.¹⁷²

Only ten years after the new workhouse infirmary had been opened the medical officer reported overcrowding of the womens'

wards.¹⁷³ When the infirmary had first begun operation in 1891 it had been intended to accommodate 70 people, but by February 1902 the womens' hospital alone was described as containing 50 beds and 56 patients (38 women and 18 children). In the mens hospital there were 63 beds and a total of 56 patients. 31% of the women and 21% of the men in the hospital were classed as infirm.¹⁷⁴ In a period of ten years the Nantwich Infirmary had become overcrowded by 60% over and above what had been considered to have been its full capacity. The infirmary facilities were once again stretched to the limit, prompting the speculative questions did the guardians cut costs when they were planning the new workhouse hospital by under estimating the number of people who would need to use its facilities? Was this another example of their lack of expertise in a job where paid professionals were required? Or had the number of sick and infirm poor increased rapidly beyond expectation in the decade 1891-1901? Of the inmates in the hospital 31% and 21% respectively of the women and men were classed as infirm and these figures beg the question whether it was the high percentage of infirm patients, who could not be expected to improve enough to leave the hospital, who formed a nucleus of permanent patients that had not been calculated for when the hospital had been planned.

Not surprisingly this period of overcrowding in the workhouse infirmary also coincided with a period when the District Medical Officers granted a large amount of relief in kind. They were the people most acutely aware of the overstretched conditions in the workhouse infirmary and responded by granting more out-relief in kind. As a result they were warned by the

relief committee for Crewe '... to use all possible caution in giving medical orders for relief in kind and to give such orders in serious and extreme cases only.'¹⁷⁵ This incident confirms the point raised by A. Digby that the needs of the sick outdoor paupers were as much for adequate nourishment as for medicine '... but doctors who prescribed meat and wine as 'medical extras' tended to be regarded by guardians as usurping their monopoly over relief.'¹⁷⁶ Also as M. W. Flinn has emphasised there was a constant battle between medical officers and relieving officers of the union. The medical officer contended that the relieving officer was not competent to judge whether an applicant for relief genuinely needed medical treatment or not, while the relieving officer, backed by the guardians, '... claimed that medical officers took too little account of the moral and economic factors involved.'¹⁷⁷ The conflict epitomises the professional struggle waged by the medical officer in an attempt to assert his professionalism and ethics over matters of finance and cost cutting which had a direct effect on the well being of the sick.

As R. G. Hodgkinson has pointed out 'starvation was habitual' and the doctor often realised that '... food was as beneficial, if not more so, than medicine.'¹⁷⁸ Clashes over this issue between the authorities and medical officers continued, and once again reveal the local guardians overriding concern with economy and the flouting of expert advice. When the workhouse infirmary was already overcrowded, relief in the home, especially for those beyond medical help, must have been the only relief that the board doctors could offer, indeed as

Dr. Atkinson of Crewe stated:

... that owing to the great number of poor people he had to attend and their extreme destitution, it was imperative in many cases to order extra's to help in their recovery to health and even at times to prolong life.¹⁷⁹

He assured the board that extras were not ordered except in necessitous and very urgent cases. Considering the figures showing the number of infirm in the workhouse perhaps this extra out-relief in kind was an attempt by the doctors to keep the infirm in their own home rather than have them enter the workhouse and exacerbate the already difficult conditions.

The problem of overcrowding in the workhouse infirmary, was once again brought to the guardians attention by the workhouse doctor in November 1901. The solution adopted by the board to ease general conditions was to use the young women's day-room to help the overcrowded children's quarters, and the old laundry airing room was made into a young women's day room. The question of overcrowding in the women's hospital was deferred.¹⁸⁰ The board may have deferred discussion of the problem, but it certainly did not go away, and in January 1902 smallpox broke out and the Local Government Board supplied glycerinated calf lymph for extra vaccination and re-vaccination.¹⁸¹ Once again the building committee were asked to consider the overcrowded conditions in the women's wards. Before doing this the guardians asked Crewe Corporation whether they would be prepared to receive smallpox cases into the Crewe smallpox hospital.¹⁸² The Nantwich Union received inmates from the Crewe district, as well as the surrounding rural area and obviously felt they had some right to use the facilities of the adjoining town, although

the Nantwich Guardians had refused to contribute any money to help build the hospital when Crewe Corporation had asked for financial help in 1873.¹⁸³

The response of Crewe Corporation however was indicative of the growing rivalry between the two neighbouring towns and illustrates their awareness of the differing and separate identities they wished the towns to adopt.¹⁸⁴ Indeed there is the suggestion that Crewe Corporation was exercising caution in anticipation of the Nantwich Guardians involving them with the growing problem of the poor from the large rural area covered by the Nantwich Union. The Corporation pointed out that considering the large population of their Borough, and the limited accommodation at their disposal, '... they were unable to give any undertaking to admit into the Crewe Smallpox Hospital cases from outside districts.'¹⁸⁵

It was only after this refusal that the Nantwich Guardians were finally compelled to consider alterations at the workhouse that might finally ease the overcrowding and conditions designed to be conducive to the spread of fever. After considering the medical officers report on the overcrowding of the women's hospital they stated that they were '... decidedly of the opinion that the accommodation of such a hospital is insufficient to meet the present requirements of the Union.'¹⁸⁶ However it was considered '... undesirable to attempt any addition of the existing hospital.'¹⁸⁷ Instead they chose to erect a new female pavilion and administrative block which would complete an earlier building scheme consisting of a male pavilion and mortuary block which had already been built. At a cost of £6,000 the scheme would increase accommodation for the sick by 63 beds

and relieve the male hospital '... to the extent of the rooms occupied by the staff.' The existing women's hospital could then be used for infirm and imbecile inmates so relieving the main body of the house¹⁸⁸ indicating that as late as 1902 imbeciles still mixed freely with the infirm and able-bodied in the general workhouse. Once again a decision on the above scheme was deferred for another month. The above evidence confirms the view of K. Williams that while the institutional stock of workhouses was modified between 1870 and 1914, it still did not satisfy completely the requirements of classification and treatment. 'It is probable that the addition of extra pavilions only brought many of the oldest workhouses up to the best practice standards of the 1850s and 1860s.' This was, as Williams emphasises, an 'expensive policy of make do and mend.'¹⁸⁹

By March 1902 smallpox was on the increase and typhoid fever had also broken out in the workhouse.¹⁹⁰ As a result a request was made to examine the drains but the workhouse board would not allow this, stating that they saw 'no necessity' for this.¹⁹¹ The board delayed making a decision about providing new hospital accommodation to the very last minute, a delay which must have exacerbated conditions still further in the infirmary. Secondly, to deny an inspection of the drains when fever was rife begs the question whether they were deliberately trying to cover up existing conditions rather than take positive steps to improve the situation. It could be argued that the board had a duty, both to ratepayers and inmates, to spend their finances carefully and to plan with care. However despite the advice of medical men of the consequences of chronic overcrowding and the eventual outbreak of smallpox and typhoid,

improvements only came slowly and outside intervention was resented.

When the local government board again enquired what action the guardians were taking about the fever in the workhouse the building committee stated they would recommend (and up until this point they had not done so) the Master to have '... all the drains flushed periodically and especially after storms.'¹⁹²

In order to ease conditions in the workhouse still further the Nantwich Board of Guardians began to move smallpox cases to a hospital at Ravensmoor, outside Nantwich.¹⁹³ However when Nantwich Urban District Council became aware of the action of the Nantwich Guardians, they wrote to complain that these new admittances were made without their authority. They pointed out to the guardians that accommodation at Ravensmoor was very limited and like Crewe, were afraid that they might not be able to take anymore smallpox cases from the guardians in the future. The Nantwich Board of Guardians then empowered the medical officer and Master '... to promptly deal with any further smallpox' and if there was no room at Ravensmoor they were to '... procure a tent or portable building and subject to the sanction of the Urban Council, to erect the same on land adjoining Ravensmoor.'¹⁹⁴

When this sequence of events concerning overcrowding and the outbreak of fever is analysed it clearly shows the priorities dominating the course of action adopted by the guardians. Firstly in an attempt to pacify the protestations of the medical officer they simply reallocated the existing accommodation,

even to the extent of modifying a laundry room, in the hope that this would be sufficient to ease the overcrowding. Time and again the decision was made to defer discussion of the problem of overcrowding in the womens' hospital. When smallpox and typhoid broke out they were again asked to consider the situation of overcrowding but rather than do this, with the prospect that this would lead to more expenditure, they simply asked Crewe Corporation if they would agree to take care of their fever cases. Only when a negative reply was received and no other avenues remained to be explored did they authorise the badly needed new buildings and consequent expenditure. Even then they proceeded to send patients to Ravensmoor until the Urban District Council discovered what was going on. It could be argued that the institutions at Crewe and Ravensmoor did not want the workhouse inmates in their wards because of the stigma attached to them and that they were wrong to adopt this attitude. On the other hand, the evidence indicates that the guardians would rather follow any line of action than tackle the real problems and would sooner pay a small sum each week to another institution in order to avoid large capital expenditure.¹⁹⁵ It could also be argued that the improvements made to the hospital accommodation by the guardians showed a lack of forward planning and indeed were part of the reason why problems were encountered just a few years after new buildings had been completed. The new hospital opened in 1891 could accommodate 70 patients. By February 1902 this building was actually treating 112 patients. The plans drawn up in February 1902 for the new hospital accommodation aimed to accommodate 133 patients - allowing for just 21 new patients to be treated. The new buildings did not

contain enough new beds considering the increase in patient numbers between 1891 - 1901. Lessons were not learned from the past, and inevitably overcrowding, with a growing number of infirm patients would be encountered again in the future.

In August 1905, nearly four years after the medical officer had complained of overcrowded conditions in the old infirmary the new hospital and nurses home was ready to be taken over by the board. However by this time the increase in patient numbers far outstripped the extra 21 beds that the new hospital could supply, but the hot water supply was 'all that can be desired.'¹⁹⁶

In January 1906, the medical officer requested that:

Two tables, twelve chairs, and thirtysix flock mattresses be purchased for the building lately occupied as a womens' hospital in order that it might be used for infirm and convalescent men and relieve the mens' side of the house which is at present overcrowded.¹⁹⁷

No sooner than the extra new hospital accommodation had been occupied, the problem of overcrowding in the male wards of the hospital had to be relieved by moving the patients into the old womens' accommodation. The old familiar pattern re-emerged. Rather than incorporating more beds and wards into the new building plans, the board planned to cope with future increased numbers by reinstating into use old buildings that had been vacated in favour of more modern accommodation. The virtue of this method was that it was a cheap way of dealing with increased numbers, but the reality for inmates was that many found themselves in old and delapidated conditions, earth closets still being used in parts of the workhouse in 1906.¹⁹⁸ However



Photograph A A ward in Nantwich Workhouse 1900-1914

as R. G. Hodgkinson has concluded from the 1870s onwards

... the most remarkable change in attitude related to the institutional treatment of the sick. ... there was a great local variation in the period of transition, but there was one uniform feature common to the whole country: large and small, good or bad, alterations were made to existing institutions to enable them to house and treat the sick.¹⁹⁹

The evidence from Nantwich Union confirms the view that the local guardians were still dominated by the principles of their forebears in that economy and the recycling of old buildings dominated all, above consideration of the needs of inmates. Cheap short term solutions were always preferred to longer term and more expensive expedients.

Extras and comforts for inmates

The guardians provided the bare essentials for relief in the workhouse and any luxuries, little extras, or specialist care was either provided by a caring individual or gradually by more enlightened guardians. What was the attitude of the Nantwich Guardians to this important field of inmate provision? Only slowly did attitudes change and what once would have been construed as an expensive luxury for a pauper, like a water bed for example, was, after pressure from inspectors and individual medical officers, purchased from the poor rates.

As R. G. Hodgkinson has argued the provision of medical extras once again illustrated the clash of principles: ... 'the Poor Law deterrent principle, and the medical principle that the best should be done for the patient ... The layman was again allowed to supervene over the specialist, and the principles of economy over welfare.'²⁰⁰

It took many years to break down old prejudices and beliefs, and in the early 1840s for example the Poor Law Commission discouraged the performance of important surgical operations in the workhouse and favoured instead 'reasonable subscription(s) to a hospital'.²⁰¹ It is clear that necessity, hastened by the changing role of the workhouse infirmary from that originally conceived for it, meant that the medical officer frequently had to call on the services of other institutions. This was the case, not only when an operation was required, but also for the more specialist type of care and attention he was unable to administer within the workhouse, but which increasingly many inmates were in need of.

As the Commission had stated:

[The] Commission think it desirable that where the distance or other circumstances do not present serious obstacles, paupers should enjoy the practised skill and combined judgement of the medical men usually connected with such establishments.²⁰²

Other motives apart from wishing to give the pauper the opportunity of enjoying the 'practised skill' and 'judgement' of doctors also seem to have motivated the Nantwich Guardians to subscribe to various Northern institutions. The Nantwich Board paid an annual subscription to the Manchester Eye Hospital, which it increased in 1854 in order that indoor patients might be sent to the hospital, and in 1913 they became subscribers to Manchester Royal Infirmary for more general cases.²⁰³ The Blind Institute at Sheffield was also supported and two Nantwich men were sent as inmates and were allowed '... a suit of clothing, hat, and boots'.²⁰⁴ As N. McCord has argued 'To obtain a flexibility of treatment impossible from the Poor Law's own

funds it was necessary to go beyond official resources.²⁰⁵ Specialised institutions, some public in nature, others operated by voluntary effort, had created institutions for various special categories of those in need, and the Nantwich Guardians placed paupers with special needs in these institutions, paid for out of the Poor Rates. Blind people who had no family or friends to support them, often found they had no way of earning any sort of living themselves, and so the workhouse was their only resort. The Nantwich Guardians subscribed to the Chester Society for the Home Teaching of the Blind,²⁰⁶ an organisation designed to help the blind to learn to fend for themselves. Also institutions like Henshaw's Blind Asylum were used and Hector Cornes was sent there at the age of eighteen to be trained as a pianoforte tuner. The cost of £26 5s 0d per annum was paid partly by the guardians, and by the parents, who contributed £12 0s 0d per year.²⁰⁷

The yardstick used by the guardians when selecting the various institutions to support was 'could that society help to rehabilitate inmates to a point where they were independent, and no longer a burden on the poor rate?' If the answer was 'yes' they considered the money well spent, and a cheaper proposition than maintaining paupers in the workhouse for years.²⁰⁸

Similarly, from 1901 onwards, inmates were occasionally sent for convalescence, for example to New Brighton, '... at 6s 6d per week and travelling expenses.'²⁰⁹ The guardians felt that the money spent on such a convalescence was worthwhile in the hope that the person would fully recover and not have to re-enter the workhouse and be a burden in the future. One example of the development of a more caring attitude by the



Photograph B Exterior of Nantwich Workhouse 1900-1914

guardians occurred in 1901 when 'the boy Haslington', who had consumption, was to be sent to Rhyl for four weeks convalescence at a cost of 5s 0d per week. He had been an inmate of the workhouse and then had been boarded out, and so before the guardians could pay for his convalescence he would have to enter the workhouse for one night. The vice-chairman said it would be a shame to make him do this just for £1 0s 0d and so the guardians 'passed the hat round' and paid for the cost of his convalescence themselves. £1 6s 3d was raised and the boy was sent to Rhyl for six weeks and given 6s 3d for pocket money.²¹⁰

This more enlightened, sometimes caring attitude, which showed an awareness of long-term as well as short-term gains, indicates that the guardians had to some extent accepted that expenditure on what in the past would have been considered the 'luxury' of convalescence made good economic sense from everyone's point of view. For example many of the problems encountered in the 1850s and 1860s in the infirmary had been caused by a short-sighted attitude which is summed up by the guardian who said '[we] would not even buy one for ourselves.'²¹¹ It took a long time before it was fully realised that this philosophy did not work in relation to ensuring the well-being of large numbers of inmates in the workhouse, but old attitudes died hard.

In 1887 the board authorised one John Howard to '... be supplied with an artificial foot and that he be taken to the manufacturers to be measured',²¹² and in 1901 an artificial leg for one inmate cost £5 5s 0d.²¹³ Just a few years earlier some guardians would have classed such devices as 'luxuries'

and not seen it as part of their duty to provide them out of the poor rate; but once the artificial limbs were fitted the men were more likely to be able to earn their own living and stay out of the workhouse.

This more far sighted attitude was also extended to the children of the workhouse in 1909 when a dental surgeon was appointed at £10 per annum, but he was 'to attend the children only' and find his own materials and appliances.²¹⁴

Individuals too had a role to play in helping to provide extra care for inmates that otherwise would have been unlikely to have been provided by the guardians. A Mrs Stock paid for the upkeep of a 'consumptive person' to be sent to the Liverpool House for Consumptives,²¹⁵ and Lady Tollemache paid for an inmate to be sent to a sanatorium.²¹⁶ Gifts were also received and Henry Machin, a local solicitor, presented a bath chair, a carrying chair, a self adjusting pillow, and surgical instruments 'for the benefit of inmates.'²¹⁷

In 1912 there was evidence of the growing co-operation between the guardians and the Co-operative movement in order to provide for the well-being of locals. Crewe Co-operative Friendly Society asked the guardians to 'grant a recommendation' to the Devonshire Hospital, Buxton, for a fifteen year old boy prevented from working because of rheumatism. The application would not have been made to the guardians but for the fact that the recommendation held by the society for the current year was exhausted.²¹⁸ The following year the same request was made again for a woman as '... the case was a deserving one.'²¹⁹

The role of the medical officer in the life of the poor

As M. W. Flinn has argued the key to the post 1834 Poor Law Medical Service was the district medical officer '... yet his position and conditions of work were so profoundly unsatisfactory that it is astonishing that the service did not collapse as quickly as it had been expanded.'²²⁰ The influence of the medical officer extended far beyond the workhouse infirmary: was he a force for radical change in Nantwich?

As parishes became organised into Unions many medical officers complained that districts were too large for them to cope with efficiently. However the Nantwich Guardians categorically stated that their own district was not too large for the medical officer to cope with,²²¹ in spite of the fact that their union covered a greater area than any other in Cheshire, and only had seven 'surgeons' in 1842.²²² This 'difference of opinion' between the medical officers and guardians was typical of many that were to arise during the nineteenth century, once again emphasising the difference between those that had to actually administer the relief and those dictating the policy.

The importance of the role of the medical officer in the workhouse was that he influenced the treatment of all the inmates, not just the sick, and as M. A. Crowther has commented '... medical routine was also part of [the] discipline,' of the institution.²²³

Under the new Poor Law medical officers had to submit to the guardians the cost of their services, drugs etc. From these tenders the guardians selected the medical officers who were to work for the union on a twelve-month contract, and the

guardians could dismiss them at will.²²⁴ However when selecting a union medical officer the Commission pointed out that 'cost alone cannot be the sole consideration' and that the experience of the medical man counted for a lot '... the guardians having never been required to accept the lowest tender...'²²⁵ but the temptation for the guardians to be swayed by thoughts of economy in new unions, anxious to show a saving and justify their position, cannot be ignored. Thoughts of quality and experience would surely have been subservient to 'value for money for the ratepayers' - many guardians themselves being ratepayers. To further justify the use of tenders the Commission argued that they were only submitted because the unions were new and the guardians would have found it hard to decide how much money to allocate for medical services without such estimates.

Medical officers in Nantwich Union were paid a fixed salary which, in 1842, ranged from £9 7s 6d per annum for surgeons serving in outlying districts, to £21 5s 0d per annum for the surgeon responsible for Nantwich and the workhouse itself. The job was certainly not a well paid one, the salary for the country surgeons in Nantwich Union being half that received by the relieving officers, and the doctor would have to provide all his own drugs and equipment out of his salary. As I. Waddington has argued many practitioners found their incomes insufficient to enable them to make adequate provision, upon their deaths, for their own families.²²⁶ This lack of income had obvious implications for both the quantity and quality of drugs supplied by the practitioner to his pauper patients.

The Nantwich Guardians, as was the case with most boards of guardians, approved of the 'fixed salary' method of payment

and strongly disapproved of any change to payment by a pauper list because the amount of money allocated for salaries would have increased dramatically under this system.²²⁷

As a doctor's salary was poor in private practice, and it took time to develop such a practice, many were forced to take on workhouse duties out of dire necessity. M. A. Crowther has pointed out:

They were men with divided loyalties to the ethics of their profession and to Poor Law conventions, ... The workhouse doctor had 'to accept an underpaid Poor Law post because his private practice did not support him adequately, or because he wished to keep other doctors out of his territory.' A workhouse doctor did not expect his work to increase his prestige, rather the reverse.²²⁸

F. B. Smith has also drawn attention to the fact that accepting employment as a Poor Law doctor often harmed a doctor's standing as a private practitioner, thus, creating even greater financial problems.²²⁹ A combination of poor pay and working conditions, including having to find drugs and equipment out of their salary, meant that guardians could exploit local doctors, knowing that of necessity they would accept Poor Law work at uneconomic salaries, simply because there was no alternative. Once appointed he was answerable to the guardians, and he had to refer to the Master of the workhouse constantly as he was in overall charge of the running of the infirmary, and the medical officer could only suggest 'extras' be given to patients. In reality there was no way he could make sure that any 'extras' he ordered for patients were received by them. M. A. Crowther has argued: 'like the lay officers, the doctors and nurses in the workhouse system suffered from the reputation of a second-class service.'²³⁰

A further responsibility that the district medical officer had to shoulder was that of vaccinator, 'The association of a basic health service, essential to all classes in the nation, with the Poor Law was regretted but recognised as unavoidable.'²³¹ Vaccination was made compulsory in 1853, being tightened up still further in 1867, all of which meant an increased workload for the already overburdened medical officers.

