

THE PARISH AND THE POOR IN NEW BRENTFORD 1720 - 1834

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“Anyone who studies the Old Poor Law must be a very dull dog indeed”. Too many historians think that. It can be both interesting and informative to study the administration of the Poor Law in a small township. This essay is an attempt to demonstrate that such an investigation will throw light on questions that intrigue historians.

Firstly, one may ask whether the accepted view of eighteenth-century institutional development is correct. After 1688, England’s old-established institutions, like the Poor Law, supposedly became sacrosanct and mouldered away as they lost touch with a changing society. Instead of being radically altered, England’s institutions became encrusted with a reef of *ad hoc* machinery, which grew up without any long-term plan.¹ More particularly, the Poor Law administration decayed during the eighteenth century and the years up to 1834. Occasional attempts at reform, however, punctuated this long tale of decline.²

The criterion by which decay may be measured is quite clear. If the system did not sufficiently develop to cater satisfactorily for a changing society, then surely decay is proven. But what is “to cater satisfactorily”? What satisfies one person does not satisfy another. It would be wrong for the historian to measure the eighteenth-century Poor Law by his own attitudes towards the welfare state. The result would be mere propaganda. Unfortunately, we cannot tell how satisfied the poor of New Brentford were. The Old Poor Law must be judged by the degree of satisfaction which the parochial authorities felt, who have left us some records. If the authorities were not satisfied, the causes of their discontent ought to be elucidated.

Secondly, the historian wishes to know who really laid down administrative policy—the central or local organs of government. A thoroughly bureaucratic regime has never governed England. Central organs have always relied on local amateurs, be they Tudor J.P.’s or modern town councillors, to implement national policy. The central body has always had to be careful to ensure that its local limbs co-operate. The centre ensured this co-operation by taking its local agents into partnership. The centre, once it had laid down a rather woolly policy, allowed the local agents to translate it into hard administrative fact very much how they liked. In so doing, these local authorities moulded the soft, shapeless clay of national policy into thousands of sharply-defined local policies. One can see local authorities doing this whether one examines the Tudor Poor Law or Conservative retrenchment. The relative importance of the centre and local organs as policy makers has varied from period to period. In Tudor and modern times, the central governments laid down very narrow guidelines to follow. In the eighteenth century, governments did not support and constrict their local agents with narrow parallel bars. Between the Glorious Revolution and the Great Whig Reform, governments scarcely governed.³ Elizabethan and later Acts provided a broad administrative framework. New Acts concerning the Poor Law originated not from government, but from private initiative. After the experience of the Stuarts, the “Grand National Quarter Sessions” were unwilling to see the government regulate the behaviour of the leaders of local society, the country gentry. If the leaders of a locality wanted to undertake a new

direction in administration in their area, Parliament would usually give its sanction in a local Act. When M.P.'s had been bothered by a sufficient number of parishes all wanting to make the same change, or sufficient had gone ahead and made a change with little reference to legality, Parliament would legitimise the practice in a general Act. Such Acts were generally permissive or were at least treated as such and allowed the localities to get on with what they wanted to do. By and large, the more widely reaching were the provisions of an Act, the less compulsion there was to implement them.

Only three general Acts need concern us for the moment. The Act of 1601 laid down a few important general principles. Each parish was to set the able poor "on work" and to relieve the impotent, and had, when necessary, to levy rates to pay for relief of the poor. The justices were to appoint two overseers of the poor yearly from amongst the inhabitants of each parish. These part-time unpaid, overseers were entrusted with the duty of carrying out the provisions of the Act. The two important eighteenth-century Acts were largely permissive, whereas the 1601 Act was compulsory. Knatchbull's Act of 1722 is regarded as having been unsympathetic to the poor. Parishes were allowed to refuse relief to those who would not go into a parish workhouse, where they would be forced to work. Parishes could combine together for the purpose of setting up a workhouse. If they wished, they could farm the poor to a contractor. There was only one compulsory provision, which gave the overseer more authority than the justice in ordinary relief. Gilbert's Act of 1782 reiterated the provision that parishes could combine together to set up a workhouse. The Act envisaged however, that only the impotent would be relieved in the house, but the able-bodied could be paid pensions if the parish wished. The only compulsory provision reversed the one in Knatchbull's Act. The magistrate was given more authority in the granting of relief. Historians have thought that Gilbert's Act was much more humanitarian than Knatchbull's. The difference is supposed to be apparent in the relative importance accorded to the hard-hearted overseer, *vis-a-vis* the soft-hearted justice.⁴

Most writers would also emphasise certain other features of the Poor Law. The principle that each parish should look after its own ran deep in English society.⁵ It was axiomatic that each parish was responsible for its own poor wherever they might be. The Act of Settlements in 1662 was the classic expression of this commonplace.⁶ If a person could not pass a stiff test designed to prove that he (or she) was economically self-sufficient, then the parish where he was living could send him back to his home parish.⁷ If he could pass this test, then he could only be expelled if he actually became chargeable. The courts and statutes laid down a long series of definitions of what was to be considered a person's home parish. An Act of 1697 mitigated the operation of the Act of 1662 by setting up the special category of certificated persons.⁸

There was no bureaucracy which could enforce action by issuing orders. If people wished to force any local government organ to carry out some action, they had to resort to the cudgels of litigation. Thus the administrative decisions of the Quarter Sessions took the form of legal judgements.⁹ The great nuisance of this system was that litigation tended to be slow, costly and unsure in the result.