Once again there is evidence to confirm the view that the local board of guardians wanted 'value for money' from their medical officers, even if this was at the expense of the patients. For example in 1854 the Nantwich Guardians decided that they would not pay any doctor, other than medical officers of the union, for attending an accident:

excepting where they may be called in the absence of the medical officers... and then only for the setting of the fracture ... and the medical officer of the union is to attend the case as soon as he is acquainted with it.²³²

Having paid the medical officer his fixed salary the guardians were reluctant to pay a second doctor to do his job, even if this meant the patient waiting until he was 'acquainted' with their plight.

In 1842 the Poor Law Commission ordered that no medical man could be employed by any guardians unless they were qualified in both medicine and surgery and had at least two of the formal qualifications available at the time. However the guardians ability to obtain a qualified medical person to fill the position of medical officer for the union often proved a problem. For example in the 1860s and even as late as the

1870s and 1880s men who were qualified to practice as 'medical men, though not qualified according to Act 168 of the Consolidated order of the Poor Law Commission' were appointed as there were no other qualified men 'residing within any of such districts willing to accept the appointment',²³³ at a salary of £30 per annum in country districts, £70 per annum for Nantwich, and £30 per annum for the union workhouse. The only proviso that was made was 'that the board hope he will obtain his second qualification as early as he possibly can.' However the same man was still being employed in the 1880s without the necessary qualifications.²³⁴

This is yet another example of the continual problem faced by the Poor Law Commission up to 1847 and then by the Poor Law Board, who inherited the same problems from its predecessor. Time and again the board issued guidelines on standards relating to the qualifications of officers, and standards of hygiene, but local boards of guardians either 'ignored' them completely or 'adopted' them very slowly. As a result the standards of poor relief suffered. On the one hand the local board of guardians would have argued that it was only by compromising and adapting the rules that they could make the system function, and that the Board were out of touch with reality. On the other hand it could argue that the local guardians were deliberately ignoring official dictat and thereby reducing standards in order to keep costs down for the ratepayers.

As The Lancet investigation into the quality of medical care in the workhouses was to show²³⁵ by the mid 1860s the necessary qualifications needed to become a union surgeon were lower than those required in an asylum or gaol, and the

salaries for the position of medical officer were in many cases such as to prevent responsible surgeons from applying for the job, which in turn affected the quality of the service provided. As M. A. Crowther has argued the Poor Law doctor was burdened with routine administration and while he was not required to keep medical histories of the patients, he had to '... account in detail for any 'extras' which were ordered,'²³⁶ reflecting the concern of the guardians with cost rather than the well-being of the patient.

Complaints against medical officers were frequent. For example in 1867 Dr. Lord, the medical officer for the Crewe district of the union, had complaints made against him for neglect of duty in the case of Thomas Cotgreave of Monks Coppenhall whom he had received on order from the relieving officer to attend.²³⁷ The order had been given to Ann Cotgreave, his daughter, at half past eight in the morning, on the same day on which application for medical relief was made. When the relieving officer had visited Cotgreave again the following Monday at 11 a.m. Dr. Lord had still not attended Mr Cotgreave, and so the relieving officer told his daughter that he would call again in the evening. It was then that the relieving officer learned that Mr Bain, surgeon, had been called in and had attended the case.

Ann Cotgreave gave evidence at the Board meeting held to investigate the complaints, and related how she had taken the order to Dr. Lord's house at 9 a.m. and had told him the number of the house where her father lived. Dr. Lord had not called to see Mr Cotgreave until 1 p.m. the following Monday and he had called again the next day, after which he had not visited

the patient again until the following Thursday, Mr Cotgreave died four days later.

In answer to the charges Dr. Lord stated that owing to 'pressing professional engagements' he had inadvertently overlooked the receipt of the medical order,²³⁸ until the Monday. As to his subsequent non-attendance he considered this justifiable on the ground that another medical man had been called in to care for Mr Cotgreave.

This case illustrates the fact that not only inmates of the workhouse, but paupers in receipt of medical orders as part of out-relief, were similarly at the mercy of the conscientiousness of the medical officer, and that the quality of the service offered to paupers was suspect and often had to be further investigated by the Poor Law Board.²³⁹

The increase in the salary of the medical officer, in order to attract a better calibre of applicant was slow. In the 1840s the salary for a medical officer in a country district within the Nantwich Union had been £9 7s 6d and £21 5s 0d for Nantwich.²⁴⁰ In the 1880s his salary had only increased to £36 per annum,²⁴¹ but in 1865 The Lancet had described the salary of a medical officer at Rotherhithe who received £35 per annum as 'disgraceful.'²⁴²

One problem that constantly dogged the medical officers was their relationship with the Master of the workhouse. As The Lancet indicated:

At present a surgeon had an inferiority of rank compared to the Master ... an official who is nevertheless ... socially below him.²⁴³

This fact, as The Lancet pointed out, led to antagonism between

these two officials and the Master had the right to interfere in medical matters. Very often the medical officer faced opposition from higher authorities within the Board of Guardians to his recommendations to improve the construction, management and arrangements of the house,²⁴⁴ and in many cases the good work of the medical officer could be hindered by the interference of the Master. However as R. G. Hodgkinson has argued generally '... it was the doctors who shook complacency, and demanded, and often obtained, improved conditions in the workhouses.'²⁴⁵

However the Master was the chief officer of the workhouse and was responsible for the good management of the sick wards, which meant that he could play a vital role in protecting the patients if a medical officer was not fulfilling his duties properly - a scenario all too probable when salaries were low, qualifications were often doubtful and infirmaries were always too full.

A good example of the positive role that could be played by the Master of the workhouse in relation to the medical condition of the inmates occurred at Nantwich in 1896 when 'friction existing between the Master and nurses of the workhouse ... with regard to his [the medical officer's] performance.'²⁴⁶ This incident is a classic example of the tensions that existed at the time between Doctors and Masters, as the medical profession became more aware of their professional status, and did not appreciate the interference of the Master in medical matters. What is significant about this whole affair is that it exemplifies a Master defending his patients against medical neglect by an overworked medical officer. Master Saxon was accused

of causing 'frequent unpleasantness ... owing to interferences'.²⁴⁷

Nurse Ryder catalogued many complaints against the Master citing that the Doctor would discharge a patient, but then the Master would say he had no right to do so.²⁴⁸ Also the nurse took exception to Master Saxon speaking to patients who were under her charge and asking them when their poultices had last been changed, and checking with them when they last saw the nurse. She also objected to the fact that the Master said she often did the doctor's work.

Matters came to a head when the Master ordered Nurse Ryder to move a patient from one ward to another, as the Master felt that the man was not in the right ward. Nurse Ryder had objected on the grounds that she had no other bed to put him in, to which the Master replied that he would have him moved and 'snapped his fingers.'²⁴⁹

In another case Dr. Munro had ordered a patient to get up and the nurse informed the doctor that the Master had said that this patient was not getting the proper treatment, and that he had been complaining for a month about the treatment the patients were receiving in the hospital. Nurse Ryder had then told the Master that the doctor had ordered Critchlow up, but that she could not physically manage to do this, to which the Master replied: 'If I was Critchlow I would not get up, this place is for the likes of him.'²⁵⁰

In another incident a man who was eventually sent to the Chester Asylum was spotted by the Master in a ward with sick patients. The Master said he was to be removed from the ward, but the nurse stated that 'this was the ward such patients usually go into,' The nurse objected to removing him without

the doctor's orders, but as Master, he said he would 'have it done.'

Other nurses were brought before the Special Board Meeting to testify to the fact that the Master was constantly checking up on the doctor's decisions and interfering, and M. Lomley said: 'I have frequently heard the Master say that the doctor has no right to discharge a patient.'²⁵¹

In his defence Master Saxon stated that he had complained that the doctor had no right to discharge the patient and that he did not make a practice of interfering with patients but that 'I pointed out to the nurse that it was not right to put sick patients with lunatics.'²⁵² Another nurse complained that the Master ordered her to work from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. and told her not to go into other wards to help other nurses. If Nurse Ryder ordered her to do something when she was doing another job the Master told her she was not to do it, as he said '... I was paid to look after the sick and not to run after the nurse.'²⁵³

The Master in his statement to the Special Committee pointed out that recently there had been 'serious attempts made to upset the authority of the Master and Matron in this and similar workhouses throughout the country,'²⁵⁴ and in order to sort the matter out he had asked the Board to inquire what was going on 'behind the scenes' some twelve months ago. Again in the previous May he had made a written appeal to the Visiting Committee to help him sort matters out, but no notice was taken of it.

The Master was of the opinion that the present unpleasantness arose from the fact that the medical officer and the

nurse could not understand that the Master and Matron were responsible for the sick and

... that if you wish me to put a stop to the nonsense that is going on, I would ask you (as suggested by the Local Government Board) to have the books of the medical officer and the Chaplain examined and every attendance given otherwise than by the medical officer noticed.²⁵⁵

The Master suggested that the entries in the medical officer's book relating to his visits to the workhouse should be compared to those noted in the porter's book and to check if the deputy medical officer's visits were clearly shown. He also questioned the whereabouts of the reports that should be made by the medical officer to the guardians. More seriously he directed the guardians to examine the report sent to the Local Government Board in reference to Thomas Salt, one of the men he alleged had been neglected. This man was certified as having died at 76 years of age from senile decay, when in reality his age was only 55.

I ask you to enquire by examining the death certificates who really attends the patient and then you will see if the medical officer is in a position to know who 'is the best nurse we have had during the last 25 years' as he stated last Board day.²⁵⁶

The Master stated that out of the 66 deaths which had occurred in the workhouse since January 1895, the deputy medical officers attended 45 cases, while the medical officer himself attended only 19 cases. Again the Master quoted from the porter's book to show that during the 13 weeks ending June 13th 1896 the deputy medical officer had made 35 visits to the hospital, and the medical officer 36 visits. Similarly for the

13 weeks ending February 1st 1894 'at which time I strongly drew the doctor's attention to his non-attendance' the deputy medical officer had visited the hospital 27 times, whilst the medical officer himself made only 19 visits.

The Master stated that:

I have often complained to the Doctor of his not having attended personally to his duties and of his deputies and himself making mischief between the subordinate officers and the Master and Matron. I can produce copies of letters proving this.²⁵⁷

The above accusations made by Master Saxon confirm F. B. Smith's argument that sick patients in the workhouse were often neglected because assistants, frequently untrained, were employed by doctors to attend pauper cases because the doctor's Poor Law salary was so low that he could not afford to neglect his private patients, and once again the patients were open to abuse and neglect.²⁵⁸

Another serious cause for complaint by the Master, and one that had been identified by The Lancet some 31 years earlier was that the medical officer:

... does not give in writing on the bed cards, his instructions as to the treatment of patients which should be done not only as a safeguard to himself and the nurses but also that the Master and Matron can perform their duties.

and he stressed that this omission had been the cause of considerable friction with the nurses.

As to the Master's difficult relationship with Nurse Ryder, he stated that they had 'shaken hands' and he believed that they would have no further trouble when the proposed new rules were in force. In conclusion the Master stated his

belief that if the medical officers did not approve of the orders of the Local Government Board, it would be better for him to say nothing, rather than deliberately encourage the subordinate officers to commit a breach of them, which the medical officer had admitted doing.

After the report of the special committee into the dispute between the Master, medical officer and nurses, their respective duties were explained to them '... with the hope that any further differences might be avoided' and the chairman also promised to inform Dr. Munro that the meeting was of the opinion that he should 'attend more frequently personally to his duties rather than performing the same by deputy.'²⁵⁹ Nurse Ryder withdrew her resignation.

Master Saxon had drawn the reluctant attention of the Board of Guardians to the malpractices that were occurring in the workhouse infirmary, and had tried hard to improve conditions for the sick inmates. However just six months after the report of the special committee Mr and Mrs Saxon wrote to the Board of Guardians stating that they were acting under the advice of their medical man and that they begged to tender their resignation, to take effect as soon as convenient, and they enclosed a medical certificate from Dr. Munro. Mr Saxon had been a Master for 19 years and his wife a Matron for 16 years.²⁶⁰

In 1901 Dr. Munro, who had held his position as medical officer for the workhouse for over 20 years, asked for an increase in salary.²⁶¹ The last increase he had received had been 23 years earlier when there were only 23 beds in the

hospital, whereas now there were 113 beds, with 14 further beds in the isolation hospital. When he had first joined the workhouse there had been only one nurse and the salary he received was £20. He pointed out that now the guardians were paying the nursing staff alone salaries of £165 a year, and as his duties had greatly increased since his appointment, he felt justified in asking for the increase. Dr. Munro also had to provide all his own medicines which as early as 1865 The Lancet had identified as a 'gross abuse'.

Considering the numbers of inmates in the house I think I receive about ½d for every visit - and medicines thrown in. (laughter)²⁶²

Dr. Munro also detailed that he received 10s 0d for a confinement in the house and that if he set a bone 'outside the door' he was paid, but if he set it in the institution, he was not. The finance committee increased Dr. Munro's salary from £50 to £75 per annum,²⁶³ and stated that never before had he asked for an increase and that it was 'richly deserved.'²⁶⁴

However when the assistant medical officer asked for money to stock the new dispensary with drugs in 1907 the guardians stated that they could not see their way clear to provide money for this and referred his application for his salary to be increased to £40 per annum, to the finance committee.²⁶⁵ No further reference is made to this claim however the salary of the medical officer was increased by £10 from £75 to £85.²⁶⁶

The salary of the medical officer for Wybunbury district in 1913 was £36 per annum, plus additional fees for surgical and midwifery cases, after approval by the board.²⁶⁷ The granting of these additional fees was not automatic, for example

a doctor's bill for an operation for appendicitis was submitted for £5 5s 0d plus £1 1s 0d for an anaesthetist, but the board voted to give the doctor £3 3s 0d.²⁶⁸

It is a fact that in the Nantwich Union it was only at the start of this century that the medical officer's salary increased to any significant extent, and he was still expected to provide the drugs he prescribed for his patients. Undoubtedly he was overworked in an infirmary and workhouse that was overcrowded and insanitary. This in turn led to the overburdening of his deputy medical officer, and patients did not always receive the medical care they were entitled to and record keeping and organisation frequently fell short of what was required. By 1914 district medical officers were still in receipt of low salaries, still had to provide all their own drugs and were constantly receiving lower fees for operations from the guardians than they had asked for.²⁶⁹ By the outbreak of the first World War the medical officer was still fighting many of the battles in the workhouse that had been waging since the mid-nineteenth century.

The role and treatment of nurses within the workhouse infirmary

M. W. Flinn has pointed out that the greatest handicap which the Poor Law infirmaries laboured under in their early decades was a 'complete absence of trained nurses',²⁷⁰ and just as M. A. Crowther has described the doctors as being victims of the system, '... the same is true of the first workhouse nurses.'²⁷¹ In fact their plight was in many ways worse because many old and infirm inmates were forced to take on the work which in many instances involved heavy lifting, and

their fellow patients and inmates suffered the consequences of untrained care. The Poor Law Commission had made their view clear regarding the use of inmates to help 'nurse' fellow inmates:

... that pauper class 5 and 6 could be employed constantly or occasionally as assistants to nurses, [able-bodied women and girls over 16 and girls of between 7 and 16] ... and class 4 can also be employed in sick wards [aged and infirm women].²⁷²

The implications of this ruling were only too painfully obvious in many workhouses when The Lancet carried out its investigations in 1865. As F. B. Smith has commented, pauper nurses were 'cheap and biddable.'²⁷³ The inmates chosen to act as nurses were often too old to be of any help and were in many instances sick themselves. The Poor Law Commissioners stand on this issue was that they were merely 'assistants' to the qualified staff to help with the workload; but to expect the old, sick, and infirm inmates to lift other patients, or give out medicine when many of the inmates could not read, was just a cost-cutting measure. The consequences for the patients of the workhouse infirmary was inevitably neglect especially as pauper nurses were increasingly used not as a supplement to, but instead of, qualified, paid nurses. How far does the evidence available for Nantwich Workhouse confirm this view of pauper nursing? After an inspection of Nantwich Workhouse in 1860 the Poor Law inspector pointed out that the woman acting as nurse '... was no longer able to discharge her duties.'²⁷⁴ However when the guardians asked the Matron of the workhouse she was of the opinion that although the nurse was deaf she

was able to perform her duties adequately - a comment no doubt reflecting the standing in which the nurse was held in the hierarchy of workhouse officials.

That there was a real need for paid nurses, as opposed to implementing the unpaid help of yet more inmates, was forcibly brought to the public's attention in the findings published in The Lancet. They found that paid nursing was being given 'cautious assent' and partial trials were gradually being introduced and The Lancet felt that:

... the employment of a full staff of trained, paid nurses offers the only possibility of a thorough and genuine performance of duties which are at present, at most, perfunctorily discharged ... it is notorious that the majority of them are aged and feeble and past work or have strong tendencies to drink ... in the great majority of cases, pauper nurses can only manage their patients by inspiring fear, and that their conduct is consequently often brutal.²⁷⁵

The problem, as The Lancet pointed out, was to get good paid nurses, at a reasonable salary, 'which would not be exorbitant.'²⁷⁶ The norm in large London workhouses was for one paid nurse to be responsible not only for looking after the sick, but also for superintending the work of women, giving out linen, looking after washing, discharging females, giving out clothing, and passing through the wards: consequently there was little time for nursing.

As R. G. Hodgkinson has pointed out there was not a single trained nurse in any of the infirmaries in the provinces before 1863, salaried nurses were trained by experience only and not through organised instruction.²⁷⁷ The only qualification prescribed for paid nurses was that they should be able to read

the written directions on medicines. By 1870 Hodgkinson has commented that

Although such remarkable advance had been made in the development of the workhouse medical services, the new nursing system amounted to only a crack in the deep crust of inefficiency which lay heavily on the method of caring for the sick.²⁷⁸

The first mention of a paid nurse at Nantwich Workhouse appears in June 1872,²⁷⁹ when a nurse was appointed at a salary of £20 per annum, plus her maintenance in the workhouse. In comparison, the Matron of the workhouse at this time was receiving £30 per annum, the schoolmistress £20 per annum and the porter £18 per annum, but the guardians were forced to increase the nurses salary to £25 just eight months after she had started work in order '... induce her not to move',²⁸⁰ but the increase was obviously not enough to tempt her to stay as she still resigned. The job was re-advertised at £20 per annum. As K. Williams has emphasised a policy of treatment did develop in workhouse infirmaries with the employment of specialised technicians who were necessary in any regime of treatment.²⁸¹ Similarly M. A. Crowther has argued 'once staff labour had begun to replace inmate labour, the institutions could be seen as offering a social service rather than acting only as a deterrent²⁸² however progress was slow. Indeed by 1892 the role of the nurse was not seen in any more important light than it had been two decades earlier - in fact her salary was £18 9s 2d a year, which represents a cut of £1 10s 10d compared with 1872. One reason to account for this fall in salary was that one assistant nurse, who was presumably an inmate, received the pitifully low

wage of £1 7s 8d a year.²⁸³ So when the need for more help in the hospital was recognised a cut in salary for the original nurse, in order to pay for an assistant, was the order of the day.

With the increased pressure on the infirmary accommodation at the workhouse and new buildings being introduced after 1891, the number of nurses employed at Nantwich Workhouse in 1902 had risen to 10 to care for 112 patients.²⁸⁴ However cut-backs were still obviously being made because when the new hospital accommodation was opened in August 1905 there were places for approximately 133 patients and only 9 nurses were employed.²⁸⁵ As F. B. Smith has pointed out guardians begrudged paying extra money for trained nurses, and they also saw the nurses as, ultimately costing them more money as 'The nurses ... loomed as a force which would upset existing arrangements and demand more expenditure.'²⁸⁶ Nurses at Nantwich Workhouse did not find the living accommodation satisfactory, and in the Building Committee Reports it refers to the new hospital which was to be opened in 1905 as '... disposing of the question of the present unsatisfactory accommodation for nurses in the women's hospital',²⁸⁷ and the local newspaper, the Nantwich Guardian, refers to nurses leaving their jobs at the workhouse in order to find more comfortable accommodation. As an inducement to keep the nurses for longer periods and to improve conditions generally, the new nurses home opened in 1905 included a sitting room for the superintendent nurse, and a separate sitting room for the nurses, a dining room for their use, a doctors room, kitchen, toilets and bathrooms, and 8 bedrooms.²⁸⁸ As M. A. Crowther has argued after the furore that had been caused by The Lancet revelations

in the late 1860s:

... it appeared that everything was ready for the rise of the medical expert in Poor Law administration, but this happened so slowly that the period between 1867 and 1914 must again be seen in terms of the forces inhibiting the medical staff.²⁸⁹

Workhouse diets

If the principle of 'less eligibility' was to be carried through into the feeding of the inmates, then workhouse diets should have been inferior to that of the local independent labourer. However the diet of many lower paid workers was so poor that to emulate this in a workhouse containing so many old, infirm, and sick people, not to mention the very young, was impossible.

This issue caused many arguments over the years, all centring around this main problem; what should the diet of workhouse inmates consist of in terms of quantity, quality, and variety, and how should this be modified for the different categories of inmate in order to sustain life and no more.