Generally speaking, parishes had to pay all their expenses from their own rates.¹⁰ Every parish was therefore tempted to exploit the settlement laws to reduce the number of people chargeable to it. The picture historians present is one of a thousand odd parishes each trying to prevent its own people being returned.¹¹ In these perpetual duels, parishes could not avoid resorting to the only method of enforcing action—litigation. Thus they became

entangled in the increasingly complicated meshes of the settlement laws and much money was wasted all round.¹²

Marc Blaug has recently revised our attitude to the Old Poor Law. He has said that Chadwick's strictures of it were not justified, and that his criticisms were levelled with little reference to the facts. One must ask whether a study of the Old Poor Law in Brentford tends to confirm Blaug's position or not.¹³

The system of relief which existed in New Brentford before 1756 was comparatively undeveloped. The administrative system displayed many characteristics one would expect to find in a seventeenth-century parish. Knatchbull's Act made only a slight impact on the township. Backward New Brentford exhibits a strong contrast to the neighbouring parishes of Ealing and Isleworth.¹⁴

The adult poor were relieved in a variety of ways. The settled parishioners received the weekly parish pension. This seems sometimes to have supplemented insufficient income rather than to have provided full support to life.¹⁵ The parish might also pay their rents or provide free accommodation in the poorhouse. Though sometimes referred to as the workhouse, the poorhouse was really a type of almshouse. As was usual with such institutions, it was under the charge of a woman who had paid security for her good conduct to the parish.¹⁶ No attempt was made to set the poor "on work" or to institute a workhouse test. It was impracticable, really. Many of the paupers could not be profitably employed because of their age. New Brentford, moreover, had too few paupers to employ in a proper workhouse. In 1735, there was only one adult pauper. Isleworth and Ealing, because they were so much bigger than New Brentford, could afford to set up workhouses.¹⁷ In the early eighteenth century, the township was a rather sleepy backwater.¹⁸

Casual relief covered a multitude of disbursements such as those given to the sick parishioners and to travellers. Itinerant paupers were often relieved under the explicit proviso that they leave and be no further charge to the parish. It was cheaper to buy off the pauper. Removal could be expensive and might take a long time to implement, and by the time the procedure had been completed, the pauper might have caused more expense to the parish. Travellers might bring smallpox. Pregnant women might give birth to illegitimate children, whom the parish would have to support, for they gained a settlement where they were born. The practice of buying off the travelling pauper remained common throughout the eighteenth century.¹⁹

New Brentford's organs of local government were quite capable of dealing with the township's small problems. The work was not beyond the capacities of the overseers, who were able to divide the year's work evenly so that each was only active in alternate months. Two rates were usually levied, but not always. The overseers were usually tradesmen or professional men. In Middlesex such people could be expected to have had a reasonable education.²⁰ In practice, the overseers were responsible to the open vestry, not the justices, and the vestrymen seem to have been satisfied with the overseers' performance of their duties.²¹ Before 1732, the vestry itself met very infrequently. This inactivity reflects the lack of anything for the vestrymen to be concerned about. If any matter was beyond their capacities, the vestry could always fall back upon the services of its active local gentry—James Clitherow II and John Drinkwater.

In this sleepy climate, the treatment of poor children is the most interesting facet of the administration. In the 1730's this topic was discussed a great deal. The township's authorities made arrangements to send the parish children to the New Brentford Charity School.²²

The vestry probably hoped that the atmosphere of the school would turn them into honest members of the community. A circular issued by the trustees of the school in 1705 certainly stressed how education would stop pauper children pilfering.²³ The school seems to have maintained about seven boarders for the parish in reasonable comfort by the eighteenth century standards. By the 1730's, the Charity School had seriously degenerated. Much of the time, the children may have been employed in gainful labour. The schoolmaster, who was also a cobbler-cum-tailor, educated the children in a very discontinuous way.

Once the children had finished their formal education, if any, the parish officers provided for their charges by binding them as apprentices, as ordered by the Act of 1601. The Elizabethan legislation wanted pauper children to learn a trade in order that they might maintain themselves in adult life. In the early eighteenth century, however, the original intention of the legislators was already being lost from sight. The settlement laws caused much of the abuse of the system of parish apprenticeship. The apprentice gained a settlement where his master was domiciled. The parish officers made sure the young paupers never went on the parish by ensuring that they gained settlements by apprenticeships in other parishes. So long as this was achieved, the officers cared not a whit about the paupers' training or welfare. If they became chargeable that was someone else's look-out. For example, one John Rowse had been apprenticed to a surgeon. On his master's death, the officers bound him to a fisherman in a neighbouring parish. The training of the surgeon-fisherman can scarcely have formed a coherent whole. The parish appears to have sacrificed John's education to the noble cause of reducing the number of paupers.²⁴

There was more than one way of achieving this object. The Act of 1601 had insisted that the immediate family should, if possible, maintain its own paupers rather than let them become chargeable. The vestry insisted ruthlessly on this responsibility.²⁵ The beadle was usually a man with a dependent relative. One must suspect that the parish appointed such a man in order to use his salary as security for the discharge of his responsibilities. The treatment of bastardy cases also reveals exploitation of the principle of family responsibility. The father had to pay for the support of the child or be put in Bridewell.²⁶

On occasion, the parish did involve itself in serious litigation in an attempt to shift responsibility. Appeals against orders of removal appear infrequently in the minutes. Only a few persons seem to have been removed each year. In the 1730's, however, the vestry jumped into the legal quagmire. One Deborah Street became ill and chargeable to the parish until her death.²⁷ It appeared that there had been an annuity due to her which she had not received. The vestry decided to recoup the township's expenditure on her by recovering the annuity. The case dragged on from 1732 until 1738 or 1739. The parishioners seem to have had little joy of the affair and the overseers even less. They had to pay the legal bills and wait a considerable time before the parish repaid the money. In 1735, the township again bore heavy legal costs of £50 which helped send the total expenditure for the year soaring. This time a battle which was fought to recover money due to the township from the Lady Spencer Charity probably accounted for most of the outlay.²⁸ The vestry seems to have been more cautious in the next period, 1757-84. In 1767 the vestry refused to involve the township in another case similar to the affair of Deborah Street.²⁹ The parochial authorities learnt some of the lessons which experience taught.