As the Poor Law Commissioners pointed out as early as 1836, workhouse diets were not uniform throughout the country, but should be governed by '... the ordinary mode of living in the district.'²⁹⁰ However sample diet sheets from around the country, representing most types of community, were sent to all unions to illustrate standards approved of by the commission. How did the Nantwich Workhouse diets compare with the ones selected by the Commission as embodying suitable standards of nutrition?

As early as 1836 there had been complaints about the diet

offered in new workhouses up and down the country. However as one Poor Law Commissioner pointed out, complaints about diet were often made for inmates, not by them, and that it was interested members of the middle classes who said the diet supplied was not good enough. He argued that their opinion was influenced by middle-class values that were not appropriate to the people in the workhouses, who when questioned, expressed satisfaction about the food they received.²⁹¹ Such arguments based on the value of the subjective view continued until 1866, when Dr. Edward Smith was commissioned by the Poor Law Board to investigate workhouse diets from the viewpoint of a dietitian, the first time that a scientific approach had been adopted in order to analyse the content of the workhouse diet.²⁹²

Extras in terms of food could be ordered by the medical officer, who had special jurisdiction over the diet of the aged, infirm, sick, and children, and:

The medical officer may order for any individual pauper such change of diet as he shall deem necessary; and the Master shall report such allowance or change of diet so made, to the next meeting of guardians, who may sanction, alter, or disallow the same at their discretion.²⁹³

Here again is another example of the Poor Law Board making the provision for extras to be provided on medical grounds, but giving the power to local guardians to deny these at will if they wish to overrule the advice of their medical officer. The unqualified guardian with a lack of specialist knowledge had the power to reject the advice of the specialist: mainly on the grounds of economy and for no better reason. Once again this

formula was all too familiar in dictating how the workhouse was run. The inmates were not allowed to drink any liquor or consume food other than that allowed in the dietary table, but the guardians could make an extra food allowance to paupers working as nurses or to those helping with extra household work.

In Nantwich Workhouse in 1854 the day started for all inmates with bread and porridge. For dinner they would receive cooked rice and treacle twice a week, lobscouse; pea soup and bread twice a week, and cooked meat or bacon with potatoes or vegetables and buttermilk twice a week. Supper consisted of bread and porridge.²⁹⁴

When this diet is compared with the specimen diets issued by the Commission in 1836 the Nantwich Board appear to have conformed to the norm respecting the amounts of bread and porridge given for breakfast - 6 oz. for men and 5 oz. for women. However for dinner the amount of meat or bacon received was just over half the amount recommended by many of the diets of 1836, and it only appeared twice a week and once in the form of a stew. However the amount of potatoes or vegetables served, which would have 'filled up' the inmates, were double the quantities recommended by many boards, reflecting the fact that they were produced freely in the countryside around Nantwich. The amount of bread received twice a week at dinner was approximately half that recommended by many boards in 1836.

M. A. Crowther has argued that the authorities '...relied on the monotony of the diet rather than its quantity, as a deterrent'²⁹⁵ although Nantwich Union exhibited both monotony and, in certain areas, a lack of quantity. Another important point made by Crowther is that in the workhouse, despite the

disadvantages '... women and children were not as restricted [for food] as in poor families, where their needs would come second to those of the breadwinner.'²⁹⁶ However despite this the type of food served, together with the methods of mass cooking served to make it uninviting.

A dispute arose at Nantwich Workhouse in 1856 when 'alleged irregularities' concerning the diet of vagrants came to the notice of the Poor Law Board. The Master claimed that in 1854, when the vagrant wards were altered, he received verbal instructions from several of the guardians that able-bodied vagrants should not be supplied with food during their stay at the workhouse. However the Master claimed that:

I have, however always given them food where it appeared to be required and sometimes they bring food in with them rendering any supply unnecessary. All other vagrants have food given to them.²⁹⁷

The board ruled that they were perfectly happy with the Master's explanation and the way he discharged his duties, but added that gruel and bread for breakfast and supper should be supplied to all vagrants in the same proportions as to other inmates. Vagrants were largely seen as a growing nuisance and a drain on local resources; the verbal instruction issued by 'several' guardians to the Master were presumably intended to discourage able-bodied vagrants from staying too long in the workhouse and to cut costs. The fact that this practice had continued for two years despite inspections and visiting committees tends to indicate that the guardians knew of, and approved of, the action of the Master towards the able-bodied vagrants. The explanation that many vagrants brought their

own food with them, thereby removing the need to feed them, is dubious as it was a rule in the workhouse, was strictly forbidden and most vagrants were hardly likely to have food with them or why would they go to the workhouse in the first place?

As the findings of The Lancet investigations into workhouse infirmaries also served to reveal poor conditions in the general body of the workhouse, so the enquiries made by The Lancet concerning the diet offered to patients also had wider implications for the quality of food offered in the general wards. The Lancet had found that the food given to the sick under the direction of the medical officer, was usually of a good quality, but the house diet for the infirm - who formed a large percentage of those in the general body of the house - gave cause for 'serious complaint.'²⁹⁸ Beef was tough and leathery and proved hard to digest, and the variety of food offered was poor.

All Poor Law Boards were compelled to give people over 60 years of age an allowance of tea instead of gruel, and some butter and sugar, but their dinners were the same as those offered to everyone else:

... but the mischievous anomaly remains of allowing the guardians to pretend to feed aged and feeble persons upon the tough boiled beef and the indigestible pea-soup and suet pudding of the house diets.²⁹⁹

The Lancet had argued that pea soup, usually served twice a week at Nantwich Workhouse, should be replaced by beef soup thickened with rice. Meat should be served at least five times a week whereas it only appeared twice a week at Nantwich and

once in lobsouse, a recipe renowned for its frugality of meat and one where even the toughest beef can be boiled up for hours.

The problem of digesting the food, especially for the old and the monotony of the diet, were two of the main complaints against the food offered in the workhouse. The Lancet found that the infirm often rejected ordinary house dinners and pea soup often caused pain and spasms of the stomach. Once food was rejected for the above reasons, the diet became insufficient. Many old people lived for many years in the workhouse but as The Lancet pointed out this was in spite of the diet they received:

True, these persons live long, but they live a life of a most low grade, with the minimum of mental and bodily activity; in fact, they subside more and more into a vegetative existence; and a part of this change is distinctly traceable to the persistent under-nutrition which they experience. 300

The Lancet directly challenged the diet offered by Bermondsey workhouse in terms of the amount of nourishment it gave to inmates, and in several instances the allowances at Nantwich Workhouse fell short of those offered at Bermondsey:-

<u>WEEKLY WORKHOUSE DIET</u>			
	<u>BERMONDSEY</u>	<u>MALE</u>	<u>NANTWICH</u> <u>FEMALE</u>
<u>MEAT</u>	15 oz.	6 oz. plus one quart lobscouse	6 oz. plus one quart lobscouse
<u>POTATOES OR</u> <u>VEGETABLES</u>	24 oz.	64 oz.	48 oz.
<u>SOUP</u>	3 pints	3 pints	2 pints
<u>BREAD</u>	84 oz.	92 oz.	76 oz.
<u>GRUEL</u>	21 pints or tea and sugar for the aged and infirm	21 pints or	21 pints or

<u>BERMONDSEY</u>	<u>NANTWICH</u>	
	<u>MALE</u>	<u>FEMALE</u>
<u>BUTTERMILK</u>	2 pints	1 pint
<u>RICE AND TREACLE</u>	3½ lbs.	3 lbs.

The Lancet considered this diet to be '... an altogether insufficient allowance, and, to the infirm class especially must be considered as hard treatment.'³⁰¹ The main difference between the two diets being that the Nantwich inmates did receive more products of the countryside, for example potatoes and buttermilk; although rice and treacle appears to have been used as a substitute for meat, something which the guardians considered too expensive a commodity to provide too often for the inmates.

The criticisms made by The Lancet were heeded by the Poor Law Board and in February 1866,³⁰² the Nantwich Guardians issued an amended dietary table that consisted of:

<u>WEEKLY WORKHOUSE DIET</u>			<u>INCREASE COMPARED WITH DIET OF 1854</u>	
	<u>MALE</u>	<u>FEMALE</u>	<u>MALE</u>	<u>FEMALE</u>
<u>MEAT OR BACON</u>	8 oz. plus 2 quarts lobscouse	8 oz. plus 2 quarts lobscouse	2 oz. plus 1 quart lobscouse	2 oz. plus 1 quart lobscouse
<u>POTATOES OR VEG.</u>	64 oz.	48 oz.	Same	Same
<u>PEA SOUP</u>	4 pints	3 pints	1 pint	1 pint
<u>BREAD</u>	118 oz.	100 oz.	26 oz.	24 oz.
<u>GRUEL</u>	14 PINTS	14 PINTS	Reduction of 7 pints	Reduction of 7 pints
<u>CHEESE</u>	16½ oz.	12½ oz.	replaced 2 pints of Buttermilk	replaced 1 pint of Buttermilk
<u>RICE AND TREACLE</u>	1¼ lbs	1½ lbs	Reduction of 1¼ lbs	Reduction of 1½ lbs

OLD AND INFIRM - instead of gruel at breakfast and supper
could substitute:

1 oz tea	)	not to exceed 1 pint
5 oz butter	) per week	per meal sweetened
7 oz sugar	)	with $\frac{1}{2}$ oz sugar per
		pint.

303

The new amended diet reflected some of the criticisms of workhouse diets by The Lancet - the guardians increased the allocation of meat and included one extra lobscouse dinner per week. However even with this increase meat was only served four times a week at the workhouse and not five, as recommended by The Lancet. However perhaps more revealing and damning of previous diets used in the workhouse is to note the food that was reduced, for example gruel which The Lancet had shown to be lacking in nutrition.³⁰⁴ Cheese replaced buttermilk in the diet and was served every evening with the traditional bread and gruel supper in order to make it more nutritious, but by March 1867 cheese had been dropped from the diet and buttermilk brought back once again, only to be replaced by milk the next month.³⁰⁵ Originally there had been no mention of fresh milk for the adults or, more importantly, the children of the workhouse which as The Lancet had pointed out in relation to many workhouses was '... a very grave defect, and one which can scarcely fail to be very mischievous.'³⁰⁶

Children above 9 and under 16 were to be allowed the same food and quantities as women at meal times. Children between 2 and 9 were to receive the 'dietaries provided for them' and children under 2 years were to be 'dieted at discretion.'³⁰⁷ So flexible a provision obviously allowed abuse and as noted in the minutes 'childrens food [was to be] the same as adults

but smaller proportions.'³⁰⁸ A diet that was so obviously meagre for adults had many deficiencies for children and to state that they should have smaller portions of the same once again indicated that the Nantwich Guardians were ignoring all the medical advice given by The Lancet.

By 1872 cooked rice and treacle had been replaced by rice and milk in the workhouse diet, 4 oz. of cooked meat was only served once a week together with Irish stew and male inmates received 4 pints of buttermilk a week, while the females had 3 pints.³⁰⁹ Vegetables had by this time disappeared altogether from the diet and potatoes dominated this category, being served three times a week as the main meal, twice with buttermilk and once with meat, bread and buttermilk.

The treatment of lunatics

When a lunatic was brought to Nantwich Workhouse they were frequently sent on to Chester Asylum, or in extreme cases Broadmoor.³¹⁰ Harmless lunatics however were often kept in the workhouse, in common with the practice followed by many other workhouses, and in 1855 Nantwich accommodated 9 harmless lunatics who were discharged from the Cheshire Lunatic Asylum.³¹¹

However while concern was being expressed about the sanitary, medical, and general conditions existing in the Nantwich Workhouse as a whole, the lunatic inmates had their own special set of problems. The way these problems were dealt with once again serves to reveal the application of the local guardians yardstick of economy. As R. G. Hodgkinson has pointed out Poor Law institutions were entirely unsuited to '... minister to the special wants of the mentally unstable,

and some inmates were totally unfit to be retained there ... they were just neglected and kept quiet, without means of amusement or occupation.'³¹² When one of the Commissioners in Lunacy visited Nantwich Workhouse in 1854 he noted the need for additional sleeping accommodation for idiot inmates, but the Visiting Committee of the workhouse stated that after enquiring with the Master that the Commissioner was mistaken:

... in supposing that some of the idiot inmates sleep on loose straw beds, the facts being that the beds of that description which that gentleman saw were not used by that class and that with regard to the sick and infirm of the same class the visiting committee upon enquiry found that good straw beds were provided and which from the facility of covering could always be kept clean, they considered the best that could be used.³¹³

Once again the local guardians imposed their own standards and refused to accept any expert advice that might involve extra expense.

After a visit to Nantwich Workhouse in 1859 the Poor Law Inspector identified the need to separate male and female idiots from other inmates,³¹⁴ who they were associating with freely. Just six years later it was this very problem that The Lancet focused attention upon by emphasising the insensitivity with which lunatics were treated, and that it was common practice for them to be mingled with other inmates in the sick wards. Often imbeciles were put together with epileptics or people suffering from depression, which also inflicted great cruelty on the patients.³¹⁵ By 1866 there were several imbeciles in Nantwich Workhouse who should, according to the Commissioners in Lunacy, have been in Chester Asylum.³¹⁶ As a

result of the overcrowded state of the county asylum, male patients had to be maintained in the workhouse until a vacancy arose,³¹⁷ thus exacerbating conditions in the workhouse still further.

In late 1866 conditions were so bad on the County Asylum that as the institution was nearing full capacity, the Clerk wrote to the already overstretched Nantwich Workhouse to enquire if they could accommodate chronic patients to 'make room in the Asylum for recent and curable cases' to which request Nantwich was forced to reply in the negative.³¹⁸

However despite the publicity resulting from the exposures made in The Lancet relating to the treatment of lunatics, conditions had still not improved greatly by 1873 when their accommodation was described as 'insufficient' in Nantwich workhouse.³¹⁹ Indeed as R. G. Hodgkinson has argued although lunatics could be maintained at half the cost in the workhouse, the effect on the patient was often bad because diet and environment were so different. 'The diet of lunatics in workhouses was far inferior to what was offered in the asylums, and to what was given in gaols.'³²⁰ The food that they received at Nantwich Workhouse was the same as that given to the aged and infirm, the diet being amended in 1874 by substituting a third solid meat dinner during the week instead of one of pea soup dinners.³²¹

Even in the 1880s, some fifteen years after complaints about the unsuitability of workhouses to cope with dangerous lunatics, Nantwich had to accommodate a criminal lunatic of 'dangerous character' who had committed murder.³²² As it was considered unsafe to move this man to the County Asylum the

workhouse had to accommodate him, even though the workhouse and its officials were obviously unsuited to fulfill this role, and by so doing the welfare of the other inmates was jeopardised.

That the number of insane inmates kept in Nantwich Workhouse at any one time was usually small can be seen from the census figures for the years 1871 and 1881. In 1871 only 2.6% of the inmates were classed as imbeciles, but this figure had increased to 4% in 1881.³²³ The fact remains that the Nantwich Guardians passed on the bulk of their insane inmates to the County Asylum, but this in turn caused problems.

The burden of coping with harmless lunatics had escalated to such a degree that in 1896 the 22nd. Annual Conference of the North West Poor Law District discussed how best to tackle this problem. Dr. Hodgson, a delegate to the conference, said that Cheshire had to find more accommodation for the reception of harmless lunatics, and it was sharply expressed that many unions ought to make more effort to accommodate these harmless cases themselves. Many board of guardians 'showed a tendency and anxiety to evade responsibility for these lunatics by rushing them off to the asylum.'³²⁴ This, guardians were reminded, might relieve them of the cost in the short term, but in sending these cases away 'indiscriminately' they '... threw upon the county authority ... the necessity of enlarging the asylums at considerable expense in order to receive them.'³²⁵ In 1896 Cheshire was in the process of spending £100,000 on enlarging its county asylum.

By the end of 1900 there were 14 imbeciles and 1 epileptic in Nantwich Workhouse, but the board were divided as

to how well they coped with these inmates.³²⁶ One guardian said that the Union had no great difficulty in dealing with the imbeciles, and that one of them was usefully employed in running errands. However another guardian expressed the opinion that the imbeciles caused a great deal of trouble to officials, but it was agreed that an enormous addition to the county expenditure would result if new asylums were built.

Although some of the Nantwich Guardians expressed an interest, there was a general sense of reluctance for all the Unions within the county to contribute towards the building of a new asylum. There was a growing feeling in relation to the care of lunatics, as in relation to other areas of the Poor Law, that the government should take a more positive role, and shoulder more of the financial burden, rather than leave it to individual unions to try to solve these ever growing problems.

With the increasing number of lunatics in the county asylum a deputation was sent to Chester Asylum from Nantwich Union who expressed their regret for the '... large increase which had taken place in the numbers of lunatics sent from Nantwich Union.'³²⁷ In 1901 there were 160 lunatics in the county asylum from Nantwich, which meant that 16.8% of the total inmate population came from the Nantwich Union, 'a number which had never previously been reached.'³²⁸

Not only did earnest discussions take place about the high number of lunatics transferred from Nantwich Workhouse to the County Asylum but the workhouse did, on occasions, refuse to admit the insane at all. For example in 1905 the Home Secretary wrote to the union enclosing a copy of a letter from the Chief Constable of Cheshire with reference to the refusal

by the Master of Nantwich to admit persons alleged to be insane. The Master stated that owing to the lateness of the hour when the man arrived he was unable to do more than put him in the Receiving Ward on condition that a constable was left with him. As the police refused to do this, the man was taken to the police station.³²⁹ The guardians were certainly not over anxious to receive lunatics into the workhouse, but in 1913 they were instructed that no more lunatics could be admitted to Chester for the time being due to scarlet fever.³³⁰

If a comparison is made between the cost of maintaining a pauper in the local workhouse and sending an inmate to the asylum, the difference was considerable. For example, for the half year ending Lady Day 1896 the average cost per head, per week, for maintaining the indoor poor with provisions and necessities including clothes was 2s 11½d. For the same period the cost of maintaining a lunatic in the asylum amounted to 7s 0d per week, which represents a 233% difference.³³¹ However in spite of the costs incurred, the guardians were not deterred from sending ever increasing numbers to the county asylum rather than maintain them in the local workhouses, where facilities were already stretched to the limit.³³² The very fact that any lunatics were still maintained in the workhouse by 1900 belies the assertion that the general mixed workhouse had withered away to be replaced by separate, specialised institutions. This confirms K. Williams assertion that by 1908 specialised institutions on separate sites had not replaced the general workhouse. Cost was the fundamental cause of this.³³³

The care and training of children by the local guardians

Children, together with the sick had been practically

ignored by the new Poor Law, but as R. G. Hodgkinson has pointed out they became the 'most favoured' class and their treatment illustrates the development of the 'supplementary policy' which grew up after 1834 in poor relief, and as their numbers swelled the workhouse, this policy became imperative.³³⁴ How far did the Nantwich Guardians develop their supplementary policy in favour of children? From the inception of the new Poor Law the Commissioners stressed the important role to be played by industrial training in helping to reshape and influence the lives of pauper children, 'the descendants of former generations of paupers' who were in receipt of relief.³³⁵ Girls were to be instructed in household duties, the care of children and the sick, together with religion '... to prepare them to fulfill all the practical duties of their station in life.'³³⁶

The education of boys was to centre around religious and moral training together with gymnastics, gardening, and practical skills such as shoe making. It was also essential that:

The habit of cheerfully prosecuting their daily labour, of whatever kind, would certainly have been acquired by every child at the age of thirteen. To insure complete success in this respect, the industrial training is to commence in the infant school where straw-plaiting, knitting, and sewing will soon be taught.³³⁷

As A. Digby and P. Searby have argued the education of pauper inmates in the workhouse, industrial schools, and reform schools reflected the whole philosophy of the 1834 Amendment Act in that they displayed '... most obviously society's desire to impose social control on its recalcitrant members.' The point is also made that this aim could not be fully achieved until the development of compulsory, free, elementary education had



Photograph C Exterior view showing workhouse extensions and
vegetable gardens



Photograph D Nantwich Union Workhouse

been implemented at the end of the nineteenth century.³³⁸

What were the problems involved in implementing a basic educational policy for the children in the workhouse? Great stress was laid upon the fact that the content of the education for 'this class of labourers' should have direct relation to their condition in life³³⁹ reinforcing the social objectives. Formerly, when no training of pauper children took place in the workhouse they often became '... great places for the supplies of prostitution and delinquency',³⁴⁰ and many children came back to the parish for relief as adults. As F. Duke has pointed out the idea of providing a basic education was seen as the most effective way of breaking the 'chain of hereditary pauperism, at least among the children resident in workhouses.'³⁴¹

As Assistant Commissioner Dr. J. P. Kay discovered initially setting up such a system of training was fraught with problems. Many schools provided by workhouses in the early years of the new Poor Law were 'almost universally imperfect' and were often worse than those provided by private individuals.³⁴² It was frequently found that children were not separated from adults and were instructed by fellow paupers. Moral and industrial training was neglected and teachers, books and equipment, were lacking. Many boards of guardians excused such conditions by stating that they were reluctant to make 'Final arrangements for the schooling of pauper children because the whole of their workhouse arrangements were unsatisfactory and they considered it 'inexpedient' to spend a lot of money on the children, '... before [they] decide what may be the best arrangements for the adult paupers.'³⁴³

The Commissioners set out with high hopes and principles to reform the training of pauper children, but in the late 1850s and 1860s the Nantwich workhouse school which was part of the main workhouse buildings, was suffering from many of the shortages and problems that Dr. Kay had identified in the 1830s. Also many day schools in the area would not accept workhouse inmates as pupils, so the taint of their parent's pauperism could not in reality be easily cast aside, even when they were attempting to train the children in the hope of raising them out of the relief system.