New Brentford did not remain a sleepy township where the vestry was only concerned with a few children and evading its responsibilities. The first murmurs of dissatisfaction arose during the 'forties. In the period from 1720 to 1756, expenditure rose after periods of

prolonged rises in the price of bread, which probably brought epidemic disease in their wake.³⁰ In the late 'twenties, the price of wheat shot up and expenditure was high. Then it fell again together with the price of wheat. Total disbursements in the 'thirties were low for two reasons. Firstly, the number of paupers was small. Quite probably a high proportion of the paupers, who would have been amongst the weakest members of the community, were killed off by an epidemic following the period of high bread prices. Secondly, there were no prolonged rises in the price of wheat in the period from 1734 to 1737, although prices were often high. In 1739 and 1740, there were bad harvests, however. Bread prices and casual expenditure rose severely in the period 1731 to '41. In 1741, pension relief made a massive jump, although prices were already falling. Disease and destitution were doubtless left in the wake of the bad harvests. The inhabitants seem to have objected to the heavy disbursements necessitated.³¹ Expenditure was brought down from its high peak of 1742 by a series of good harvests from 1741 to 1750, which prevented total disbursements welling up.

In the 1750's there arose a dissatisfaction with the system of administration and not merely with the level of the rates. In May 1753, it was mooted that the poor be farmed to a Mr. Tull. Again in October 1756, the vestry discussed the possibility of farming.³²

The proposals offered by both the prospective farmers were turned down. The first proposition, in 1753, was rejected as "unreasonable". If it was anything like the second proposal, in 1756, the reason for the rejection is obvious. At the rate offered, the farmers would have had to have mistreated the poor in order to make a profit.

The question of farming was discussed because expenses were again running at a high level. Firstly, bread prices were not so favourable as in the period from 1741 to 1750. Prices were again high in 1752-53. In May 1753, the vestry decided to economise. Although prices fell in 1753-54 and 1754-55, there was another prolonged rise in 1755-56 and 1756-57. By Lady Day 1757, the price of wheat was extremely high—£3.8.0 per quarter. Secondly, from mid-century, the coaching traffic became increasingly important. Wealthy travellers, inns and made-up roads probably attracted increasing numbers of itinerant paupers.

The surprising fact is that farming was suggested in the high price period of the 1750's but not in the late 1720's. It seems possible that a deterioration in the discipline of the poor may have hardened the vestry's attitude to the less fortunate. Discipline was declining, in part at least, because the beadle was becoming lax.³³ It would, however, be wrong to overstress the point that the vestry may have thought a change in the administrative system would cure bad behaviour. When the workhouse was set up in 1757, the vestry was more troubled about expenditure than discipline. Quite probably, the poor were reduced to good order after the beadle was installed in the house in 1753.³⁴

By the 1750's New Brentford had woken up. There was more concern with Poor Law matters than in the 'thirties. Meetings of the vestry were now more frequent. Although the vestry was dissatisfied with the way matters were being conducted, the township still had not abandoned its archaic system.

The period from 1757 to 1783 presents a strong contrast to the unadventurous era preceding. In 1757, the vestry finally took advantage of the 1722 Act and tried to catch up with its more progressive neighbours. Failure, however, rewarded the township for its initiative. From about 1775, the seeds of trouble can be discerned; by 1784, the forest of tares was plain to all.

In 1757, the vestry set up a workhouse regime in the hope of curing some of the problems encountered in earlier years.³⁵ The new system was aimed primarily against the high rates.

Expenditure was to be reduced not by the profits of pauper labour but by applying the workhouse test. The vestry earmarked the profits for the master's salary, and little, if any, was directed to the paupers' upkeep.³⁶

The test was rigidly applied in the early years. Pension relief was totally abolished and casual relief severely restricted.³⁷ In 1764, the vestry reprimanded the overseers for disbursing pension relief, although they had strayed no further than granting casual relief in money. The test was not very harsh. The parish authorities did not attempt to make indoor relief particularly unpleasant by eighteenth-century standards. The paupers could not complain of being overworked. There were sufficient beds to go round, at least in the early days from 1757 to 1769. The paupers were, moreover, fed liberally.³⁸ Though not brutal, the test was rigid enough to be effective. Severe restrictions upon movement and drinking probably galled the paupers most.³⁹ Initially, the test frightened off quite a few of them.⁴⁰ Annual expenditure from 1757–58 to 1764–65 was usually considerably lower than in the period 1754–55 to 1756–57. An easing of the price of wheat may have accounted for at least part of the drop.

The vestry did not introduce any special measures to improve the behaviour of the poor. The regulations threatened the disobedient pauper with confinement and bread and water.⁴¹ It seems, however, that no room of confinement was provided until 1787.⁴²

The moral edification of the paupers was sadly neglected. The vestry had intended that they be paid a small sum from the profit of their labour to encourage them in their work.⁴³ It must remain an open question whether the vestry was trying to teach the poor the benefit of labour, or merely trying to ensure that they earned the master's salary. Nothing may have come of this proposal until 1789.⁴⁴ Some attention was paid to the religious education of the paupers. Neither Bible nor Prayer Book, however, appears in the inventory of the goods at the house.⁴⁵ Only two measures were taken which might have helped to improve the poor. Gin was not allowed in the workhouse and the parish children who went to the Charity School were to continue to attend.⁴⁶ In general, the atmosphere in eighteenth-century workhouses was unedifying because insufficient attention was paid to separating the sick from the healthy, and the anti-social from the young. The workhouse did not lack merely a room of confinement. The vestry ordered that a separate room for the sick be provided, but this attempt to contain infection did not succeed.⁴⁷ The house did, however, contain a separate nursery room.⁴⁸

The reason for the new departure in administration should be sought partly outside the realm of what is normally thought to bear directly on the Poor Law. In 1755, the second James Clitherow died and was succeeded as squire by his much-respected son, the active James Clitherow III. In the establishment of the workhouse, we see him making his first youthful attempt to carry out his duties. He provided the driving impetus which changed an idea into a reality. Doubtless, the vestry would have eventually succumbed to the strong forces in favour of a workhouse without the influence of James Clitherow. He was responsible for the exact timing of the changes in 1757.

During the period from 1757 to 1783, two important administrative changes took place. Instead of leaving the choice of overseers entirely to the bench, the vestry began in 1762 to recommend suitable candidates to the justices.⁴⁹ They seem to have always followed the vestry's wishes down to 1805.⁵⁰ James Clitherow seems once more to have been the driving force behind a change which brought New Brentford into line with current practice.⁵¹ In the period from 1762 to 1781 it probably did not make much difference whether the

magistrates or the vestry appointed the overseers. In either case, the opinions of James Clitherow III and his colleague, John Drinkwater, must have carried much weight. After 1781 this new development was probably quite important.

The second change partially overcame one of the major problems of the Old Poor Law. Because two fresh overseers were appointed annually, policy and administration lacked continuity in many parishes. Both men had, moreover, to learn the job from scratch by a process of trial and, more likely, error.⁵² From 1756–57 the practice grew up of re-appointing each overseer for a second term in such a way that, in any year, both one experienced and one fresh overseer were serving.⁵³ The man who had served the year before could impart his knowledge to the tyro.

The first change described may, in fact, have facilitated the second. The longer periods of continuity appear after 1762, when the vestry began to nominate overseers.

The rejuvenated administrative system displayed serious weaknesses from the beginning. The vestry joined the office of workhouse-master to that of beadle and bellman.⁵⁴ In so doing, the vestrymen presented the master with a difficult task. How the man was expected to wring profits out of the paupers after he had spent half the night ringing the bell, is anybody's guess.⁵⁵ Admittedly, the master was allowed to hire a deputy to discharge his nocturnal duties.⁵⁶ There is no record in the vestry minutes that a deputy was ever appointed. In all likelihood, the profits from the workhouse were too low to allow the master to part with any of his emoluments.⁵⁷ There does not seem to have been enough work to employ all the paupers.⁵⁸ Four spinning wheels and a cardstick were not going to transform the master into a Richard Arkwright.⁵⁹ New Brentford was not situated in the right area to allow the workhouse a profit from wool. The paupers produced the coarsest yarns.⁶⁰ The return to the labour cannot have been great, because this type of work required the least skill. The master had no labour costs, of course, and this fact should have helped boost his profits. Pauper labour was not, however, noted for high productivity. Firstly, the poor were probably unwilling to work for somebody else. Secondly, workhouses usually contained those who could not maintain themselves because they were not efficient workers.

The workhouse was administered under a system which was half-way between farming and direct parish management. Like the farmer, the master had every incentive to make the inmates work. If there were no profits, then he received no salary. The parish was responsible for the paupers' maintenance, whereas if a farmer had taken over the house, he would have been bound to provide for them.

The vestry always made one big mistake in the regulation of the workhouse. The vestrymen thought wonders could be worked at the house merely by making it in the master's interest to be economical. They did not seem to realise that an inefficient or corrupt man will retain his faults whatever the system.

Every parish with a workhouse faced one major problem—how do you find a suitable workhouse-master? He could only expect a meagre income and was regarded as occupying practically the same social level as the paupers themselves.⁶¹ Such mean rewards did not attract men of integrity or education and did nothing to make the paupers respect the master in a way that would enable him to keep discipline. The workhouse-master was efficient only so long as he was kept under surveillance. The Biggins family ran the workhouse well at first.⁶² The rebuilding of the chapel between 1762 and 1766, however, claimed much of the attention of James Clitherow and the vestrymen.⁶³ In 1766 Mr. and Mrs. Biggins were dismissed for extravagance and mismanagement.⁶⁴

Although the workhouse regime may originally have reduced expenditure, the success was not maintained for long. From 1764-65 to 1774-75 annual outgoings fluctuated between £201 and £294 except for a record peak of £312 in 1771-72. In 1775-76 a new record peak of £366 was reached. From then until 1783-84, spending never fell below this level, but reached great heights in 1782-83 and 1783-84. A breakdown in the administration accounts for at least part of the extra disbursements. The peak of 1771-72 can be correlated with a break in the continuity which had been established in the overseers' offices. Similarly, the beginning of the period of very high expenditure in 1775-76 corresponds closely to the final abandonment of the "continuous system". In 1783-84, the overseers were criticised for spending too much but were excused because one of them was ignorant of the customs of the township.⁶⁵ There are various signs that in the early 'eighties the overseers were finding it more difficult to cope. Under the old system, each overseer paid out money in alternate months only. From 1780-81 we find that both overseers were making payments in some months. From 1783-84 they were usually both disbursing money for most of the year. Some overseers, moreover, became very reluctant to undertake their duties. The revelation of the inefficiencies of the men who served in 1783-84 sparked off the enquiry of 1784.

It is difficult to uncover the exact cause of growing inefficiency. The most likely explanation is that society was becoming too complicated for the old amateur and voluntary system. During the late eighteenth century, New Brentford was attracting a considerable amount of highly capitalised industry. This development may well have been accompanied by growth of the local population.⁶⁶

The waste and corruption which were involved in victualling the workhouse were a constant bane of the system. If not checked, the suppliers would make hay in the township's meadow, whilst even the overseer would fleece the community. The rules established in 1757 laid down stringent procedures to ensure that the victuallers did not cheat the parish.⁶⁷ Biggins' extravagance probably involved a conspiracy with them to supply more goods than were necessary.⁶⁸ Doubtless, the overseers had become lax in ensuring that the suppliers behaved. Even at the best of times when the overseers were not lax, there was little to stop them channelling their energies into cheating the township. A Mr. Ross, overseer in 1775-76, probably used his position to have himself appointed as one of the suppliers.⁶⁹ The difficulty was to draw the line between what was allowed and what was not. The overseers were permitted a few drinks on the parish to compensate for their onerous labour, but this "perk" could easily grow into something worse.⁷⁰ The presentation of tenders to the vestry became increasingly a matter of form as the pressure of work began to defeat the overseers.⁷¹ The same people supplied the house year after year. Tenders for bread and meat ceased to appear at a very early date. On occasion, the suppliers did not even bother to submit proposals. The enquiry of 1784 revealed even more abuses than the records for previous years show.