By 1842 all children in the workhouse had to spend three of their working hours every day on reading, writing, arithmetic and religion, together with instruction that would fit them for service and '... habits of usefulness, industry, and virtue.'³⁴⁴ With reference to the selection of a schoolmaster or mistress, who M. A. Crowther has described as a 'particularly dispirited' group,³⁴⁵ there was no doubt that in no department of the workhouse was 'a careful selection of the person employed of greater importance' and that their incompetence and habits:

which are generally the cause or consequence of pauperism, affect not only the present comfort and conduct of the children entrusted to their care, but exercise a most pernicious influence on the subsequent welfare of those children and on the likelihood of their permanent chargeability.³⁴⁶

Once again the principles of the original Commissioners were commendable enough, but in reality the Nantwich Union found them hard to put into practice. Lack of money meant that it was hard to provide a sufficient salary to attract a suitably 'moral' person to fulfill this demanding role. The fact that after 1848 the Treasury made direct grants to unions to

subsidise teachers pay did help to ease the fraught situation concerning salaries which was compounding progress. However as M. A. Crowther has argued the quality of teacher employed by the guardians was affected by the 'reputation of a second class service' as pay and holidays were not as good as in elementary schools, and Crowther goes on to argue that '... they would not have taken Poor Law employment if there had been an alternative,' which has obvious implications for the children.³⁴⁷ The job of schoolmistress could also entail taking on much greater responsibility too, as was the case in Nantwich in 1842 when the Master of the workhouse was suspended after alleged improper conduct with two female inmates, and the schoolmistress was appointed to assist the Matron in the 'management of the workhouse.'³⁴⁸

This incident highlights not only the varied responsibilities that could be expected of the schoolmaster or mistress, but also the delicate relationship that existed between him or herself and the Master of the house. It was against this turbulent background that the schoolmistress at Nantwich Workhouse was granted permission to leave the institution after school hours,³⁴⁹ and was given 3 days leave of absence at Christmas.³⁵⁰

By 1851 the influx in the number of children in Nantwich Union was described as 'very great'.³⁵¹ The total number of children in the workhouse on December 1st 1849 had been 72; on December 1st 1850 the total was 62; which represented an actual decrease of 13.8%; but 47.2% of the children in the workhouse on December 1st 1850 had been there since the previous survey had been taken twelve months earlier.³⁵²

figure 9

Table to show the number of children in the workhouse on the
1st December 1849 and the 1st December 1850

	Children under nine			Children over nine		
	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total
1st December 1849	27	15	42	19	11	30
1st December 1850	32	16	48	9	5	14
Increase	5 18.5%	1 6.6%	6 14.3%	-	-	-
Decrease	-	-	-	10 52.6%	6 54.5%	16 53.3%

Source - Parl. Papers 1851 XLIX (646) p. 41

An analysis of the above table indicates that while the number of children in the workhouse under nine years of age had increased by 1850 there was an actual decrease in the number of children over nine years of age. After the age of nine many children were considered to be old enough to go to work and many were placed in service. Even the small earnings of a child of nine could make a difference to the family budget and could help the family to remain independent, and so escape the workhouse.

All the children in Nantwich Workhouse were under the care of the schoolmistress. However in spite of all the positive advantages that had been attached to industrial training by Poor Law Commissioners in the 1830s no means had been found by 1850 to provide industrial training for the boys in Nantwich Workhouse. When this fact was pointed out to the guardians by the Poor Law Inspector they promised to rent land for that very purpose.

The education of pauper children posed a dilemma both for the guardians and the commissioners generally. On the one hand it was agreed that paupers should be educated to improve their chances of escaping from the poverty that previous generations had known - thereby experiencing 'superior eligibility.'³⁵³ On the other hand the guardians:

... cannot make them paupers in order to educate them. When a parent applies to quit a workhouse with his child or when an employee offers service to a boy of 9, 10, or 11 years of age, guardians cannot determine that it is better for the child to remain another year in the school.³⁵⁴

So ironically the workhouse system of education would always have the built-in deficiency that every time the paupers left the workhouse to be independent, which in itself was laudable and approved of by the guardians, their children would stop receiving the very education that was supposed to save them from future deprivation. Similarly if a child entered into service at the age of nine, his formal education would stop before the child was fully literate or had acquired industrial training.

Arguments also arose among local guardians centering around how 'well' paupers should be educated viz. the education received by the children of independent labourers, many of whom did not receive any education. As D. Fraser has argued the subject of pauper education implicitly raised issues related to less eligibility but this 'conflict of principles' could not be allowed to inhibit the quality of education as it was acknowledged to be one means of eradicating pauperism.³⁵⁵ As a result when workhouse schools were set up, their cost and efficiency

was bound to be questioned by locals who felt that they were providing an unnecessary luxury. Children, like the sick, were not supposed to be penalised by the theory of less eligibility, but the ingrained prejudices of local people meant that throughout the nineteenth century the fact that education was paid for out of the poor rate meant that penny-pinching and small mindedness often acted as a restraint against the efficient operation of the service.

While Inspector Doyle believed that by 1850 pauper education in Cheshire was making considerable progress he set the general tone by which the subject was viewed when he reminded everyone of the '... nature of the evil with which the boards of guardians have to cope: of the quality of the material upon which they have to work.'³⁵⁶ The amount of work and responsibility, together with low pay and lack of facilities, meant a high turnover of schoolteachers, and at the end of 1851 the minutes of the Nantwich Board of Guardians refer to their 'trouble in securing a schoolmaster' for the workhouse.³⁵⁷ Once appointed they were very much tied to the workhouse and were expected not only to teach the children but to be available to look after and discipline the children for 24 hours a day. In 1854 'disquiet' was expressed by Mr Doyle, the Poor Law Inspector, after visiting the house, because the schoolmaster was absent on Saturday 14th January, and had not returned by the 16th January. In future it was advised that the guardians '... would not perhaps desire to give the Master authority to permit other officers to absent themselves for so long a time.'³⁵⁸

An indication of the scope of the learning aids that were

available in Nantwich Workhouse school can be gained from the inventory of new stock purchased early in 1852 after the appointment of a new schoolteacher. The items ordered included:

- two dozen first reading books.
- one dozen reading cards and copies of the alphabet.
- two dozen pen holders and copy books.
- three dozen tin pencil cases and writing cards.
- two packets of slate pencils.
- one box of steel pens.³⁵⁹

Further restocking of the school took place the following month when the boys school was provided with:

- twelve grammar and small arithmetic books.
- one geography book.
- a set of Mulhouse's [Mulhäuser's] writing models.
- one dozen slates and hand pens.
- one bottle of ink.

The purchase of Mulhäuser's writing models stresses the positive aspect of the restocking of the workhouse school. The use of an up to date system of teaching children to write stresses that the pupils would be experiencing current educational learning aids at least as good as those in the national school in the town. The girl's schoolroom was furnished with a table, fender, a cupboard, and a blackboard and easel. Individual lessons were to be mounted on mill board.

By 1852 a schoolmaster and mistress had been appointed and it was stressed that the Governor and Matron were to help as much as possible to carry out the industrial training. The Governor was to select male paupers to assist with the training of male children, directed by himself and the schoolmaster. Similarly female paupers were selected by the Matron to assist in the training of female children.³⁶⁰

However just as the school had been restocked the schoolmaster and mistress were accused of alleged misconduct, and

they were suspended as an 'improper intimacy [had] existed between them.'³⁶¹ The schoolmaster was discharged and the schoolmistress admonished, and told to be more prudent and guarded in her future conduct. Problems also arose when the schoolmistress stated that she was 'unaware' of what her duties were supposed to entail, and rather than dismiss her for inattention to duty she was to be 'informed what those duties are.'³⁶² This, it would appear, was a more attractive proposition than seeking yet another new schoolmistress.

That the education, such as it was, of children leaving the workhouse at an early age to take up apprenticeship and domestic service, was prematurely cut short, was undisputed. In an attempt to make sure that these children were 'morally improved' it was decided in 1855 that all children leaving Nantwich Workhouse to take up such appointments be supplied with a copy of the Holy Scripture.³⁶³ However the number of children who would actually be able to read this book and the message contained therein would be small. In 1869, for example 14 out of the 68 scholars in Nantwich Workhouse could read the Testament.³⁶⁴

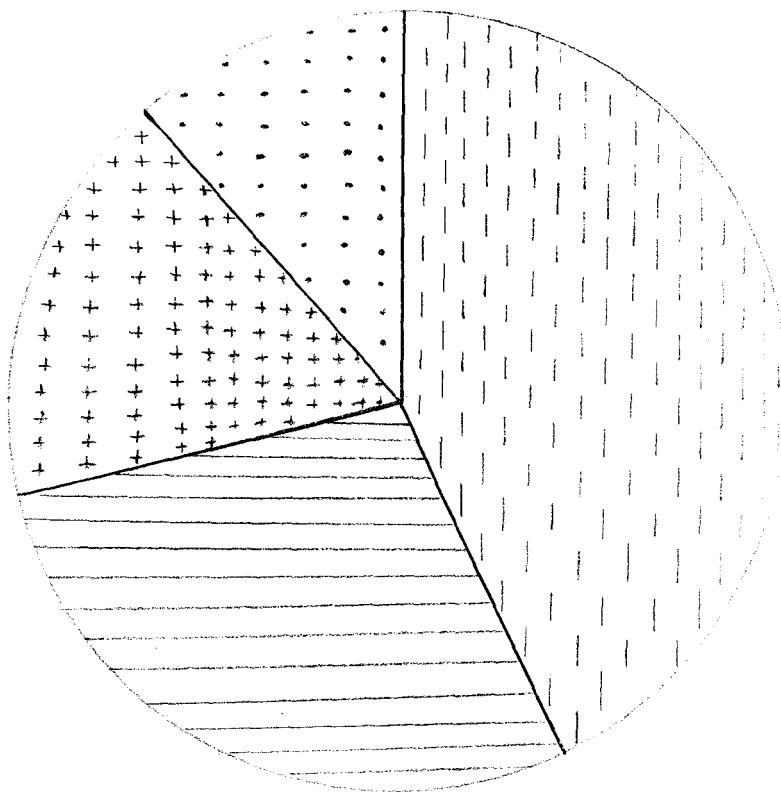
Exercise and physical well being was also seen to be the province of the schoolmaster and mistress, who were ordered to take all the children out for exercise for at least one hour every morning and evening.³⁶⁵ By the end of the 1850s the number of children in the workhouse school continued to gradually decline. For example between Michaelmas 1858 and Michaelmas 1859 there had been a decrease of 13.9% in total numbers, and from Michaelmas 1859 to Michaelmas 1860 the number of children in the workhouse school stabilised at a total of 34, which

represents a decrease of 20.9% on the figures for 1858.³⁶⁶

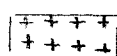
The breakdown of figures for the half year ending 21st April 1860 are typical of those for the late 1850s and show that the greatest number of children in the workhouse were girls under the age of ten. However once the girls reached the age of ten, their numbers declined rapidly, due to the fact that many went into service. Boys, on the other hand, followed the reverse pattern, the larger number being aged over ten years, employment not being so readily found for them as for the girls. Indicative of this was that by 1879 £1 10s 0d was granted to each pauper boy going into service to buy him suitable clothes for his new employment.

figure 10

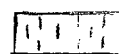
Pie chart to show the composition of children in Nantwich workhouse for the half year ending 21st April 1860



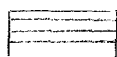
KEY:



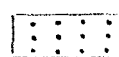
Boys UNDER
10



367
Girls UNDER
10



Boys OVER
10



Girls OVER
10

Two incidents serve to show that the Nantwich Guardians were rather slow to adopt the recommendations of the central board in relation to the care and training of children as had been the case in other areas of workhouse life. Firstly industrial training was not introduced until May 1859 when the females were employed in the workhouse laundry, and the boys were set to work on the garden and general outdoor work, and '... almost metaphysical qualities were attributed to spade husbandry as a form of moral training.'³⁶⁸ Both forms of 'training' also had the dual advantage that the work undertaken would be of direct economic benefit to the workhouse, which must have helped persuade the guardians of its ultimate usefulness. Secondly, although the Poor Law Commission, and then the Poor Law Board, had warned guardians of the dangers of the 'contamination of the young and susceptible' by those who were hardened in the ways of poverty, it was not until March 1866 that the desirability of a schoolgirl's day room was first suggested which would aid classification and the girls' morals would not be 'so much injured by the influence of the young women.'³⁶⁹

It was in December 1859 that the Nantwich Guardians enquired of neighbouring unions what hours they observed for tuition and recreation in their workhouse schools, in the hope of framing a set of rules for Nantwich to follow.³⁷⁰ Northwich Union provided the model which Nantwich adopted:-

Time-table to be followed in Nantwich Workhouse school

	<u>Summer</u>	<u>Winter</u>
<u>To rise</u>	6 a.m.	7 a.m.

	<u>Summer</u>	<u>Winter</u>
<u>To bed</u>	younger children	older children
	7 p.m.	8 p.m.
<u>School</u>	9 a.m.	- 11.45 a.m.
<u>Hours</u>	2 p.m.	- 4 p.m.

Intermediate hours except meal times - children allowed to play.

<u>Summer</u> <u>and</u> <u>Winter</u>	Children taken for a walk on Tuesday morning and Friday afternoon - weather permitting 371
--	---

While standards of education and training in the workhouse were being debated by the guardians what was the position regarding the education of children whose parents were in receipt of out-relief? As was the case in other areas of workhouse life, such as medicine, while the provision made for paupers in the workhouse could often be found to be wanting, facilities outside the house were often as bad or non-existent.

figure 11

Table to show the number of children between the ages of 3-15 attending day school who were supported on out-relief on 1st July 1859 and 1869 in Nantwich.

Year	Parents paid for day school	Poor Rate paid for day school	Attended charity school	Not at school	At work
1859	28.5%	-	29%	24%	18.5%
1869	44%	2%	12.2%	31%	10.5%

Source: Parl. papers 1860 LVIII (232)
Parl. papers 1870 LVIII (33)

The above chart shows that between 1859 and 1869 the overall percentage of children supported on out-relief receiving some sort of education did not change greatly: 57.5% in 1859 and 58.2% in 1869. However where they received their education

did change. In the intervening decade the percentage of children attending charity school fell greatly while the number of parents who paid for their children to go to a day school consequently rose. Also the guardians had, since 1855 had the power to pay the school fees of children supported on out-relief. By 1869 in Nantwich 1 in every 50 children supported on out-relief had their fees paid by the guardians. However an important point to note was that there had been little change in the intervening period in the percentage of children who were not at school or were at work, and so were in receipt of education: 41.5% in 1859 and 42.5% in 1869. So while inspectors and certain guardians were constantly battling for improvements in the education provided for inmates, nearly one third of the children supported on out-relief were in receipt of no education whatsoever in 1869. It was in an attempt to rectify this obvious deficiency that in 1873 education was made a mandatory condition of outdoor relief, and school cards had to be produced showing the child's attendance at school for the previous week before relief could be received.³⁷²

During the 1860s the question arose concerning whether individual district schools, formed by a combination of Unions, might serve the needs of their pauper inmates better than workhouse schools. These schools would prevent the 'contamination' of children by adult paupers and provide:

... the means of preventing the propogation
of the hereditary taint of pauperism ...
they would not be daily taught the lesson of
dependence of which the whole apparatus of a
workhouse is the symbol³⁷³

Questions of cost and accessibility held back the growth of

such schools and as a result a debate developed concerning whether it would be possible to amalgamate smaller rural workhouse schools to form district schools. However '... Poor Law Inspectors became increasingly convinced of the practical advantages of encouraging piecemeal improvements in the workhouse school.'³⁷⁴ Inspector Doyle joined in the above debate and referred to Nantwich Workhouse school in support of his argument to retain such schools. He stated that the results of the school were '... not by any means unfavourable,'³⁷⁵ and that during ten years 24 boys and 13 girls had been sent out into service, and not one of them had been returned 'in consequence of misconduct.' The workhouse chaplain submitted the following evidence to support Inspector Doyle's argument:

... the workhouse school has worked well and been really useful whenever the children have had a fair time in the house; and ... several children [in the workhouse] would be surpassed only by the 1st class of our first rate National schools for intelligence and good conduct.³⁷⁶

Inspector Doyle was at pains to emphasise that children educated in the workhouse turned out on average 'quite as well as the children who are educated at twice, and in some cases, three times the expense in district schools.'³⁷⁷ He also stressed that workhouse schools were more advantageous as rural unions were so far apart, and children moved in and out of the workhouse so quickly, that circumstances favoured their continuance. Also he stressed the fact that if only district schools were allowed, he estimated that 52% of children would not be eligible to attend them and would still remain in workhouses with no educational provision.³⁷⁸ No such district

schools were established in South Cheshire and by 1866 the number of children attending the workhouse school was 36, this figure not being appreciably different to those of the late 1850s and early 1860s.³⁷⁹ However by late 1869 the number of children in the school had reached 65, 'a number greatly in excess of the schoolroom accommodation, and far too many to be managed by one teacher.'³⁸⁰ The supply of clothing, especially to the boys, was also described as deficient. Problems relating to overcrowding and a lack of facilities were emerging in relation to the children and their education and well being, just as it had in relation to the sick. Did the Nantwich Guardians exhibit appreciably different tactics and policies to help deal with this supposedly 'favoured class'? The fact that there were 31 boys and 38 girls attending the workhouse school in November 1869 represented an increase of 101% compared to the same period in 1860. The total number of boys had increased by 103%, and the total number of girls by 100% compared with the figures for 1860.³⁸¹ This number of pupils was described as being injurious both to the health of the teacher and pupils, and it was suggested by the Poor Law Inspector that a schoolmaster should be appointed. However before a decision was made on whether or not to appoint a new schoolmaster other solutions to help cope with the sheer numbers were considered. For example it was suggested that some children could be sent to the National school. However, when approached, the teachers of the National school said that to take children would impair the efficiency of their school and parents would object. Education for the paupers was considered a good idea as long as it did not start to infringe on that provided

for non-paupers.

Another suggestion to help ease numbers at the workhouse school was that some of the pauper children should be farmed out, as practiced by other unions. Faversham was cited as an example and details were given of how the guardians allowed 3s 0d per week for food, and 10s 0d per month for clothes and the care and education of children. This union was written to for advice on the matter and while they did not want to discourage Nantwich they pointed out that in order for the system to work there had to be 'rigid supervision of the children's education and upbringing.'³⁸² Lord Tollemache, Chairman of the Board of Guardians, believed that this scheme would be a good idea, but others felt that the cottages in Cheshire were not suitable for the adoption of this system due to their overcrowding.

Another suggestion centred around an idea followed at Swinton, Lancashire, where a large institution had been built to receive pauper children from all the unions in the county, but as that idea had failed it was finally decided to appoint a new schoolmaster. While the large number of children in the workhouse school continued to cause consternation, one of the guardians, Mr Martin Heath, drew attention to the fact that in his opinion some children were in fact too small to be at school and he suggested 'that they be taken out of the room and be given dolls to play with instead of books.'³⁸³ The bigger boys could then be taken out to do weeding, leaving only 30 pupils in the classroom. The figures might well be manipulated, but the problem was not going to go away.

While the Poor Law Commissioners had all agreed that educating the poor lay at the heart of attacking future pauperism, the main stumbling block lay once again at the local level in the fact that educating the paupers meant spending money. The fact that Nantwich Workhouse needed a schoolmaster was met with the response that it was 'Too expensive to have a qualified teacher',³⁸⁴ despite the fact that grants were received to help pay the salary. Once again the theory of good practice from the 'central body' floundered when local guardians were faced with spending more money.

One further solution offered by Mr Heath was that one of the girls in the workhouse, aged 15, who was too poorly to go to work could help the teacher. This response to the problem gives some insight into how important education was seen to be by some local guardians. However not everyone agreed with Mr Heath's suggestion and indeed the Chairman, Mr Johnson, said he thought Mr Heath was in error and indeed was surprised at his suggestion as ' he had 40 years experience as a Sunday school teacher.'³⁸⁵ It was pointed out that to employ a schoolmaster would in fact cost the union probably less than one farthing in the pound as the rest of the cost would come from the country. However as several guardians persisted the 'least expensive method should always be tried first.'³⁸⁶

How did the Nantwich Guardians deal with the education of pauper inmates in relation to the dilemma that constantly dogged issues relating to the administration of the Poor Law, i.e. that relief should not raise the pauper above the condition of the independent working classes? Mr R. N. Owen, one of the Nantwich Guardians stated '... that children in the workhouse

received as good an education as the children of most poor people outside' and he thought that it was a manifest injustice that they should give the children in that house a better education than parents of the working classes could afford to give their children.³⁸⁷ Mr Heath was of the opinion that a teacher could control and teach between 50 and 90 children, and that if numbers approached 90, then a pupil teacher could help. He had apparently spoken to an incumbent of nearby Coppenhall, who said there were 120 children in Coppenhall taught by one master and two pupil teachers. Once again the question of quality and what was best for the children was not of paramount importance to some guardians. The very fact that such a situation existed nearby and functioned well enough on the surface, was seen as justification for it to be cited as an example good enough for Nantwich Union to follow. Mr Heath concluded '... he was only trying to do what was right and fair to the children in the house and the ratepayers outside. (Hear, Hear.)'