By 1783 the township's new system of administration had failed because the Old Poor Law was not sufficiently flexible to meet adequately the needs of a changing society. The period from 1757 to 1783 is one of the most interesting of all because it is sometime about 1775 that we discern the beginning of the collapse of the Old Poor Law. Much of the story from 1784 merely recounts how these same problems became accentuated and how the parochial authorities made the same mistakes in trying to meet the difficulties. The last fifty years of the Old Poor Law can, however, be extremely interesting. Although the basic framework was not flexible the vestry retained a wide area of manoeuvre. The vestrymen

adopted a variety of expedients to try to prevent the decay of the system. Although none of them would have cured the canker, they might have relieved a great deal of pain. As it was, parochial authorities seem never to have realised the need for a consistent policy or to have adequately understood the problems which had to be dealt with.

The committee of enquiry of 1784 revealed a sorry state of affairs.⁷² The overseers had been lax. The township was supporting too many people in the workhouse.⁷³ The practice of making written contracts between the parish and those who victualled the house had ceased many years before. Finally, the master had connived with the suppliers to overcharge the township.

The report reveals how little the committee understood the problems under investigation. The report ought to have blamed the vestrymen. They should have ensured that the overseers did their job properly and that abuses did not arise. The report laid too much blame on the master, Simpson. He said that when he had queried the meat bill, the supplier, Mrs. Piper, had told him that because there was no contract, she could send in what she liked. We must admit that the master could have reported the incident to the parish officers, but we cannot expect too much from that eighteenth-century dogsbody. The report blamed the few rather than the many. What was worse, it laid blame on individuals rather than the system.

After 1784, the old notability helped less and less to support the system. This development was due to both local and general causes. Death and advancing age took their toll of active men. John Drinkwater died in the 1780's, and James Clitherow III in 1805.⁷⁴ As the urban areas of Middlesex grew so did the need for more magistrates whilst, on the other hand, the number of suitable candidates decreased. Middlesex had always lacked a sufficient quota of country gentry who possessed the education, leisure and sense of social duty so necessary to the leaders of society.⁷⁵ In the late eighteenth century, the deficiencies were made up by appointing tradesmen to the commission of the peace, but they lacked the necessary qualifications. During the period from 1781 to 1822 these men were often corrupt.⁷⁶ Increasing reliance was also placed upon clergymen justices, who usually were qualified.⁷⁷ Like the middle-class justices, their clerical colleagues often did not reside in the crowded urban area in which they functioned. Non-residency increasingly affected the Church up until the 1830's. Non-resident magistrates lacked the local knowledge that was so essential a part of the equipment of the J.P. and had little interest in keeping the rates down. The baneful effects of the decay of the bench were aggravated by the increasing importance of the justice in Poor Law matters since the passage of Gilbert's Act in 1782. Doctor Samuel Glasse, the curate of New Brentford from 1780 to 1785, was the typical non-resident squarson.⁷⁸ The vestry was not completely satisfied with his performance as a J.P.⁷⁹ As the vestry had usurped the right of nominating the overseers, the township was to some extent cushioned against the operations of the magistrates. Although bourgeois vestrymen could be just as corrupt as any trading justice, they did have an interest in maintaining efficiency and keeping the rates down, and ought to have known who in the township had administrative talent. Although the justices destroyed the system of nomination by the vestry in 1805, they still had to pay some deference to the wishes of the vestrymen.⁸⁰ New Brentford was fortunate in that it possessed the services of a conscientious line of established country gentry.⁸¹ As society became more and more complicated, it thrust even more duties upon the shrinking social élite. Even with the best will in the world, the Clitherows could not do everything.⁸²

The strain on the overseers became immense during this period. They did not halve the

year's work between themselves until the boom of 1825 relieved some of the pressure.⁸³ The dislocations of war between 1792 and 1815 caused extra work. Rapid inflation brought about a huge increase in poverty. New duties were thrust upon the overseers.⁸⁴ The population grew rapidly whilst New Brentford continued to attract industry. It became difficult to check properly who were worthy objects of relief and who were not.⁸⁵ Money was being given out too freely for the vestry's liking in 1797.⁸⁶

During the late eighteenth century, there was a marked increase in the number of times the vestry met each year. The vestrymen seem to have disliked turning up to frequent meetings. Often few inhabitants besides the parish officers attended. At times, the vestry degenerated into a corrupt little oligarchy. In 1810, the vestry recommended that the overseers order supplies from the tradesmen as nearly in rotation as possible, in order to stop arguments between them.⁸⁷ In 1829, a suggestion that open tenders be presented to the vestry was turned down.⁸⁸ So small did the attendance become that often the parish officers did not bother to call a meeting. Instead, they made their own decisions in holes and corners. The vestry itself installed only one workhouse-master (in 1828) out of the four or more who held that office between 1807 and 1832.⁸⁹

By the end of the French wars the workhouse regime had reached its nadir. Matters had come to such a pass even before the wars that the workhouse test was dropped. Pensions crept in bit by bit. They were first paid to parishioners in 1785–86 but were disguised as monetary casual relief.⁹⁰ In 1789, the vestry authorised the continuation of the pensions that were being currently paid.⁹¹ The minutes of another meeting in 1789 make it clear why pension relief was sanctioned.⁹² It was cheaper to maintain people outside the house so they were to be brought in only if they could not survive on the parish pension. A pauper could be paid a very small allowance which would force him to contribute to his own maintenance by undertaking casual labour. If brought into the workhouse, he would have to be supported completely by the township. What with all the petty speculation associated with victualling the house, the vestry could expect to pay a very stiff price for maintaining paupers there. Later developments reinforced the tendency for pensions to be offered rather than the house. It became very dilapidated during the early nineteenth century but the township could not afford the cost of rebuilding.⁹³ Quite possibly the workhouse just would not hold all the poor. During the French wars, inflation made it impossible for many to live on their incomes. The cheap way of dealing with this problem seemed to be to make up the deficient wages rather than have the depressed groups wholly dependent on the parish.⁹⁴ The parochial authorities may have hoped that substituting outdoor for indoor relief would help to keep the poor docile at a time of dangerous social unrest. Quite a few inhabitants must have been able to remember the dangerous Wilkite riots in New Brentford.⁹⁵ By the end of the French wars, relief in aid of wages was definitely established, although no specific mention was made of the Speenhamland scale.⁹⁶ The workhouse was no longer the major form of relief. By 1810 there were only eighteen persons in the house.

Between 1787 and 1796, discipline at the workhouse deteriorated. In 1787, it is recorded that the divisional magistrates had recommended that the township provide a room of confinement for paupers who rioted.⁹⁷ In 1791, Joseph Smith, the master, was dismissed by the vestry because he had had an improper relationship with a young woman in the workhouse who thought she might be pregnant.⁹⁸ In 1795 the master and mistress were discharged for failing to keep proper order.⁹⁹ The next couple seem to have been little better.¹⁰⁰

During the period from 1784 to 1836, one of the parish's favourite cure-alls was to farm

the house.¹⁰¹ This was done from 1796 to 1807 and again from 1832 to 1836.¹⁰² In 1789, it was suggested that the poor be farmed, quite probably because some inhabitants were becoming dissatisfied with the heavy rates.¹⁰³ In 1796, the house was farmed in order to reduce the rates and to restore discipline.¹⁰⁴ In 1830, the management committee suggested farming.¹⁰⁵ It seems that they were mainly concerned with the ratepayers' pockets. Large numbers of people defaulted on their rates in 1831 and thereby upset the workings of the administration.¹⁰⁶ The vestry, therefore, handed the house over to a contractor in 1832, in order to reduce expenditure.

The benefits which farming could provide were bound to be limited. At best, it could only improve management. Farming could do nothing, however, to prevent a genuine increase of poverty in the 1790's and 1830's.

Farming was foredoomed because the workhouse was not economically viable. By 1802, an important amount of wool processing was still being undertaken but some paupers were doing other work.¹⁰⁷ Profits from spinning coarse yarn were probably already feeling the pinch from cotton factory production. Straw hats were being made, probably by the children.¹⁰⁸ This unskilled labour, which was done in many workhouses, must also have produced few profits.¹⁰⁹ The house also contained an excellent set of cobbling equipment.¹¹⁰ The contractor, Povey, evidently tried to find work which would best fit each of the varied capacities of his charges. Thereby he lost all benefit of the division of labour. Povey also turned to food production to cut costs and, perhaps partly because production for the market had failed. At any rate, he built a pigsty and a chicken run.¹¹¹ He could not, however, push this policy to the limit for there was no room for a garden or a cow.¹¹²

The farmers, moreover, found the rent burdensome which they had to pay before the township gained ownership of the house in 1807.

The greatest difficulty was the unsuitability of the labour force. Only those paupers had to enter the house who could contribute little or nothing to their own support by casual labour. The contractor was obviously not going to make a fortune out of such unfortunates.

Jeffries, Povey's successor, was aware of the benefits of large-scale production and of buying supplies in bulk. There were just too few paupers in the house in 1802 and 1806 to employ and maintain profitably, partly because so many paupers received out-relief and partly because the township was small.¹¹³

New Brentford normally paid its farmers so much per head for each pauper they maintained. Dorothy Marshall pointed out that farmers paid in this way, rather than by one lump sum, always had an interest in increasing the numbers in the house to gain more profits.¹¹⁴ The extra returns which could be gained from large-scale production and bulk buying only increased the temptation. In 1804 and in 1833, the vestry discovered that the farmer had illegitimately increased the numbers in the workhouse.¹¹⁵ The only way the vestry could overcome this problem in 1806 was to adopt a more expensive system, whereby the amount paid per head increased as the numbers decreased.¹¹⁶

Both 1796 and 1832 saw the poor farmed out as the economic outlook was gloomy. The vestry was being very sanguine if it thought any farmer would make a profit. It would have been a good idea if the vestrymen had appointed an efficient man to be the farmer in 1796. As usual their penny-pinching attitude defeated their object. They chose as contractor the person who offered the lowest price—the current master, John Povey, who had already been convicted of mismanagement.¹¹⁷ The vestry did not realise that a change of system will not turn bad managers into good ones.

It almost goes without saying that the farmers could not survive on the money allowed to them. Three out of the four farmers were granted rises, whilst the fourth only lasted a year.¹¹⁸

Farming did nothing for discipline. Some order was not restored until Charles Collett was installed in 1810 under direct parish management.¹¹⁹ A new system could no more transform bad disciplinarians into good than bad managers into good.

After the township resumed control of the workhouse in 1807, production for the market seems to have ceased, and in 1816 no work was going on.¹²⁰ Thereafter, there is no indication that the paupers were occupied with anything more substantial than odd jobs or simple public works.¹²¹

The vestry failed to learn the lesson of the period 1796 to 1807 that something should be done to change the type of administrator. From 1811 at least, the master received a proper salary, not the profits of pauper labour.¹²² The vestrymen did not, however, take the opportunity to ensure that the remuneration would attract the right men. Instead, the master was only paid £20 per annum.¹²³ In 1830, the vestry rejected a proposal that his salary be raised. One of the masters actually ended up drawing the parish pension in 1828.¹²⁴ The workhouse-master could be no more trusted to keep expenditure within proper bounds than before. In 1830 the vestry forbade him to buy articles for the house.¹²⁵ The by now familiar train of abuses appears once again in the nineteenth century. In 1826, there were irregularities in the management of the workhouse.¹²⁶ The master and mistress were reprimanded in 1832 for not calling medical or spiritual aid to a child which was dying unbaptised and for having it buried secretly in consecrated ground.¹²⁷