A committee was set up to consider the problem of how to deal with the large number of children in the workhouse school and reported back some two weeks later. The suggestion to appoint a schoolmaster was said to be '... so repugnant to the board that he [the chairman, W. Tollemache] did not think of pressing it.'³⁸⁸ As to the 'problem' of the guardians being 'unjust' in giving the workhouse children a better education than those children of the independent poor outside, W. Tollemache commented:

He had no wish to give them any better education than the poor children out of the workhouse, but he believed that they

should have an equally good education because if they turned these children out of the workhouse with a slighted education he knew they would come back to that house at the first difficulty that they met within life. But if they gave the children a good sound education they became self-reliant, and after a time they blended with the population and you heard no more of them.³⁸⁹

Mr Edwards, a member of the committee formed to look at the problem of educating the children in Nantwich Workhouse, reported that there were 61 children in the workhouse school:

47.5% (11 = able bodied boys able to work on the land.
(18 = boys who were not able to work on the land,
but could read

(7 = girls who were able to go out and work as they
(could wash, knit, and sew.
52.4% (10 = girls who were not able to go out to work, but
(they could read, sew, and knit.
(15 = small girls who could only go through their
(letters.

After having visited Nantwich Workhouse Mr Edwards was of the opinion that a single schoolmistress could cope with the above pauper children, '... as he did not think it was justified to employ a schoolmaster for just 29 boys',³⁹⁰ and he felt it was important that little boys and girls should be taught by a woman. Mr Edwards therefore devised a plan whereby the schoolmistress would not have more than 30 or 40 in her class, and he believed that 'the schoolmistress would be very well satisfied with that arrangement.'³⁹¹ His plan revolved around the workhouse porter who, he assured everyone, 'was a very well educated man' and he would take the responsibility of educating the older boys himself by taking them with him on the land.

Mr Bateman, another local guardian, felt that keeping the children in the workhouse, as they had done in the past, meant that they came to look on it as their home and so they were

actually encouraging pauperism. His solution to the problem was to appeal to any guardians that if they wanted a servant girl or boy, they should look to see if there was anyone suitable in the workhouse, before trying cottages in their own neighbourhood.

All the above schemes indicate how loathe the guardians were to spend money on employing a schoolmaster, and shows to what extent they would devise methods whereby the number in the workhouse school could be reduced by redistributing the elder and younger children around the house, under the responsibility of various individuals.

Eventually, after much discussion, a schoolmaster was employed, but in September 1872 both the schoolmaster and mistress resigned, and once again enquiries were made to the National School at Nantwich to see if the boys from the workhouse would be allowed to attend if the guardians paid the usual school fees. However once again the reply was that '... the National School Committee did not consider it desirable to admit boys from the workhouse into the National School.'³⁹² Within the space of two years the same problem of how to cope with children in the workhouse faced the guardians once again, and they resolved that the services of a schoolmaster be dispensed with and that a schoolmistress be employed.³⁹³ Within two weeks a schoolmistress had been appointed on a salary of £20 per annum plus maintenance in the workhouse. Once again, against the express advice of the Poor Law Inspectors two years previously, only one teacher was employed, cost again proved the deciding factor. However one month later the Local Government Board '... desired to be informed of the grounds upon

which the guardians proposed to dispense with the services of a schoolmaster,' the reason being given that the number of children in the workhouse 'had much decreased' and the guardians believed this decline would be permanent, as usually the winter months were the worst.³⁹⁴ This viewpoint was greeted with caution by the Local Government Board who only agreed to this arrangement for a six month period, after which a report on its efficiency was to be made to them.³⁹⁵ The arrangement was obviously not a satisfactory one, as in April, just six months after appointment, the schoolmistress resigned and her job was advertised with the salary increased from £20 to £25 per annum.³⁹⁶ As no applications were received, another advertisement was placed in May 1873 for a schoolmaster to teach both boys and girls at £30 per annum, and he was appointed in June 1873.³⁹⁷ However it is not clear why this man left suddenly, because in August 1873 it is noted in the Minute Book that a 'schoolmaster was appointed' and the clerk was authorised to give John Cooper, an inmate at the workhouse, a testimonial relating to his good conduct during the time he acted as a temporary schoolmaster.³⁹⁸

The creation of cheap and efficient education in rate-aided board schools created after the Elementary Education Act of 1870 did not mean that the workhouse school was immediately wound down. Indeed in 1879 the Inspector of Schools reported a 'decided improvement' in the workhouse school at Nantwich. Discipline was described as excellent and there was a '... spirit of earnest work manifested by the children one and all which speaks volumes for the moral influence exercised by the teacher.'³⁹⁹ It was during 1879 that plans were made for a new

Children's Home and School at the workhouse, to be opened in 1880 at a cost of £3,500. An unfortunate image of the new building is conjured up by the statement that instead of the new playground being fenced in by a wall '... it be enclosed with unclimbable iron palisading.'⁴⁰⁰ The first floor of the new building contained school rooms, day rooms, for boys and girls, a dining hall, an apartment for the schoolmistress, kitchens etc. The second floor consisted of bedrooms and a maximum of 60 children could be accommodated in the new buildings. To inculcate a sense of self-sufficiency, not to mention keeping the costs down, the new school was painted by the inmates.⁴⁰¹

In spite of the new school buildings and reports of the excellent work in the workhouse school, the guardians were still dogged by a high turnover of teachers, who often only stayed for a short time. The board constantly strove to find a couple who would provide stability. For example in January 1886 the schoolmistress and industrial trainer both resigned and the positions were advertised as suitable for a man and wife, or brother and sister, at £35 per annum each, plus apartments in the children's home.⁴⁰² However by June 1887 the schoolmistress and industrial trainer had resigned once again.⁴⁰³ The salary of the industrial trainer did not increase, as one might have expected in order to attract better applicants, indeed by 1895 when another new industrial trainer was appointed his salary was £25 per annum, plus furnished apartments, rations and washing.⁴⁰⁴

That the running of the school should continue even in times of epidemics is exemplified when a temporary schoolmaster

was appointed in 1896 during an epidemic of scarlet fever. He was paid 2s 6d per hour, but he was not to exceed three hours per day.⁴⁰⁵

Just as the guardians had difficulty in securing and retaining good schoolmasters, so the quality of the industrial trainer was questioned in November 1902, when he was cautioned 'for not carrying out his duties',⁴⁰⁶ and in 1908 the salary of the industrial trainer had fallen to £20 per annum.⁴⁰⁷

Apart from educating the poor, how did the guardians deal with problem children who did not conform to normal workhouse regulations? Increasingly in the 1890s the Nantwich Board of Guardians tried to send children who were classed as refractory to industrial schools, such as the one at Ardwick Green, Manchester. However these attempts were not always successful because of the pressure of numbers in the industrial schools, and then institutions like the Manchester and Salford Boys and Girls Refuge and Homes, and Children's Aid Society were resorted to, who would accept youngsters upon the receipt of £10 per annum.⁴⁰⁸ Similarly the Emigration Home for Boys at Strangeways Manchester, also received pauper children from Nantwich at a rate of £13 per annum.⁴⁰⁹

Dishonesty was one reason for sending young people to industrial schools. When three boys ran away from the Children's Home after attending school one Sunday, they were brought back by the Master and told that if they caused any more trouble they would be sent to an industrial school.⁴¹⁰ One George Parry who was transferred from Nantwich Workhouse to the Manchester and Salford Boys and Girls Refuge 'requested' to join an emigration party to Canada. The Society stated

that they found him '... to be suitable in every way and would be likely to do well in Ontario.'⁴¹¹ The Nantwich Guardians agreed to pay the £10 cost of his emigration, outfit, and passage, which then relieved them of all further financial responsibility towards the lad. Indeed the board of guardians were positively encouraged to send pauper children abroad because once their passage had been paid they had effectively freed themselves of further financial burden. The Manchester and Salford Boys Home frequently wrote to the Nantwich Guardians asking if there were any suitable pauper children that could go on the next sailings to Canada.⁴¹²

Children frequently absconded from the workhouse and were often found begging in nearby villages such as Bunbury, and were then returned to the workhouse.⁴¹³ In 1896 for example, two boys who had previously absconded, did so again but this time to Stafford. They were brought back at a cost of 16s 8d and enquiries were made to send the boys to different industrial schools.⁴¹⁴ The two boys, together with a third miscreant were sent by the Nantwich Guardians to the Manchester and Salford Boys Home, and from there they were sent to Canada.⁴¹⁵ Five months later one boy wrote to the guardians from Canada '... expressing his satisfaction and gratitude for the situation that had been found for him [on a farm].'⁴¹⁶ The Manchester and Salford Boys Home kept the Union well informed of the fortunes of paupers who had been sponsored for emigration and in 1902 their Canadian agent wrote to say that one boy, who had emigrated five years earlier, had secured work in the Pan American Exhibition for the season.⁴¹⁷

While the guardians were active in sponsoring the emigration of paupers, and so ridding themselves of their future financial burden, there was on occasions a sense of impatience with the Local Government Board's strict interpretation of the rights of the guardians to become involved in such transactions. For example in 1902 the guardians proposed to assist with the emigration of a boy to Belgium. However the Local Government Board wrote to the guardians to remind them that they had no legal authority to use money from the poor rates to pay for the expense of sending the pauper to Belgium. As one of the guardians could not understand the objections raised, and as further correspondence with the Local Board would be 'tedious and troublesome' he paid for the boy's emigration himself and '... would free the guardians of future liability for the boy's education and maintenance.'⁴¹⁸

The board of guardians were also held responsible for the misbehaviour of paupers who they had arranged apprenticeships for. For example one pauper apprentice ran away from his employer, who as a result wished the indentures cancelled. As a punishment the Master of Nantwich Workhouse placed the boy on a fishing smack at Grimsby, which was considered to be the '... best place for him as he was a very naughty boy' and organisations like the Wahond Memorial Smacks Boys Home and Seamen's Institute wrote to unions such as Nantwich asking for boys to be shipped on the Great Yarmouth fishing smacks.⁴¹⁹

At the 22nd Annual Conference of the North West Poor Law District held at Chester in October 1896, the topic of how best to deal with young paupers was discussed at length.

Mr H. J. Hagger of Liverpool spoke of the advantages of putting

boys in the navy and mercantile marines, while girls could be boarded out and supervised by ladies. He cited the successes of the Goliath on the Thames, and the Indefatigable on the Mersey, a training ship for non-delinquent orphan and poor boys who readily made transfers from the training ships to the navy and marines. The Admiralty had a surplus of sturdy, old, wooden-wall vessels which were readily turned into floating reformatories and training vessels. By 1874 there were seven such reformatory ships, on loan from the Admiralty, in service around the coast of Britain, and local guardians soon extended the idea to include training vessels for paupers.⁴²⁰ At the conference the attention of the guardians was drawn to the fact that the navy was crying out for men, yet no effort was made to attract boys, especially pauper boys, to a career at sea.

The conference adopted a resolution in favour of placing a training ship for workhouse boys on the Mersey.⁴²¹ Girls on the other hand could often be sent to manufacturers, and domestic service offered unlimited openings '... and most of them turned out well',⁴²² but most of the discussion at the conference showed the greater difficulty lay in disposing of boys.

When the content of the North Western Conference was reported to the Nantwich Guardians, Mr Dutton stated that he did not think that the proposed ship on the Mersey would be of any great advantage to Nantwich and was better suited for places like Liverpool, Hull, Newcastle, and London, where boys were brought up to a seafaring life.⁴²³ However as Nantwich Union had on several occasions been unsuccessful in getting boys on such a training vessel, the board did not want it to go forward that Nantwich was not in favour of such a venture. In fact at

that time they had a boy waiting for a vacancy on just such a training vessel.

In May 1897 a meeting was held at Manchester Town Hall for representatives of each union in Lancashire and Cheshire to consider the practicality of securing a training ship on the Mersey primarily for the use of the two counties.⁴²⁴ By 1901 circular letters to the Local Board of Guardians pointed out the advantages of training ships for the instruction and maintenance of pauper boys.⁴²⁵ By November 1901 a report from the Clerk of the Peace for Cheshire called the attention of all guardians to the training ship 'Clio' which was stationed in the Menai Straits. Clio was certified as an industrial school and was available for boys from workhouses,⁴²⁶ and in 1913 the Master of Nantwich Workhouse was still obtaining magistrates orders to send boys to the training ship Clio.⁴²⁷

It is also recorded that on occasions the Master was instructed to administer corporal punishment to children. For example, the ringleaders of a group of boys who '... have lately given considerable trouble by absconding from the workhouse and playing truant from school' were given corporal punishment.⁴²⁸

The importance of industrial training and the advantages of teaching a trade to the young was also extended to the disabled. Frank Johnson of Crewe was an inmate of Henshaws Blind Asylum. Once he reached the age of sixteen Cheshire Education Committee agreed to retain him at the asylum to learn a trade on condition that the guardians would contribute half of the total fees which amounted to £26 5s 0d, to which the guardians agreed for a twelve month period, after which his case would be reconsidered.⁴²⁹

Children continued to be boarded out by the workhouse when it was considered expedient, but it was not until 1907 that it was minuted that '... in future the Relieving Officers furnish reports as to the sanitary condition of proposed homes for boarded out children.'⁴³⁰ Up until that point the main concern had been that the children were housed more conveniently in terms of cost than at the workhouse. Boarding out certainly provided a cheaper alternative to building extensions to accommodate ever increasing numbers in the childrens home. This practice had been formally recognised in 1889 as F. Duke has pointed out removed the children entirely from a Poor Law environment, but as Duke argues in many cases boarding out was '... probably little more than a disguised form of outdoor relief paid to relatives of the children.'⁴³¹ The problem of dealing with the growing number of pauper children was generally more acute in the towns of Nantwich, Monks Coppenhall and Church Coppenhall than in the rest of the union as a whole. For example the amount spent on boarding out children in the whole union between April 1895 - April 1896 amounted to £435 3s 11d, 43.7% of this total cost being attributable to Monks Coppenhall and Church Coppenhall, and 27.8% to Nantwich.⁴³² Cumulatively 71½% of the total cost of boarding out children in the whole of Nantwich Union resulted directly from the above three townships. As to how the cost of boarding out compared to the total expenditure on out relief, in Nantwich for example between 1892 - 1895 boarding out fees accounted for between 9.9% - 18% of the total expenditure on out relief, and in Monks Coppenhall and Church Coppenhall between 4.5% and 8% during the same period.⁴³³

While it was not until 1907 that any thought was given to the unsuitability and sanitary condition of the prospective homes for boarded out children, it appears that prior to this date the sanitary conditions of the Childrens Home within the workhouse left something to be desired, confirming the argument of R. G. Hodgkinson that 'crowded together with no means of isolation, some children were ill with one disease after another for years' and the children's homes and schools were 'hospitals rather than centres of education.'⁴³⁴ Indeed many of the problems of hygiene and sanitation encountered in the workhouse had merely been 'transferred' to the Children's Home under the guise of improved classification. For example in March 1895 Dr. Munro reported that there had been for 'some time past' an unusually large number of cases of eczema, ring-worm, and inflammation of the eyes, in the Childrens Home. In his opinion this building was 'much overcrowded' and that in a 'great many cases two children have to sleep in one small bed.'⁴³⁵ Also the number of staff to children was in Dr. Munro's opinion, insufficient. That these overcrowded and insanitary conditions had continued for some time is evident as Dr. Munro had identified the need for extra ventilation in the roof of the dormitories in 1891, but no action had been taken to improve conditions. As a result the many cases of opthalmia were attributed to overcrowding and improper ventilation.

The children were also affected by poor conditions in other parts of the workhouse too, and because the workhouse hospital was overcrowded, several children had to be moved into the fever wards because of the shortage of proper accommodation in the general wards.⁴³⁶ As a result of these complaints the

Building Committee was brought in to consider the ventilation problem, and four more beds were ordered for the hospital.

Later the same month there was a severe outbreak of diarrhoea at the workhouse school, whereby most of the children were affected and it was minuted that 'several important reports as to the arrangements (sanitary etc.,) of the school house '... had not yet [been] attended to,' and in 1902 Dr. Munro was still complaining of insufficient lavatories in the Childrens Home.⁴³⁷

That the number of children in Nantwich Workhouse had always been high is reflected in the census figures for the period:

<u>Year</u>	<u>Children under 15 in Nantwich Workhouse</u>	<u>Total number of inmates</u>	<u>% of inmates under 15</u>
1841	78	132	59
1851	62	150	41
1861	45	103	43½
1871	87	150	58
1881	84	220	38

figure 12

438

These figures clearly indicate that children under the age of fifteen consistently formed a high percentage of total inmates. That this trend continued into the 1890s is evident both from the figures that are available, and from the fact that the facilities for children were stretched to the limit. A period marked by high unemployment between April 1893 - April 1894 was also one of the worst years in the 1890s for the relief of children in the workhouse, and as appendix G shows

77% of the children receiving relief in the union workhouse came from the townships of Nantwich, Monks Coppenhall and Church Coppenhall, and 46% of these children came from the growing railway centre of Monks Coppenhall. After 1894 the total number of children in the Nantwich Workhouse fell gradually to a figure of 259 children having received relief between April 1896 - April 1897, but still 78% of this figure came from Nantwich, Monks Coppenhall, and Church Coppenhall, and 50% of this total originated from Monks Coppenhall.⁴³⁹

With the pressure of large numbers of children in the workhouse, the guardians became increasingly concerned with the problems of classification, especially for young girls of 'blameless character.' The guardians felt that 'insufficient care' was taken in the separation of these girls from women 'whose previous life had been such that their influence could scarcely fail to be prejudicial to those associated with them.'⁴⁴⁰ It did however, take some time to make any effective changes and only in 1901 were slight alterations made to try to better accommodate young girls. A day room was made into a childrens room, and an old laundry drying room was made into a day room for young women. However as the chairman explained these alterations did not help to solve the larger question of classification which the guardians were concerned about, and the £10 to effect these alterations was provided by an anonymous donor.⁴⁴¹

Just as boys from the workhouse were frequently passed on to other institutions, girls from Nantwich Workhouse were sent to the Rescue Home at Chester.⁴⁴² Also on occasions a girl or boy might be singled out by one of the guardians for

special treatment. For example Lady Tollemache, wife of Lord Tollemache of Peckforton Castle, an ex-officio guardian, took an interest in the case of Harriet Dykes, and paid for her to be sent to a sanatorium for consumption.⁴⁴³ Similarly a Miss Aspinall of Bunbury, asked permission to send William Welsh to the Royal Albert Asylum at her own expense, and the guardians expressed their admiration 'of such a spontaneous act of kindness.'⁴⁴⁴

In order to encourage the development of a self sufficient independent character 23 girls in the workhouse were put 'under the care of' Nantwich Girls Friendly Society, an organisation run by the Church of England, but which was interested only in 'respectable girls.'⁴⁴⁵

The guardians also had to cope with children who had been deserted and often the guardians arranged adoption. It was common practice for the guardians to give a child a surname derived from the place where they had been found, hence John Crewe Green and Mary Crewe are two examples.⁴⁴⁶ The police were always asked to help investigate the cases of desertion and a reward, usually £10 was offered to anyone who could help convict the parents. In the long term this £10 reward would have been a wise investment if it helped release them from the potential burden of indefinite maintenance. If the parents of a child could not be traced adoption was arranged as in the case of Mary Crewe where the foundling was to be handed over to a Mr Benson of Wigan, 'to be kept and maintained by him on his coming over to fetch her and sign an undertaking to keep, maintain, clothe and educate her, and to relieve the guardians of all responsibility.'⁴⁴⁷

The guardians also paid for children from the union to be admitted to orphanages, some of them at great distances from Cheshire. For example the guardians paid 8s 0d per week to a Wesleyan Methodist orphanage in London for two Crewe children.⁴⁴⁸ On another occasion six girls were sent to the St. Vincent's Orphanage in Hereford, and two boys to an orphanage in Leominster, with the cost of their maintenance ranging from 2s 6d to 4s 0d per week.⁴⁴⁹ Another boy was sent to Dr. Barnado's in London, his rail fare costing 18s 0d.⁴⁵⁰ However, once an adoption was arranged by the guardians it did not guarantee total freedom of responsibility for the child. In 1900 for example, the Hind family of Warrington adopted a girl from Nantwich workhouse. Some twelve months later Mrs Hind wrote to the guardians stating that due to the sickness of her husband she was unable to maintain the child any longer without some assistance from the guardians. As a result the guardians resolved that the child should be returned to the House.⁴⁵¹

Such was the burden of children in the workhouse that once Webbs Orphanage was established by the railway company in Crewe the children of inmates were often admitted to that institution.⁴⁵²

Apart from education and training, what facilities were made available for the children's recreation? The occasional 'treat' was arranged for them, sometimes at the instigation of the guardians, but often as the result of an offer from a local institution, or interested local person. For example in 1852 at the instigation of the schoolmaster, elder boys whose behaviour had been satisfactory during the week, were allowed to

leave the workhouse on their own for a few hours on a Saturday afternoon.⁴⁵³ Also a pole and swings were procured for the amusement of the boys '... at an expense not exceeding £4.'⁴⁵⁴ As already stated Lord and Lady Tollemache of Peckforton Castle took an interest in the children of the workhouse. An annual fete was held at Beeston Castle, to which the schoolmaster, mistress, and children of the neighbourhood and workhouse were invited. Lord Tollemache always gave the children a treat on this occasion. Similarly the workhouse children were annually invited to the rural fete at Dorfold Park, outside Nantwich, the home of Henry J. Tollemache M.P., and ex-officio guardian. Miss Tollemache organised the treat for the children and was noted for the 'repeated kindness shown by her to them.'⁴⁵⁵ Baroness Schröder of Rookery Hall, wife of Baron Von Schröder another ex-officio guardian, also regularly invited the children to the Hall for a treat. It appears to have been the wives of guardians, and after 1894, (following the abolition of the property qualification which enabled women to be elected to the Board of Guardians) female guardians, that concerned themselves with the welfare of the children by supervising the boarding out arrangements and special treats.