A number of attempts were made to reform the administration. For a period in the 'nineties the vestry again adopted the "continuous system" of overseers which had been used in the 'sixties.¹²⁸ In the early nineteenth century, the appointment of an assistant overseer was a favourite panacea. At least it ensured that there was some continuity of policy and that the parish authorities had an expert's advice on hand. It was suggested, in 1823 and 1829, that the vestry should appoint an assistant overseer.¹²⁹ Both proposals were rejected although the vestry almost implemented them.¹³⁰ As always happened, when the pressure of expenditure was not too heavy, as in 1823 and 1829, the vestrymen felt no urgent necessity to do anything. On the other hand, when disbursements were high, nobody wanted to spend extra money, however salutary the cause might be. Alternatively, the vestrymen may just have felt that New Brentford was not large enough to obtain its money's-worth from an assistant overseer.

Attempts were made to increase the checks on expenditure. In 1816, the vestry ordered the overseers to present their accounts quarterly.¹³¹ Although this order was reiterated in 1821, the overseers presented their accounts only at every half-year from 1818 onwards.¹³² Still, half-yearly checks were better than the previous yearly audits. The vestry, in 1821, realised the major obstacle to a quarterly presentation of accounts: people were unwilling to turn up to more meetings. The vestry tried to avoid having any more by ordering that a special committee would undertake the quarterly audits.¹³³ It was never set up, however.

After the township regained direct control of the workhouse in 1807, the overseers themselves decided up to 1816 who should victual it.¹³⁴ In that year, the vestry ordered that tenders were to be presented quarterly.¹³⁵ The tradesmen usually complied with this order until 1822. Thereafter, in only two years (1823 and 1831) were tenders presented four times. In each of the years, 1824, 1825 and 1830, the vestry received tenders only once. Perhaps

the vestry's interest in preventing waste declined along with expenditure in the early 1820's. Quite probably, the presentation of tenders was never much more than a formality.¹³⁶

In 1816, it was also ordered that the vestry must examine the list of pensioners quarterly.¹³⁷ This was done fairly regularly. The inspection tended to be rather cursory when the vestry was not worried about the level of disbursements.¹³⁸ A committee may have been inspecting the list monthly in 1834.¹³⁹ The vestry, in 1816, decided too that the pensioners should turn up to each quarterly meeting so that the vestrymen could check that all those on the pension list were proper objects of relief.¹⁴⁰ This provision must have fallen into abeyance for a similar procedure was again laid down in 1831.¹⁴¹

During the period from 1784 to 1836, there was a tendency to set up management committees which by-passed the vestry. They appear to have had a dual origin. Firstly, the parish officers were expected, from 1757 onwards, to meet regularly to check that goods were being supplied to the house correctly.¹⁴² Secondly, the vestry turned the committee of enquiry of 1784 into a management committee, which was to assist the overseers.¹⁴³ In the 1830's, *ad hoc* committees seem to have been distinct from management committees. They were usually set up in an attempt to involve more parishioners in the administration of the Poor Law. Membership was usually very wide.¹⁴⁴ Where all the members' names were specified, they usually outnumbered the inhabitants at the meeting which had established the committee. A large number of these people were usually appointed as members. The vestrymen were not trying to pass the buck to others or to consummate the tendency for a corrupt oligarchy to gain control. If the committees had been intended as vehicles of peculation, the vestry would not have appointed such large numbers of members or included the parish notability amongst them.

The great drawback was that many people were not willing to serve on committees for long. Once one had been appointed, nobody heard much about it again. The committee of 1830 asked to be wound up.¹⁴⁵ Inhabitants were so unwilling to serve that committees which dragged on probably consisted of no more than a corrupt oligarchy in the end. It should be noted that some of the contractors who victualled the workhouse were amongst the most enthusiastic committee members.

Ad hoc committees were much smaller. The minimum membership was three. Some of these little groups were probably corrupt. One should be very suspicious of one committee set up in 1818. The vestry entrusted three contractors with the task of auditing the overseers' accounts!¹⁴⁶

Generally speaking, none of the administrative reforms achieved much. The committees suffered from all the same drawbacks as the rest of the amateur machinery—too many people in responsible positions were ignorant, lazy or corrupt. Management committees were only set up when things were going wrong: in 1784, 1796, 1797, 1830, 1831 and 1833.¹⁴⁷ Similarly, the other reforms were only tried out in the 'nineties, in 1816, 1821 and 1831, when the outlook appeared black. If the system had not been allowed to degenerate during the bright spells of the 'eighties or mid-1820's the township might have negotiated the patches of black ice with less trouble. As it was, inclement situations were always catching the vestry off balance and the vestrymen hastily adopted all sorts of temporary expedients which were bound to fail in the long term.

The vestry usually reacted to heavy expenditure by cutting the paupers' rations.¹⁴⁸ When the system was running smoothly, the vestrymen did not really worry how well the poor ate. It was all too easy to economise without any permanent reform. Once again, short-term

devices replaced constructive change. The vestry's attitude is all the more surprising when one considers that the vestrymen were often more humanitarian in the period 1784 to 1836 than before. It would not do to ignore the fact that some of this apparent concern was pure humbug.¹⁴⁹

It is, perhaps, all too easy to castigate the vestry for its failings. The parish faced severe problems because the causes of poverty were changing. Before 1784, the township was dealing with a few of the perennial unfortunates: widows, children, the sick and vagrants. It is, however, difficult to over-exaggerate the extent of poverty about 1800. The records still convey the urgency with which extraordinary measures were taken to reduce the consumption of wheaten bread.¹⁵⁰ In the early nineteenth century, fluctuations of the trade cycle induced the ebb and flow of the tide of expenditure. It reached high levels in 1815–16, 1819–20 and 1831–32, when the economy was depressed. Short-time working and under-employment were probably forcing people onto the parish. When there was a boom in 1825, the township's expenditure reached its lowest recorded level in the post-Napoleonic period. The small township of New Brentford could do nothing to prevent the alternation of boom and slump. At the caprice of the waves she rode the crest or sank into a trough.