The schoolmaster often made suggestions to the guardians on behalf of the children, for example in 1859 it was suggested that the children in the workhouse be given a 'few holidays' to which there was no reply from the guardians,⁴⁵⁶ it was only in 1866 that the children from the workhouse were allowed to attend Divine Service on Sunday morning in St. Mary's Parish Church, Nantwich, and in 1881 it was decided that the boys in the house should have a suit of clothes for Sundays.⁴⁵⁷ However by 1900

it was decided that the children should not be allowed to attend public worship in the workhouse on the Sunday evening. Some of the guardians stated that they could not see any harm resulting from the children attending, especially as the services were 'very heartily appreciated by the inmates.'⁴⁵⁸ However it was felt by the majority that the spiritual needs of the children were well catered for, and so the attendance at Sunday evening service stopped.

July and August 1879 saw an unprecedented level of activity in organised events for the workhouse children, both by officers of the union and outside bodies. For example, permission was given to take the children to New Brighton, and the Master undertook to provide the money to get them there and back.⁴⁵⁹ An invitation from the Band of Hope to attend one of their demonstrations was accepted and as a result an invitation to a fete held by the Nantwich Female Friendly Society had to be refused, as they were both on the same day.⁴⁶⁰ Also in August the workhouse children attended the Crewe Flower Show and went to the Wesleyan treat at Henhull.⁴⁶¹ In 1880 the children were invited to attend the school children's celebration of the school centenary at Crewe, and the trip to the seaside was once again repeated with the Master obtaining funds for the day trip.⁴⁶²

There is no mention of toys being bought for the younger children, and again it rested on the generosity and thoughtfulness of local people to donate unwanted toys, illustrated papers.⁴⁶³ It was at the invitation of certain cricketers from Crewe that in 1886 the children were taken to Rhyl,⁴⁶⁴ and on Jubilee Day in 1887 the children were allowed fruit or sweets to the value of 3d each, at the discretion of the Master.⁴⁶⁵

An invitation from the Lyceum Theatre, Crewe, prompted a visit to the pantomime, but in 1902 the visit to the pantomime had to be cancelled due to an outbreak of infectious disease in the house.⁴⁶⁶

The children were not simply encouraged to take these treats for granted and they did help raise money for others. The workhouse boys 'quite spontaneously' raised money for the Soldiers and Sailors Families Association at a concert which the boys arranged. 10s 7d was raised and this was to be given to a poor soldier invalided home, or to a boy or girl whose father had been killed in war. The guardians said the boys had shown loyal spirit and hoped '... that they would grow up to be loyal defenders of their country whether at home or abroad.'⁴⁶⁷

In 1913 the King and Queen visited Crewe, and several gentlemen made arrangements for the children of the workhouse to be taken to Crewe, places were reserved for them on a stand provided by Crewe Education Committee. The children were supplied with refreshments but it was emphasised that no expense would be incurred by the guardians, so permission for the trip was granted.⁴⁶⁸

The treats that the children in the workhouse received were largely generated by the good will of interested local people and institutions, not to mention the wives of prominent local guardians. The overriding proviso, however, for granting permission for such outings was always that they should not cost the guardians anything.

In 1913 the Poor Law Institutions Order, prohibited children between the ages of 3 - 16 from remaining in a mixed workhouse for more than six weeks. As P. Thane has emphasised

this act meant that '... a large proportion of one of the largest groups traditionally provided for by the Poor Law had been substantially removed from direct association with it.'⁴⁶⁹

Resulting from this act the idea of providing cottage homes for the children was examined in 1914. Rented property could accommodate '... a considerable number of girls' and at the annual rental of £45 this was considered an 'Easy way to remove children from the workhouse.'⁴⁷⁰

M. Crowther has argued that '... as an educational institution the Poor Law schools seem never to have succeeded' because they '... turn[ed] out the children as nothing better than unskilled labourers likely to earn the lowest wages,'⁴⁷¹ who had to rely on outdoor relief in hard times.

F. Duke also concludes that '... the tenor of Poor Law schooling was genuinely and uniformly utilitarian, and rarely rose above the requirement of efficiency in preparing the children for independent service at an early age.'⁴⁷² However if judged by the standards of the time, which is the only standard by which it can be judged, the education provided in the workhouse was in many respects no worse than the education provided in the elementary schools of the day. Evidence relating to the Mulhauser writing models indicate an awareness of current practice, but what proved to be the main drawback of the system was the fact that many children did not experience the education for any consistent length of time as families left to seek work and independence - the dilemma being that that was the essential aim of the workhouse. Also problems of overcrowding and disease plagued the children's home just as they did the workhouse. Education like health care, had in many respects, been tackled

positively by the Poor Law Commissioners, but many of their suggestions were often criticised and reacted against at local level. Inevitably many problems were encountered because, as with health care, the principle of less eligibility should not have applied. However in reality, as soon as even a very basic education and training service was established, this provision often surpassed the education received by many children of independent labourers, who because of poverty and a desire to avoid the workhouse, relied on the wages of even small children to provide '... the 1s 6d or 2s 0d per week,' ... 'His usefulness and not his welfare is the thing considered.'⁴⁷³ So the educational element of the Poor Law, like health care, while seen to be important and necessary in terms of the long term elimination of reliance on poor relief was bound to be eternally dogged in the minds of local guardians by doubts relating to whether they were exceeding their duties towards the poor.

Nantwich Union often found itself grappling with problems that in terms of facilities they were far from capable of dealing with. The cost together with sheer numbers, and the reluctance of local guardians to wholeheartedly implement improvements, meant that for many years education and training facilities were far from ideal for so many young people gathered together in one workhouse school. The supplementary policy referred to by R. G. Hodgkinson was retarded by all the same factors that impeded progress in the workhouse itself.

As soon as the Poor Law entered into the field of the education and training of paupers as part of their 'package' for dealing with poverty, they were inevitably going to surpass, and progress beyond, the very basic educational facilities then

existing for independent labourers. It is ironic that while it was decided that less eligibility should not apply to children that local guardians were in fact restrained by the prevailing conditions of independent labourers, and could not or would not grasp that if progress was to be made then this strait-jacket would have to be broken away from. Cost lay at the heart of the problem, and increasingly more central direction and financial help was called for as the size and scale of the problem was fully appreciated, and was still being called for at the turn of this century.

Attempts to improve the quality of workhouse life

What evidence is there to suggest that the Nantwich Guardians were aware of the spartan life style and deprivation of workhouse life, and in what ways did they attempt to ameliorate this, and if not, how did other members of the community step in to help?

Apart from the medical 'luxuries' that were gradually made available to inmates, either through the generosity of individuals or by more enlightened guardians, other treats and extras for the rest of the inmates were largely supplied as a result of individual gifts from the community. Such examples illustrate, as N. McCord has emphasised, how official and unofficial activity could be closely linked in practice as local guardians '... chafed under the restricted categories of relief which they were able to provide under the official rules.'⁴⁷⁴ The Churchwardens of Weston gave fruit to the workhouse inmates,⁴⁷⁵ and Nantwich Unitarian Church gave flowers;⁴⁷⁶ fruit flowers, books and papers forming the most common gifts to the workhouse.

Other examples of benefactors to the workhouse included the Liberal Unionist Club, who gave vegetables and books, the girls of St. Paul's Sunday school sent a box of toys, and a Miss Barnett of Cheltenham supplied a small library and wall cards for the tramp's ward.⁴⁷⁷ Concerts were also held to help raise money to pay for 'extras' for the inmates, for example two concerts were held in 1903 to help pay for a pianoforte and American organ.⁴⁷⁸

On special occasions the guardians allowed the inmates to have a treat, usually to mark a royal occasion where the emphasis was placed on patriotism and loyalty to Queen and country, or at Christmas time. On Jubilee Day 1887 a pint of beer was given to each man and the women received half a pint. If any of the inmates did not want beer they could have one ounce of tobacco instead, and non-smokers were allowed one ounce of tea. The children received sweets.⁴⁷⁹

Modifications were once again made to the workhouse discipline and diet to celebrate the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria in 1897 and the usual Christmas fare was served. An additional allowance was also made of 2s 0d for each out-door pauper and 6d for each dependent child, both resident and non-resident to mark the anniversary.⁴⁸⁰ The inmates started Jubilee Day on the 24th June 1897, with breakfast of bread, butter, and tea. At 12-30 p.m. roast beef and plum pudding was served in the dining hall by the guardians and their wives. After dinner, speeches were made before everyone assembled on the lawn to sing the national anthem, presents were given to all inmates: a pipe and handkerchief for men, and a handkerchief for women. Cricket bats, knives and 'other things' were given to the boys

and work baskets, dolls, skipping ropes, and balls to the girls. The very young received a doll. A large rocking horse, suitably inscribed, was presented to the Children's Home to mark the occasion, and tea consisted of bread, butter, and cake. The inmates were allowed to stay on the lawn until 8-30 p.m. while the Nantwich Brass Band played a 'good selection of music.'⁴⁸¹ Similar celebrations occurred to mark the coronation of King Edward VII, and Mr W. Eardley, a local guardian, gave each inmate a coronation medal.⁴⁸²

Apart from royal anniversaries, Christmas time provided the only other occasion when inmates were treated to special fare by the guardians. Christmas dinner consisted of roast beef, and plum pudding,⁴⁸³ and in 1901 Mr W. Eardley, announced 'it was his intention to supply the adult inmates of the house with beer to their dinner and supper on Christmas Day,'⁴⁸⁴ and usually a concert was given for the inmates by locals such as Mr Hoptroff and Mr and Mrs Kirkwood and Friends.⁴⁸⁵

Outdoor paupers in Nantwich received an extra 1s 0d and children 6d in addition to their ordinary relief to help celebrate Christmas,⁴⁸⁶ whereas West Ham Union allowed each permanent case relieved on their account in Nantwich 2s 6d extra for the festive season,⁴⁸⁷ and Poplar Union instructed that 3s 0d per adult and 1s 0d per child be paid on their behalf.⁴⁸⁸ Indeed in 1901 it was pointed out in the local press that indoor paupers fared better than the outdoor poor at Christmas, 'who after paying their rent often only has 1s 4d a week to live on.'⁴⁸⁹

The fact that one of the guardians was to provide beer for the inmates on Christmas Day was met with disapproval by

the National United Temperance Council, who wrote to ask the Nantwich Board not to allow intoxicating drink, pointing out that the majority of inmates were, in their opinion, in the workhouse because of drink and '... it was a mistaken kindness to give the paupers alcoholic beverages and so revive the old drink craving.'⁴⁹⁰ As an alternative the Nantwich Temperance Society offered to provide 240 bottles of assorted mineral waters, 96 half ounces of tobacco, and 2 lbs of tea on the condition that no intoxication was used. The board voted 22 in favour of beer for the inmates and 19 against. A description was given in the local press of the scene in the workhouse on Christmas Day 1901. The inmates were described as having '... an ample and liberal diet' and 'made merry throughout the day.' With regard to the allowance of beer '... whatever may be said on the other side for the principle at issue, [the beer] was greatly appreciated.' The bare walls of the dining hall were '... hidden under a wealth of evergreens and seasonable mottoes ... garlands of evergreens stretched from wall to wall, and the gas standards were quite elaborately decorated with multi coloured paper.' The wards of the men's and women's hospital 'were very prettily decorated' and the children's home was described as 'gay with decorations and mottoes.' Dinner was described as consisting of roast beef, potatoes, parsnips and carrots, plum pudding and beer. Children and imbeciles had similar fare with lemonade. 278 adults and children were in the workhouse on Christmas Day and after dinner oranges, sweets, nuts, and packets of tea, were given to the women and children and one ounce of tobacco to the men. Toys were provided for the children from a fund set up by the guardians. The day was

described as ending with a special tea consisting of plum cake bread, butter and cheese, and a smoking concert '... the inmates themselves furnishing the programme.'⁴⁹¹

The local press painted a very rosy picture of workhouse life on Christmas Day, but it is important to temper this picture with the realities of workhouse life throughout the year. While Christmas Day 1901 might have been 'the event of the year' and the inmates '... made merry throughout the day'⁴⁹² the medical officer had just six weeks previously complained of overcrowding in the women's hospital and young children's quarters that were detrimental to health.⁴⁹³

That the townspeople as well as the guardians were encouraged to donate items to the Christmas festivities is evident from the list of 17 names of people who gave papers, evergreens, oranges, crackers, tea, tobacco, toys and sweets. Also there were those who helped put on the concert and take the children to the Lyceum pantomime.⁴⁹⁴

Apart from special occasions the guardians, from the 1890s onwards, provided the occasional extra comfort for the inmates out of the poor rate, as workhouse discipline was gradually relaxed in relation to the elderly and children during this decade. Such concessions were not mandatory, but once again the central authority merely advised guardians that they could make such purchases if they wished. For example a supply of library books was obtained for the use of the inmates and officials at Nantwich, at a 'cheap rate' with the promise of a continual supply of fresh books.⁴⁹⁵

Also the fact that the composition of the board of guardians was changing during the 1890s helped to stimulate the

pressure for improvements to be made in the workhouse.

Mrs E. Hodgson, the wife of a local doctor was the first female guardian to represent Monks Coppenhall on the local board in 1891. Active in the field of education and the establishment of the cottage hospital, as well as Mayoress of Crewe during 1892-1893, she was interested in the work of the Liberal party.

The Nantwich Board was:

... strongly conservative in its methods and ideas and did not welcome at first so great an innovation as a lady guardian but Mrs Hodgson quickly dispelled the prejudice that existed, and in her quiet and unassuming way she soon made it manifest that a good deal of the business the Board met to transact lay solely in the province of a lady guardian.⁴⁹⁶

When the property qualification was abolished in relation to the election of guardians, the way was clear for an even wider circle of women as well as men to seek office and '... social reformers from all parties were increasingly seeking a seat on boards as an entry into local politics.'⁴⁹⁷

Ada Nield Chew is an example of just such a pressure for local reform. In 1894 she became the '... first guardian who was also a member of the Crewe Independent Labour Party' but as W. H. Chaloner has commented '... the financial question continued to determine the attitude of the majority of Crewe's representatives, Liberals and Conservatives alike.'⁴⁹⁸ In a series of five articles in the local press entitled 'The horrors of our workhouse system',⁴⁹⁹ Ada Nield Chew brought the realities of workhouse life to the public's attention, emphasising that while the system was 'expensive heavy and cumbersome in application it also proved to be 'demoralising degrading and

debasing' for those who applied. She raised the question that while pensions were given to soldiers and sailors why not to workers, as the vast majority of paupers were old, and emphasised that the workhouse diet was less nutritious than prison food.

Apart from her articles in the press Ada Nield Chew also campaigned vigorously for change at the board meetings of the guardians. For example she pressed for the diet of able bodied inmates to be varied from simply bread and gruel to include tea, bread, and butter, and that one dinner of meat, potatoes and pudding should be provided for inmates. She also pressed for the rule forbidding conversation between inmates at meal time to be abolished, together with the rule relating to distinctive dress.⁵⁰⁰ It was decided that the relaxation of talking at meal time was to be at the discretion of the Master.⁵⁰¹ No decision was made in 1897 relating to the other matters raised by Ada Nield Chew - the important fact was that she persisted to campaign and press the guardians for extras for the inmates in a way that had not been evident previously.

In conclusion the development of the new Poor Law in Nantwich Union from 1834 to 1914 illustrates time and again that the initial determination of the Poor Law Commissioners to introduce uniformity from a strong central body was thwarted by the local guardians. They were determined that they were not going to be dictated to, especially when this meant incurring extra expenses for ratepayers. The parsimony of local guardians led to many hardships for the poor, both mentally and physically in terms of overcrowding, disease, poor diet, run down buildings

and a lack of proper medical care. All these factors served to reinforce one another and cumulatively made the life of the poor in the workhouse one which every single person would have done anything humanly possible to avoid. As a result many people stayed out of the workhouse but endured dire need and suffering in order to retain their independence and respectability.

The evidence that the workhouse came to be dominated by the sick, old, infirm, and children, who could be found in practically every ward of the workhouse, reinforces the view that the 1834 Amendment Act misjudged not only the needs of the 1830s, but the future needs of the poor too.

The period between 1834 - 1870 saw the development of a repressive strategy for disciplining paupers within the general workhouse. However, as the evidence for Nantwich reveals, the fact that the majority of the inmates were not able bodied, meant that the policy of less eligibility in the workhouse created widespread problems that affected every class of pauper and not just the able bodied. The revelations of The Lancet brought these scandals to the public's attention, but the fact that many of the problems encountered in the workhouses of London were present in small provincial workhouses such as Nantwich, emphasised the depths to which the institution had sunk. From 1870 onwards improved classification and treatment, sometimes in specialist institutions, did develop slowly. However the Nantwich Guardians were forced along this road by the consistent nagging of the inspectorate. The fact that the guardians procrastinated meant the introduction of improvements were delayed: in the interim the poor continued to suffer.

It could be argued that the preoccupation of the local

guardians with economy reflected the fact that the 1834 Amendment Act failed to reform the financial basis of the Poor Law and so until 1865 the parish and not the union was responsible for assessing and collecting the poor rate. Until 1861 the assessment was based on the average annual amount of relief expended, as M. E. Rose defines it 'on its poverty rather than on its property.'⁵⁰² This system led to conflict between parishes with low rateable values and high relief expenditure and areas within the union with only a few paupers and a high rateable value. Hence friction developed between the rural parishes in Nantwich Union who tended to block proposals for change from guardians from Crewe, who until the turn of the century had limited representation on the Local Board, and yet were assessed for rating purposes far higher than the town of Nantwich. Despite this dilemma the majority of the local guardians found it very difficult to break away from the application of less eligibility, and tended too frequently to apply a personal yardstick in order to decide whether or not 'extras' should be purchased to ease the life of the inmates: invariably they were not.

Finally the problems encountered in the workhouse between 1834 and the end of the century in relation to the old, infirm, medicine, and education, led during the 1890s and early twentieth century to repeated calls for central government to take a more active financial role in this sphere, as the problem was seen to have clearly grown beyond the capabilities of the local guardians and ratepayers. More frugal administration at the local level was accepted as being inappropriate to deal with the magnitude of the problem, the dilemmas associated

with which will be examined in chapters 4 and 5. Also the fact that outdoor relief continued to be distributed during this period reflects firstly, that the local guardians refused to be dictated to by the central authority, and secondly that the reality of local poverty defied the strictures laid down in the 1834 Amendment Act. A fact that will be examined in chapter 4.

FOOTNOTES

CHAPTER THREE

1. M. E. Rose, 'The Relief of Poverty 1834-1914' (1972) p. 9
2. M. A. Crowther, The Workhouse System 1834-1929 The History of an English Institution (1981) p. 30
3. D. Fraser, (Editors' Comments) The New Poor Law in the Nineteenth Century (1976) p. 17
4. F. M. L. Thompson, The Rise of Respectable Society (1988) p. 350
5. A. F. Young & E. T. Ashton, British Social in the Nineteenth Century (1956) p. 46
6. A. Brundage, The Making of the New Poor Law - The Politics of inquiry, enactment and Implementation 1832-1839 (1978) p. 183
7. P. Thane, The Foundation of the Welfare State (1982) p. 293
8. A. Digby, British Welfare Policy: Workhouse to Workfare (1989) p. 38
9. M. A. Crowther, op. cit., p. 19
10. C.R.O. Chester Chronicle, MF 204/232 16th May 1834
11. ibid.
12. The Wirral Union began operation on May 16th 1836 followed by the Altincham Union on the 25th August 1836, and the Runcorn Union on the 26th August 1836
Second Annual Report of the Poor Law Commission For England and Wales (1836) p. 573
13. C.R.O. Chester Chronicle, 29th July 1836 MF204/233
14. Second Annual Report of the Poor Law Commissioners, op. cit., p. 3
15. Chester Chronicle 29th July 1836 op. cit.,
16. Letter from the Rev. James Beard, Rector of Cranfield Bedfordshire.
Second Annual Report of the Poor Law Commissioners. op. cit p. 546
17. C.R.O. Chester Chronicle, 23rd December 1836 MF 204/233
18. Parl. Papers 1840 XXXIX p. 100
Second Annual Report of the Poor Law Commissioners op. cit., p. 2

19. C.R.O. Chester Chronicle 15th June 1838 MF 204/234
20. Second Annual Report of the Poor Law Commissioners.
op. cit., p. 1
21. Parl. Papers 1840 XXXIX p. 100
Loan of £1000 from the trustees of Sarah Dutton.
Loan of £1000 from the trustees of Elizabeth Dutton
Loan of £1000 from the trustees of Ann Dutton
Loan of £1000 from Louisa Ann Wilson
Loan of £300 from Elizabeth Johnson
Loan of £700 from the executors of Ann Johnson
22. Second Annual Report of the Poor Law Commission
op. cit.,
23. C.R.O. Chester Chronicle 2nd June 1837 MF 204/233
24. ibid.
23 girls, 24 boys, 13 men, 32 women.
25. ibid.
26. In 1839 in England and Wales:
 - a) 31.8% of unions used old buildings to house the workhouse.
 - b) 54.6% of unions built new workhouses.
 - c) 7.2% had not yet started building/alterations
 - d) 6.3% declined to provide an adequate workhouse
 - e) 0.1% used the workhouse of another unionFifth Annual Report of the Poor Law Commission for England and Wales (1839) p. 188
27. See p. 65 *supra*.
28. Second Annual Report of the Poor Law Commission
op. cit., p. 445
29. C.R.O. Chester Chronicle 15th June 1838 MF 204/234
30. ibid.
31. ibid.
32. ibid.
33. A. Digby, British Welfare Policy op. cit., pp. 31-32
34. C.R.O. Chester Chronicle 15th June 1838 MF 204/234
35. ibid.
36. ibid.
37. ibid.
38. ibid.

39. see page 126
40. C.R.O. Chester Chronicle 15th June 1838 MF 204/234
41. ibid.
42. A. Digby, British Welfare Policy op. cit., p. 30
43. K. Williams, op. cit., p. 58
44. A. Digby, British Welfare Policy op. cit., p. 33
45. M. E. Rose, The Relief of Poverty, op. cit., p. 12
46. A. F. Young and E. T. Ashton, op. cit., p. 46
47. R. G. Hodgkinson, The Origins of the National Health Service (1967) p. 688
48. D. Ashforth, 'The Urban Poor Law' in The New Poor Law in the Nineteenth Century, Edited by D. Fraser, p. 130, p. 140
49. M. E. Rose, 'The New Poor Law in an Industrial Area' in the Industrial Revolution Edited by R. M. Hartwell (1970) p. 121
50. A. Brundage op. cit., p. 124
51. ibid p. 123
52. M. E. Rose, The New Poor Law in an Industrial Area op. cit., p. 122
53. M. A. Crowther, op. cit., p. 3
54. 8th Annual Report of the Poor Law Commissioners for England and Wales (1842) p. 128
55. M. A. Crowther op. cit., p. 113 p. 118
56. C.R.O. LGN 1/1 Nantwich Union Minute Book 15th October 1842 p. 66
57. ibid. 22nd October 1842 p. 70
58. ibid. 5th November 1842 p. 76
59. ibid.
60. ibid. 19th November 1842 p. 82
61. ibid. 26th November, 1842 p. 86
62. ibid. 3rd December 1842 p. 89
63. ibid. 31st December 1842 p. 105

64. C.R.O. LGN 1/4 Nantwich Union Minute Book
4th February 1854 p. 437
65. ibid.
66. ibid.
67. C.R.O. LGN 1/5 Nantwich Union Minute Book
5th July 1856 p. 404
68. ibid.
69. M. A. Crowther op. cit., p. 118
70. C.R.O. LGN 1/6 Nantwich Union Minute Book
10th March 1860 p. 269
71. ibid. 6th October 1860 p. 373
72. C.R.O. LGN 1/9 Nantwich Union Minute Book
28th October 1865 p. 74
73. C.R.O. LGN 1/11 Nantwich Union Minute Book
1st June 1872 p. 22
applications came from Aberystwth, Salford,
Wolverhampton, Bootle and Cumberland.
74. ibid.
75. M. A. Crowther op. cit., p. 123
76. C.R.O. LGN 1/11 Nantwich Union Minute Book
27th December 1873 p. 341
77. ibid. 24th January 1874 p. 354
78. C.R.O. LGN 1/14 Nantwich Union Minute Book
5th July 1879 p. 173
79. C.R.O. LGN 1/22 Nantwich Union Minute Book
25th July 1896 p. 112
80. ibid. 23rd January 1897 p. 245
Master salary = £60 per annum
Matrons salary = £40 per annum
81. C.R.O. LGN 2022/1/1 Minutes of the Finance Committee
for Nantwich Union 14th March 1900 and
C.R.O. Crewe Chronicle 24th March 1900 MF 207/6
82. C.R.O. LGN 2022/3 Reports of Nantwich Union Building
Committee 19th January 1899
83. C.R.O. LGN 1/26 Nantwich Union Minute Book
4th November 1905 p. 158
84. ibid.

85. ibid. 23rd September 1905 p. 129
86. ibid. 16th June 1906 p. 311
87. ibid. 14th July 1906 p. 331
88. ibid. 1st December 1906 p. 403
89. ibid. 12th January 1907 p. 428
90. C.R.O. LGN 1/27 Nantwich Union Minute Book
1st June 1907 p. 92
91. C.R.O. LGN 1/30 Nantwich Union Minute Book
16th March 1912 p. 6
92. For details of this incident see below
pp 191-196
93. M. A. Crowther op. cit., p. 113
94. ibid. p. 159 and
M. W. Flinn 'Medical Services under the New Poor Law'
in The New Poor Law in the Nineteenth Century
Edited by D. Fraser (1976) pp. 47-48
R. G. Hodgkinson op. cit., p. 147
95. F. B. Smith The People's Health 1830-1914 (1979)
p. 356
96. M. W. Flinn op. cit., p. 58
97. M. E. Rose, The English Poor Law 1780-1930 (1971)
p. 161
98. R. G. Hodgkinson op. cit., p. 148
99. See pp 34 - 45 *supra*.
100. F. B. Smith op. cit., p. 49
101. E. Royle Modern Britain - A Social History 1750-1985
(1987) p. 185
102. Second Annual Report of the Poor Law Commissioners,
op. cit., p.22
103. ibid. p 25
104. M. W. Flinn op. cit., p. 45
105. ibid. p. 49
106. D. Fraser (Editors Comments) The New Poor Law in the
Nineteenth Century (1976) p. 6
107. Seventh Annual Report of the Poor Law Commission
for England and Wales (1841) p. 16

108. ibid.
109. A. Digby, The Poor Law in Nineteenth Century England op. cit., p. 34
110. C.R.O. LGN 1/1 17th September 1842 p. 54 and 22nd October 1842 p. 74
111. C.R.O. LGN 1/4 4th February 1854 p. 437
112. ibid.
113. ibid. p. 438
114. C.R.O. LGN 1/5 10th June 1854 p. 52
115. M. W. Flinn op. cit., p. 53
116. D. Fraser (Editors Comments) The New Poor Law in the Nineteenth Century op. cit., p. 20
117. M. A. Crowther op. cit., pp. 52-53
118. Case of Master Saxon in 1896 see pp 191-196
119. C.R.O. LGN 1/5 5th July 1856 p. 404
120. ibid.
121. K. U. L. The Lancet 21st January 1865 p. 71
122. ibid.
123. ibid.
124. K. U. L. The Lancet 15th April 1865 p. 410
125. K. U. L. The Lancet 17th June 1865 p. 660
126. K. U. L. The Lancet 1st July p. 14
127. ibid. p. 16
128. ibid. p. 19
129. C.R.O. LGN 1/9 28th October 1865 p. 74
130. ibid.
131. This committee consisted of the chairman, vice-chairman, the Rev. J. B. Wheeler, Mr Wood, Mr Bateman, Mr James Edwards and Mr Heath.
132. C.R.O. LGN 1/9 op. cit., p. 75
The report of Mr T. Williamson, Medical Officer of the workhouse to the Guardians.

133. ibid. 3rd March 1866 pp. 125-126
134. ibid.
135. ibid.
136. J. M. Treble, Urban Poverty in Britain 1830-1910 (1979) p. 94
137. C.R.O. LGN 1/9 op. cit., 23rd June 1866 p. 190
138. ibid. 1st September 1866 p. 225
139. M. A. Crowther, op. cit., p. 161
140. K. U. L. The Lancet 3rd June 1865 p. 604
141. ibid. 17th June 1865 p. 659
142. ibid. 1st July 1865 p. 15
143. C.R.O. LGN 1/9 13th October 1866 p. 248
144. ibid.
145. ibid. 24th November 1866 p. 266
146. ibid. p. 267
147. ibid 2nd March 1867 p. 303
148. P. Wood 'Finance and the Urban Poor Law: Sunderland Union 1836-1914' in The Poor and the City: the English Poor Law in its Urban Context 1834-1914 Edited by M. E. Rose (1985) p. 22
149. D. Ashforth, op. cit., p. 147
150. M. E. Rose, The New Poor Law in an Industrial Area op. cit., p. 126
151. R. G. Hodgkinson, op. cit., p. 681
152. N. McCord 'The Poor Law and Philanthropy' in The New Poor Law in the Nineteenth Century Edited by D. Fraser p. 99
153. Extract from the Poor Law Inspectors Report quoted in the Crewe Guardian 13th November 1869 C.P.L.
154. ibid.
155. ibid. It was not until the 27th August 1902 that two water beds and two air cushions were purchased for the hospital. C.R.O. LGN 1/24 p. 289
156. ibid.

157. C.P.L. Crewe Guardian 11th December 1869 p. 5
158. M. E. Rose The New Poor Law in an Industrial Area
op. cit., p. 136
159. C. P. L. Crewe Guardian 25th December 1869 p. 4
160. K. U. L. The Lancet 16th December 1865 p. 684
161. C.R.O. LGN 1/11 2nd November 1872 p. 112
162. ibid. 26th July 1873 p. 253
6th September 1873 p. 279
18th October 1873 p. 295
163. C.R.O. LGN 1/9 Initial suggestion made on the
9th November 1865 p. 75
LGN 1/14 Implementation agreed 16th August 1879 p. 190
164. ibid. p. 190
165. ibid. 9th October 1880 p. 404
166. A. Digby, British Welfare Policy op. cit., pp. 34-35
167. P. Thane, op. cit., p. 36
168. C.R.O. LGN/2022/21 Annual Accounts 1892-1897 p. 19
On 22nd January 1887 a loan for £700 was taken out
over 30 years to purchase land near the workhouse
for the hospital from the trustees of the Beam Heath
Estate.
C.R.O. LGN1/16 28th November 1885. In July 1890 a
loan for £4,500 for building the new hospital was
secured over a 30 year period.
169. Kelly's Directory of Cheshire 1892 p. 367
170. C.R.O. LGN 2022/2 Reports of the Nantwich Building
Committee 1894-1912 20th August 1896
171. ibid. 18th December 1897
172. ibid. 21st April 1898
173. C.R.O. LGN 1/24 9th November 1901 p. 85
174. C.R.O. LGN 2022/3 14th February 1902
175. C.R.O. LGN1/24 9th November 1901 op. cit.,
176. A. Digby, The Poor Law in Nineteenth Century England
op. cit., p. 34
177. M. W. Flinn, op. cit., p. 49

178. R. G. Hodgkinson op. cit., p. 273, p. 362
179. C.R.O. LGN 1/24 19th November 1901 p. 91
180. ibid. 23rd November 1901 p. 92
181. ibid. 18th January 1902 p. 132
182. ibid. 1st February 1902 p. 139
183. C.R.O. LGN 1/11 26th July 1873 p. 252
184. Infra Chapter 5
185. C.R.O. LGN 1/24 15th February 1902 (letter dated 5th February 1902) p. 144.
186. ibid. 15th February 1902 p. 145
187. ibid.
188. C.R.O. LGN 2022/3 Reports of the Nantwich Building Committee 1894-1912 14th February 1902
189. K. Williams op. cit., pp. 127-128
190. C.R.O. LGN 1/24 1st March 1902 p. 155 and 29th March 1902 p. 169
191. ibid. 1st March 1902 p. 156
192. ibid. 29th March 1902 p. 169
Also the '... the stone covers to the gulleys outside the men's hospital be removed and that a disconnecting chamber be constructed in connection with the drain from the basement of such hospital.
193. ibid. 5th July 1902 p. 246
194. ibid.
195. ibid. p. 234
In June 1902 a tramp with smallpox was removed to Ravensmoor. The union was to pay 15s 0d per week plus all maintenance, medical attendance, nursing bedding utensils and appliances necessary for usage and treatment.
196. C.R.O. LGN 2022/3 3rd August 1905
197. ibid. 24th January 1906
198. ibid.
199. R. G. Hodgkinson, op. cit., p. 686
200. ibid. p. 39

201. 8th Annual Report of the Poor Law Commissioners for England and Wales (1842) p. 141
202. ibid.
203. C.R.O. LGN 1/5 Nantwich Union Minute Book
18th November 1854 p. 128
C.R.O. LGN 1/30 Nantwich Union Minute Book
15th February 1913 p. 241
204. C.R.O. LGN 1/16 Nantwich Union Minute Book
5th September 1885
205. N. McCord, The Poor Law and Philanthropy
op. cit., p. 102
206. C.R.O. LGN 2022/1/2 Minutes of the Finance Committee
for Nantwich Union 1906-1920 4th March 1911 p. 128
207. C.R.O. LGN 1/26 Nantwich Union Minute Book
10th March 1906 p. 244
208. Subscriptions were also paid to the Devonshire Hos-
pital and Buxton Bath Charity at £3 3s 0d per annum.
LGN 1/6 Nantwich Union Minute Book
16th June 1860 p. 322
The Manchester Royal Infirmary was also subscribed
to at £2 2s 0d per annum.
LGN 2022/1/2 op. cit., 4th January 1913 p. 162
209. C.R.O. LGN 1/24 Nantwich Union Minute Book
6th July 1901.
210. C.R.O. Crewe Chronicle 10th August 1901 MF 207/6
211. Supra p 163
212. LGN 1/16 op. cit., 3rd September 1887 C.R.O.
213. LGN 1/24 op. cit., 9th November p. 85 C.R.O.
214. LGN 2022/1/2 op. cit., 26th June 1909 p. 88 C.R.O.
215. LGN 1/16 op. cit., 19th February 1887 C.R.O.
216. LGN 1/26 op. cit., 22nd April 1905 p. 29 C.R.O.
217. C.R.O. LGN 1/21 Nantwich Union Minute Book
22nd February 1896 pp. 426-427
218. C.R.O. LGN 1/30 op. cit., 28th September 1912 p. 140
219. ibid. 19th July 1913 p. 356
220. F. W. Flinn, op. cit., p. 53

221. Seventh Annual Report of the Poor Law Commissioners for England and Wales p. 9
Reply from the Nantwich Guardians to Commissioners circular, dated 6th March 1841.
222. C.R.O. LGN 1/1 Nantwich Union Minute Book pp. 57-58
223. M. A. Crowther op. cit., p. 163
224. After 1842 medical appointments were no longer offered for tender.
225. Second Annual Report of the Poor Law Commissioners for England and Wales p. 23
226. I. Waddington, 'General Practitioners and Consultants in Early Nineteenth Century England: The Sociology of an intra-professional conflict' in Health Care and Popular Medicine in Nineteenth Century England Edited by J. Woodward and D. Richards (1977) p. 169, p. 174
227. Seventh Annual Report of the Poor Law Commissioners op. cit., p. 10
228. M. A. Crowther op. cit., p. 157
229. F. B. Smith, op. cit., p. 48
230. M. A. Crowther, op. cit., p. 156
231. M. W. Flinn, op. cit., p. 52
232. C.R.O. LGN 1/5 Nantwich Union Minute Book 14th October 1854 p. 105
233. C.R.O. LGN 1/6 Nantwich Union Minute Book 10th March 1860 p. 270
C.R.O. LGN 1/14 Nantwich Union Minute Book 14th September 1878 p. 7
234. C.R.O. LGN 1/14 op. cit., 23rd October 1880 p. 409
235. Supra p. 187
236. M. A. Crowther, op. cit., p. 163
237. C.R.O. LGN 1/9 Nantwich Union Minute Book 28th September 1867 p. 410
238. ibid. 12th October 1867 p. 423
239. ibid. 26th October 1867 p. 429
240. C.R.O. LGN 1/1 op. cit., p. 57
241. C.R.O. LGN 1/14 op. cit., p. 7

- 242. K. U. L. The Lancet 23rd September 1865 p. 356
- 243. C.R.O. LGN 2022/1/2 Minutes of the Finance Committee 1906-1920 p. 37
- 244. K. U. L. The Lancet 1st July 1865 p. 21
- 245. R. G. Hodgkinson, op. cit., P. 453
- 246. K. U. L. The Lancet 12th August 1865 p. 186
- 247. C.R.O. LGN 1/22 Nantwich Union Minute Book 13th June 1896 p. 76
- 248. C.R.O. LGN 2022/5 Written statement from the examination of witnesses against the Master
- 249. ibid.
- 250. ibid.
- 251. ibid.
- 252. ibid.
- 253. ibid.
- 254. ibid.
- 255. ibid.
- 256. ibid.
- 257. ibid.
- 258. F. B. Smith, op. cit., p. 53
- 259. C.R.O. LGN 2022/5
- 260. C.R.O. LGN 1/22 op. cit., 13th June 1896 p. 81
- 261. ibid. 9th January 1897 p. 234 and 6th February 1897 p. 255
- 262. C.R.O. Crewe Chronicle 15th June 1901 MF 207/6
- 263. ibid.
- 264. C.R.O. LGN 1/24 Nantwich Union Minute Book 20th July 1901.
- 265. C.R.O. Crewe Chronicle 13th July 1901 MF 207/6
- 266. C.R.O. LGN 1/27 Nantwich Union Minute Book 21st September 1907 p. 155 and 19th October 1907 p. 179

267. ibid. 2nd November 1907 p. 193
268. C.R.O. LGN 1/30 15th March 1913 p. 262
269. ibid. 29th March 1913 p. 269
The fee for an operation for the removal of adenoids
and tonsils was 10s 0d
LGN 1/30 op. cit., 5th July 1913 p. 345
270. M. W. Flinn, op. cit., p. 56 and
R. G. Hodgkinson, op. cit., p. 556
271. M. A. Crowther, op. cit., p. 165
272. Eighth Annual Report of the Poor Law Commission
for England and Wales (1842) p. 80
273. F. B. Smith, op. cit., p. 388
274. C.R.O. LGN 1/6 Nantwich Union Minute Book
10th March 1860 p. 269
275. K.U.L. The Lancet 1st July 1865 p. 19
276. ibid.
277. R. G. Hodgkinson, op. cit., p. 563
278. ibid. p. 571
279. C.R.O. LGN1/11 29th June 1872 p. 35
280. ibid. 22nd February 1873 p. 169
281. K. Williams, op. cit., p. 119
282. M. A. Crowther, op. cit., p. 135
283. C.R.O. LGN 2022/21 Annual Accounts for the half year
ending Michaelmas 1892 p. 15
284. C.R.O. LGN 2022/3 14th February 1902
285. Newspaper cutting from the Nantwich Guardian (undated)
placed inside LGN 2022/3 C.R.O.
286. F. B. Smith, op. cit., p. 388
287. C.R.O. LGN 2022/3 14th February 1902
288. ibid. 20th March 1905
Superintendent Nurses Sitting Room

2 easy chairs.	6 ordinary chairs
1 lounge	2 fancy tables 16" x 4'
1 table under window	Overmantle
3' x 1' x 9"	
Brussels carpet	2 Axminster rugs

288. Black Fire Irons with Curtain and blinds
cont brass handles.

Nurses Sitting Room

2 easy chairs	6 ordinary chairs
1 lounge	Sideboard with mirror
	instead of overmantle
Oak table 4'6" x 4'	

Dining Room

1 dozen plain chairs	1 telescope dining table
	plain to 8' x 4'
Sideboard 6' long	Butlers tray and folding
	stand
Curb fireirons	Curtains and blinds
Mats for all doors	

Doctors Room

4 upholstered chairs	Oak table (mahogany crossed
	out) 4' x 3'6"
Plain glass mirror	Cork lino instead of carpet
Curtains and blinds	Small iron curb

Kitchen

4 chairs	Solid deal table 6' x 3'6"
Fender and fireirons	Blinds
Dresser 6'	

Bedrooms (7)

Curtains and blinds	Carpet and hearth rug
Dressing table and wash	Wardrobes
stand	
3 chairs for each room	1 bedroom without fireirons
	and rug

289. M. A. Crowther, op. cit., p. 167
290. Second Annual Report of the Poor Law Commissioners
op. cit., p. 29
291. ibid. p. 497 Views of Assistant Poor Law Commis-
sioner E. C. Tufnell, Esq.
292. K.U.L. The Lancet 5th August 1865 p. 155
293. Second Annual Report of the Poor Law Commissioners
op. cit., p. 91 Appendix A no 12
294. Eighth Annual Report of the Poor Law Commissioners
Appendix F
295. M. A. Crowther, op. cit., p. 214

296. ibid. p. 215
297. C.R.O. LGN 1/5 op. cit., 5th July 1856 p. 404
298. K.U.L. The Lancet 1st July 1865 p. 20
299. ibid.
300. ibid.
301. ibid. 4th November 1865 p. 514
and C.R.O. LGN 1/4 op. cit., p. 438
302. C.R.O. LGN 1/9 op. cit., 17th February 1866 p. 119
303. ibid. 2nd March 1867 p. 304
304. Soup and gruel at Nantwich workhouse were to be made up as follows:

<u>Soup</u> -	Beef	8 oz.
	Peas	1½ pints
	Flour	4 oz to the gallon
<u>Gruel</u> -	Meal	8 oz
	Flour	2½ oz
	Milk	2 parts to the gallon

C.R.O. LGN 1/9 2nd March 1867 p. 305
305. ibid.
306. ibid. 4th November 1865 p. 515
307. ibid. 2nd March 1867 p. 304
308. ibid. p. 305
309. C.R.O. LGN 1/11 op. cit., 10th August 1872 p. 61
310. C.R.O. LGN 1/9 op. cit., 8th July 1865 p. 10
311. C.R.O. LGN 1/5 op. cit., 17th March 1855 p. 186
312. R. G. Hodgkinson op. cit., p. 582
313. C.R.O. LGN 1/5 op. cit., 7th October 1854 p. 10
and 21st October 1854 p. 109
314. C.R.O. LGN 1/6 op. cit., 21st May 1859 p. 134
315. One example of this appears in The Lancet
9th September 1865 p. 299
316. C.R.O. LGN 1/9 op. cit., 31st March 1866 p. 148
Such complaints as this continue throughout the
1870s. For example see LGN 1/11 C.R.O.
21st February 1874 p. 369

317. C.R.O. LGN 1/9 op. cit., 13th October 1866 p. 247
318. ibid. 10th November 1866 p. 262
319. C.R.O. LGN 1/11 op. cit., 12th July 1873 p. 247
320. R. G. Hodgkinson, op. cit., p. 585
321. C.R.O. LGN 1/11 op. cit., 21st February 1874 p. 369
Report from the Commissioner in Lunacy, resulting
from a visit to the workhouse on 30th January by
Mr. Phillip. Also C.R.O. LGN 1/11 2nd May 1874 p. 409
322. C.R.O. LGN 1/14 Nantwich Union Minute Book
28th February 1880 p. 287
Letter from the Secretary of State relating to
Charles Dentith.
323. C.P.L. Census returns for 1871 and 1881
324. C.R.O. Chester Chronicle 24th October 1896 MF 204/20
325. ibid.
326. C.R.O. Crewe Chronicle 3rd November 1900 MF 207/6
327. C.R.O. Crewe Chronicle 19th March 1901 MF 207/6
328. ibid.
329. C.R.O. LGN 1/26 6th May 1905 p. 36
330. C.R.O. LGN 1/30 Nantwich Union Minute Book
1st March 1913 p. 251
C.R.O. LGN 1/9 op. cit., 31st March 1866
The cost of maintaining people in the County Asylum
fluctuated as follows: 8s 9d per head per week
C.R.O. LGN 1/16 Nantwich Union Minute Book
1st January 1886 = 8s 2d per head per week
October 1886 = 7s 0d " " " "
March 1887 = 6s 5d " " " "
C.R.O. LGN 2022/21 Annual Account 1892-1897
Particulars of common charges for the half year
ended Michaelmas 1892 pp. 10-11
Michaelmas 1892 cost of lunatics = £958 13s 5d
or 20% of total amount distributed in in-maintenance
and out-door relief. This represented over 11½%
of total disbursements in the Nantwich Union.
331. Comparison made between the figures for the half-
year ending Lady Day 1896 LGN 2022/21 and C.R.O.
LGN 1/22 16th May 1896 p. 52
332. C.R.O. LGN 1/24 September 1901 County Asylum Rate 7s10½d
per head per week.
C.R.O. LGN 1/26 29th July 1905 8s 5½d per week p. 93
C.R.O. LGN 1/30 25th May 1912 8s 9d per week p. 58
ibid. 26th October 1912 9s 0½d per week p. 160

333. K. Williams, op. cit., p. 126
334. R. G. Hodgkinson, op. cit., p. 550
335. Fifth Annual Report of the Poor Law Commission for England and Wales (1839) p. 21
336. ibid. p. 22
The definition of household duties included scouring floors, making beds, washing and mangling workhouse clothes, ironing, knitting, sewing, basic cookery, and the care of children and the sick. All of these jobs accounted for half of their time-table. These activities were intended to fit the inmates for work as a maid, dairy maid, lady's maid, or nurse.
337. ibid. p. 24
338. A. Digby and P. Searby, Children, School and Society in Nineteenth Century England (1981) p. 25, pp 27-28
339. Fifth Annual Report of the Poor Law Commission op. cit., p. 24
340. ibid. p. 25
341. F. Duke, 'Pauper Education in The New Poor Law in the Nineteenth Century. Edited by D. Fraser (1976) p. 67
342. op. cit., Fifth Annual Report of the Poor Law Commission p. 145 Appendix C No. 1
Comments on the training of pauper children (second report) by J. P. Kay Esq., M.D. Assistant Commissioner
343. ibid. p. 146
344. Eighth Annual Report of the Poor Law Commission for England and Wales (1842) p. 83
345. M. A. Crowther, op. cit., p. 130
346. op. cit., Eighth Annual Report of the Poor Law Commission p. 128
347. M. A. Crowther, op. cit., p. 151, p. 205
348. C.R.O. LGN 1/1 Nantwich Union Minute Book
22nd October 1842 p. 71
349. ibid. 12th November 1842 p. 81
350. ibid. 19th December 1842 p. 101
351. Parl. Papers 1851 XLIX p. 41
352. ibid. Between 1st December 1849 and 1st December 1850 the number of children who had been admitted totalled 194 and the number discharged 204.

353. A. Digby, The Poor Law in Nineteenth Century England
op. cit., p. 33
354. Parl. Papers 1851 XLIX p. 67
355. D. Fraser, (Editors Comments) The New Poor Law in
the Nineteenth Century p. 8
356. Parl. Papers 1851 XLIX p. 66
357. C.R.O. LGN 1/4 Nantwich Union Minute Book
20th December 1851 p. 4
358. ibid. 4th February 1854 p. 438
359. ibid. 3rd January 1852 p. 15
360. ibid. 14th February 1852 p. 40
361. ibid. March 1852 p. 63 and p. 70
362. ibid. 17th July 1852 p. 146
363. C.R.O. LGN 1/5 Nantwich Union Minute Book
6th January 1855 p. 154
364. C.P.L. Crewe Guardian 27th November 1869
365. C.R.O. LGN 1/5 op. cit., 19th July 1856 p. 411
366. C.R.O. LGN 1/6 Nantwich Union Minute Book
Half year ending Michaelmas 1858 p. 67
" " " " 1859 p. 204
" " " Lady Day 1860 p. 293
" " " Michaelmas 1860 p. 384
367. ibid. p. 293
368. ibid. 21st May 1859 p. 134 and
F. Duke, op. cit., p. 76
369. C.R.O. LGN 1/9 Nantwich Union Minute Book
3rd March 1866 pp 125-126
370. C.R.O. LGN 1/6 op. cit., 17th December 1859 p. 235
371. ibid. 31st December 1859 p. 242
372. C.R.O. LGN 1/14 Nantwich Union Minute Book
12th October 1878 p. 24
373. Fifth Annual Report of the Poor Law Commission
op. cit., p. 159
374. F. Duke, op. cit., p. 77
375. Parl. Papers 1862 (321) p. 279

376. ibid. p 280
377. ibid.
378. ibid. p. 282
379. C.R.O. LGN 1/11 op. cit., 27th October 1866 p. 254
Boys under 10 = 6 Girls under 10 = 16
Boys above 10 = 8 Girls above 10 = 6
Total = 36
380. C.P.L. The Crewe Guardian Poor Law Inspectors
Report. 13th November 1869
381. For a comparison between figures for 1860 see
C.R.O. LGN 1/6 3rd November 1860 p. 384 and
figures quoted in Crewe Guardian 13th November 1869
382. Crewe Guardian op. cit., 13th November 1869
383. C.P.L. Crewe Guardian 27th November 1869
384. ibid.
385. ibid.
386. ibid.
387. ibid.
388. C.P.L. Crewe Guardian 11th December 1869
389. ibid.
390. ibid.
391. ibid.
392. C.R.O. LGN 1/11 Nantwich Union Minute Book
21st September 1872 p. 81
Reply received 5th October 1872 p. 91
393. ibid.
394. ibid. 16th November 1872 p. 121
395. ibid. 28th December 1872 p. 139
and 25th January 1873 p. 152
396. ibid. 19th April 1873 p. 196
397. ibid. 17th May 1873 p. 219
14th June 1873 p. 231
28th June 1873 p. 239
398. ibid. 9th August 1873 p. 262
23rd August 1873 p. 269

399. C.R.O. LGN 1/14 Nantwich Union Minute Book
7th June 1879 p. 157
400. ibid. 22nd February 1879 pp. 100-101
401. C.R.O. LGN 2022/3 Report of Nantwich Union Building
Committee 17th July 1897
402. C.R.O. LGN 1/16 Nantwich Union Minute Book
23rd January 1886
403. ibid. 11th June 1887
404. C.R.O. LGN 1/21 Nantwich Union Minute Book
29th June 1895 p. 215
405. C.R.O. LGN 1/22 Nantwich Union Minute Book
24th December 1896 p. 224
406. C.R.O. LGN 2022/3 op. cit., 12th November 1902
407. C.R.O. LGN 2022/1/2 Minutes of the Finance Committee
19th September 1908 p. 66
408. C.R.O. LGN 1/21 op. cit., Christmas 1894 p. 36
Tried to send 'refractory boy Parry' to industrial
school.
ibid. 6th October 1895 p. 305
attempts to get the very dishonest John Parry into
an industrial home were unsuccessful. Salford
Childrens Aid Society took the boy upon payment
of £10 0s 0d
409. ibid. 2nd November 1895 p. 325
410. ibid. 16th November 1895 p. 342
411. ibid. 25th January 1896 pp. 397-398
412. C.R.O. LGN1/22 op. cit., 23rd January 1897 p. 234
413. C.R.O. LGN 1/21 op. cit., 25th January 1896 p. 400
414. ibid. 22nd February 1896 p. 426
415. C.R.O. LGN 1/22 op. cit., 6th February 1897 pp. 255-256
416. ibid. 10th July 1897 pp. 382-383
417. C.R.O. LGN 1/24 Nantwich Union Minute Book
4th January 1902 p. 124
418. ibid. 2nd August 1902 p. 262
419. C.R.O. LGN op. cit., 2nd May 1896 p. 44 and
4th September 1897 p. 419

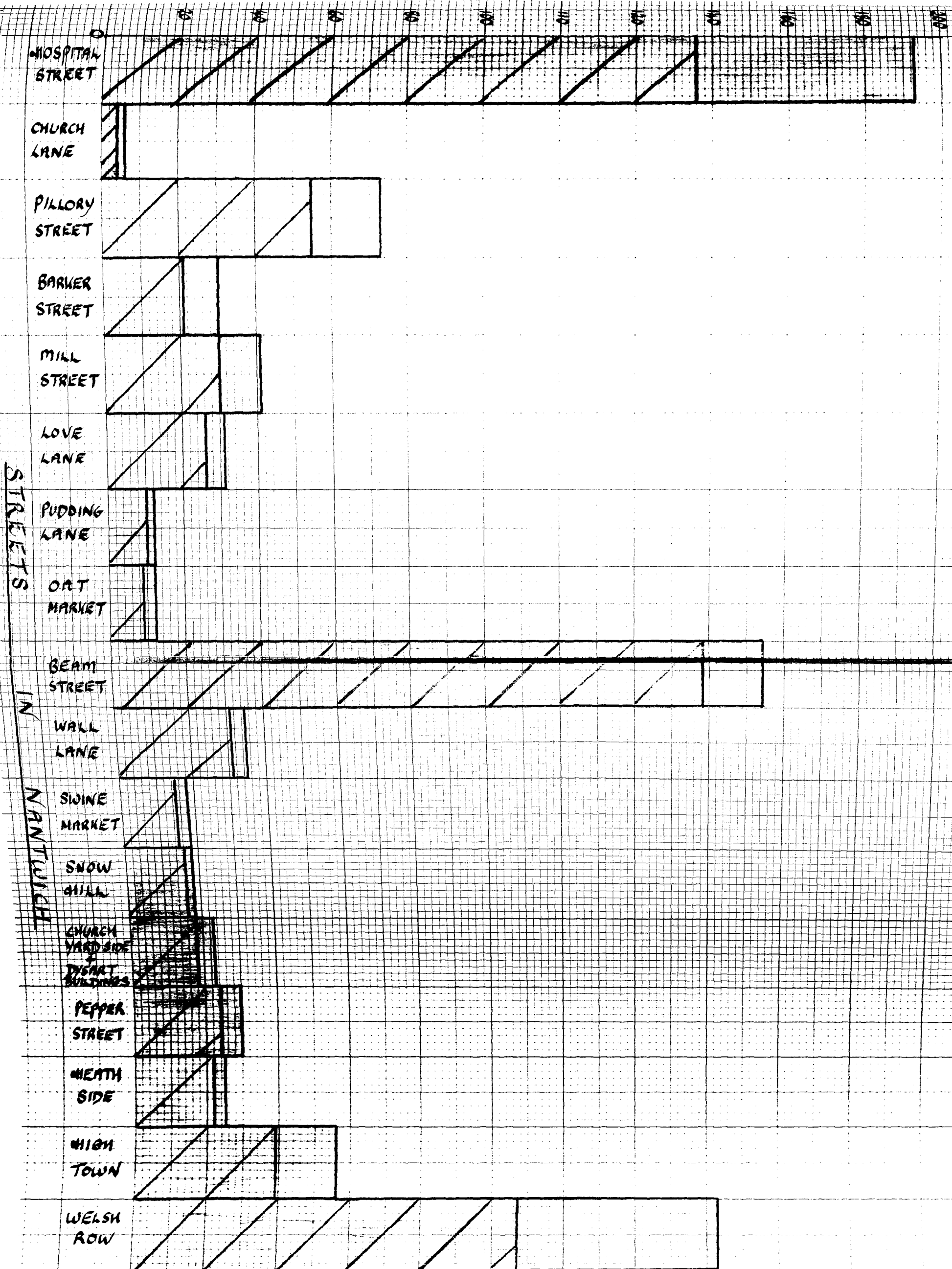
420. J. Rimmer, Yesterday's Naughty Children
Training ship, girl's reformatory and farm school
A history of the Liverpool Reformatory Association
founded in 1855 (Manchester 1986) p. 7
421. C.R.O. Chester Chronicle 10th October 1896 MF 204/20
422. C.R.O. Chester Chronicle 24th October 1896 MF 204/20
423. ibid.
424. C.R.O. LGN 1/22 op. cit., 17th April 1897 p. 311
425. C.R.O. LGN 1/24 op. cit., 20th July 1901
426. ibid. 9th November 1901 p. 84
427. C.R.O. LGN 1/30 Nantwich Union Minute Book
10th May 1913 p. 308
428. ibid. 26th April 1913 p. 298
429. C.R.O. LGN 2022/1/2 op. cit., 8th February 1908
pp. 44-45
430. C.R.O. LGN 1/27 Nantwich Union Minute Book
20th April 1907 p. 50
431. F. Duke, op. cit., p. 81
432. C.R.O. LGN 2022/21 Statement of the total receipts,
expenditure and balances and other information for
the years 1892-1897 for Nantwich Union.
433. ibid.
434. R. G. Hodgkinson, op. cit., p. 552
435. C.R.O. LGN 1/21 op. cit., 9th March 1895 p. 100
436. ibid.
437. ibid. 23rd March 1895 p. 117 and
LGN 1/24 op. cit., 8th November 1902 p. 318
438. C.P.L. Census returns.
439. C.R.O. LGN 2022/21 op. cit., see Appendix G
440. C.R.O. LGN 1/22 op. cit., 8th August 1896 p. 119
441. C.R.O. Crewe Chronicle 30th November 1901 MF 207/6
442. C,R,O, LGN 1/26 Nantwich Union Minute Book
22nd April 1905 p. 28
443. ibid. 22nd April 1905 p. 29

444. C.R.O. LGN 1/16 op. cit., 13th November 1886
445. C.R.O. LGN 1/30 op. cit., 21st December 1912 p. 197
and M. Crowther op. cit., p. 69
446. C.R.O. LGN 1/14 op. cit., 5th July 1879 p. 172
447. ibid. 6th February 1879 p. 250
448. C.R.O. LGN 1/21 op. cit., 7th March 1896 p. 442
449. C.R.O. Crewe Chronicle 3rd March 1900 MF 207/6
450. C.R.O. LGN 1/16 op. cit., 21st August 1886
451. C.R.O. LGN 1/24 op. cit., 26th October 1901 p. 78
452. C.R.O. LGN 1/30 op. cit., 27th April 1912 p. 44 cites
example of this. see p 484 for impact of this
institution on local area.
453. C.R.O. LGN 1/4 op. cit., February 1852 p. 44
454. C.R.O. LGN 1/5 op. cit., 1st March 1856 p. 345
455. Lord Tollemache reference:
C.R.O. LGN 1/6 op. cit., 4th June 1859 p. 140 and
2nd July 1859 p. 153 and Dorfold Rural Fete
LGN 1/11 op. cit., 13th July 1872 p. 45 and
LGN 1/14 op. cit., 2nd August 1879 p. 185
456. C.R.O. LGN 1/6 op. cit., 13th August 1859 p. 169
457. C.R.O. LGN 1/9 op. cit., 12th May 1866 p. 168
C.R.O. LGN 1/14 op. cit., 29th January 1881 p. 466
458. C.R.O. Crewe Chronicle 22nd September 1900 MF 207/6
459. Although it is not made clear in the minute book
New Brighton seems a more likely destination than
Brighton on the South Coast.
C.R.O LGN 1/14 5th July 1879 p. 173
460. ibid. 2nd August 1879 pp. 184-185
461. ibid. 16th August 1879 p. 190
462. ibid. 17th July 1880 p. 364
14th August 1880 p. 373
463. C.R.O. LGN 1/16 op. cit., 15th May 1886 and
2nd April 1887
464. ibid. 21st August 1886
465. ibid. 11th June 1887

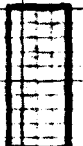
466. C.R.O. LGN 1/21 op. cit., 9th February 1895 p. 74 and
C.R.O. LGN 1/24 op. cit., 1st February 1902 p. 140
467. C.R.O. Crewe Chronicle 5th May 1900 MF 207/6
468. C.R.O. LGN 1/30 op. cit., 29th March 1913 p. 270
469. P. Thane op. cit., p. 80
470. C.P.L. Crewe Guardian 9th June 1914 p. 4
471. M. A. Crowther, op. cit., p. 205 p. 220
472. F. Duke, op. cit., p. 84
473. Parl. Papers 1851 XLIX (646) p. 5
474. N. McCord op. cit., p. 102
475. C.R.O. LGN 1/14 Nantwich Union Minute Book
23rd October 1880 p. 410
476. C.R.O. LGN 1/24 op. cit., 31st August 1901
477. All the above examples from LGN 1/24 op. cit.,
26th October 1901 p. 79; 21st December 1901 p. 107
22nd November 1902 p. 330
478. ibid. 28th February 1903 p. 400
479. C.R.O. LGN 1/16 op. cit., 28th May 1887 and
11th June 1887
480. C.R.O. LGN 1/22 Nantwich Union Minute Book
1st May 1897 p. 325 and 29th May 1897 p. 343
and p. 345
481. ibid. 26th June 1897 pp. 373-374
482. C.R.O. LGN 1/24 op. cit., 26th April 1902 pp. 190-191
and 5th July 1902 p. 246
483. C.R.O. LGN 1/14 op. cit., 21st December 1878 p. 65
484. C.R.O. LGN 1/24 op. cit., 23rd November 1901 p. 92
485. ibid. 21st December 1901 p. 107
486. ibid. 7th December 1901 p. 92
487. ibid. 23rd November 1901 p. 91
488. ibid. 18th January 1902 p. 131
489. C.R.O. Crewe Chronicle 28th December 1901 MF 207/6
490. C.R.O. Crewe Chronicle 30th November 1901 MF 207/6
491. C.R.O. Crewe Chronicle 28th December 1901 MF 207/6

492. ibid.
493. C.R.O. LGN 1/24 op. cit., 9th November 1901 p. 85
494. C.R.O. LGN 1/27 Nantwich Union Minute Book
28th December 1907 p. 238
495. C.R.O.LGN 1/21 op. cit., 20th April 1895 p. 142
496. C.P.L. Crewe Guardian 5th May 1914
497. A. F. Young and E. T. Ashton op. cit., pp. 61-62
498. W. H. Chaloner, The Social and Economic Development
of Crewe 1780-1923 (1950) p. 216
and D. Nield Chew 'Ada Nield Chew - The Life and
Writings of a Working Woman' (1982) *passim*.
499. C.P.L. Crewe Chronicle 6th June 1896
500. C.R.O. LGN 1/22 24th December 1896 p. 224
501. ibid. 9th January 1897 p. 234
502. M. E. Rose 'The New Poor Law in an Industrial Area'
op. cit., p. 136

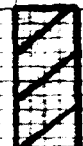
A GRAPH TO SHOW THE NUMBER OF HOUSEHOLDERS CLAIMING AGAINST THE BEAM HEATH ESTATE IN JANUARY 1831.



KEY: 1 SQUARE = 2 people



= NUMBER OF HOUSEHOLDERS



NUMBER OF HOUSEHOLDERS ELIGIBLE TO CLAIM AGAINST THE BEAM HEATH ESTATE IN THE TOWN FOR THE PREVIOUS

SOURCE - CHESHIRE RECORD OFFICE

77.9% OF HOUSEHOLDERS IN NANTWICH WERE CLAIM AGAINST THE ESTATE IN JANUARY