In the last depression in 1831–32 New Brentford's problems were accentuated by her economic decline. Doubtless, the fishing industry was decaying already.¹⁵¹ Migration was probably causing a net loss of local population.¹⁵² It is likely that the township was no longer attracting new industries.

A discussion of settlements and removals must loom large in any treatment of the period 1791 to 1817. In the 'nineties and at the end of the wars the vestry seems to have tried to prune the number of paupers in order to cut expenditure. Before applying to the justices for an order of removal, the parish officers were not too fussy about the rights and wrongs of the case. Many attempts to remove people seem to have failed when the parishes which were to receive these unfortunates appealed to the justices. Other localities do not seem to have tried to drive out large numbers of people who had settlements in New Brentford.¹⁵³ It is quite possible, though, that the township was shedding excess mouths merely because other districts were not willing to reimburse the township for relief it had provided for their own settled paupers.

Towards the end of the Napoleonic Wars, the ratepayers were forced to contribute heavily towards the demobilisation of the troops.¹⁵⁴ The only way to ensure they reached home was to have them removed. Parishes like New Brentford which lay on main roads leading out of London had to support the soldiers and other unfortunates whilst they were in transit.¹⁵⁵

After 1816 we hear no more about removals, settlements or attempts to force relatives to support their kin. Urban society was probably becoming too complicated to allow the overseers to go chasing after every "foreigner" or every pauper's family. An alteration in the law of settlement in 1797, which theoretically made removal more difficult, probably made little difference in practice.¹⁵⁶

Parish apprenticeship had degenerated into a complete farce by the early nineteenth century. The vestry became very explicit about its desire that parish children should be apprenticed outside the township.¹⁵⁷ As society changed, honest tradesmen sought fewer and fewer apprentices. By 1842, the lack of potential masters was worrying the trustees of a charity which provided money to bind poor boys. Parish apprenticeship was not abandoned in Middlesex in the face of difficulties, as the Report of 1834 would have us believe.¹⁵⁸ The children apprenticed must have been little more than bond servants or wage labourers and

could not have been receiving much education. It is well known that early factory owners took parish apprentices because it was difficult to attract free labour to mills. In 1791, the vestry supplied children to a flax manufactory and in 1800 sent some to a cotton mill.¹⁵⁹ On the second occasion, it should be noted that the vestry deprived the paupers of any veto over the binding of their children, which was left in the officers' hands.¹⁶⁰ The use of compulsion does not say much for the benefits boys and girls gained from pauper apprenticeship. The manufacturers found, after about 1810, that they could attract free workers more easily and we hear no more of this forced labour in factories.

This study has tended to confirm many, but not all, aspects of the usual view of eighteenth-century institutional development. The measuring rod used was satisfaction. The parochial authorities were usually satisfied so long as the rates could be kept down. Using this yardstick, the historian should not judge that the years before 1775 constituted "a period of decay punctuated by occasional attempts at reform". For a time at least, the administrative improvements of the late 1750's and early 1760's seem to have arrested a decline which became visible in the 'fifties. After 1775, the basic inflexibility of the system began to tell. Whatever the inhabitants might do, they were tied to dealing with problems at a parochial level by means of amateur officers and voluntary effort. The basic fact of life with which the vestry had always to cope was the township's small size.¹⁶¹ Although the vestry co-operated with Isleworth to some extent in the early years, no attempt was made to pool New Brentford's administrative resources with another parish.¹⁶² Local patriotism and the hostility which the law of settlements engendered between parishes probably prevented such collaboration.¹⁶³ The smallness of the township accounts for much of the local administrative development and failure. Could such a small parish have set up a workhouse in the 1720's? Could the farmer really have made profits from a house with so few inmates? There was some room for manoeuvre within the basic structure. By 1775 the township was running out of manoeuvres that would do any good. A workhouse had been tried and had failed. The parish authorities could only return to giving outdoor relief. Farming was bound to fail. The only reform which might have proved useful and had not been tried by 1775 was the appointment of a paid assistant overseer. Only after jettisoning the basic format could the administration have kept up with the needs of a changing society.

Whereas there had been some consistent policy between 1757 and 1783, there was no coherent or constructive policy afterwards. The township was largely at the mercy of circumstances beyond the control of the parochial authorities. We discern few signs of *ad hoc* machinery taking the place of the old institutions. The Brentford and Ealing Savings Bank, the Brentford Dispensary and the National School, all of which were set up in 1818, only touched the peripheries of the problem of poverty.¹⁶⁴ Under-employment and low real wages remained uncured.

On one level, administrative policy had a two-fold origin. The parochial authorities made their own decisions as to how they would play the script left by the Elizabethan legislators. On a more general level, the attitude of the contemporary society and the circumstances of the day dictated policy. Many parishes adopted much the same answers to the problem of poverty as New Brentford, because the problem was everywhere much the same and all rate-payers shared much the same attitudes. Peculiar local circumstances in each of the 15,000-odd parishes, however, ensured that a slightly different version of the general solution to the problem was adopted in each of them. In New Brentford, the district's small size accounts for many of the local aberrations.¹⁶⁵

The usual view of the position of statute law holds largely true in New Brentford. Very little reference was made to Acts of Parliament. The dictates of parliamentary ukases did not push the vestry into setting up a workhouse in 1757 or sanctioning pension relief in 1789. An important point to note is that the vestry did not adopt the most important provisions of Knatchbull's and Gilbert's Acts until well after they had been passed. If Acts followed fashions, then New Brentford was never *à la mode*. The township's small size was probably the ultimate reason why the parochial authorities were so dilatory. The workhouse was not established until 1757 because in earlier years there were not enough paupers to make one worth while. Outdoor relief was not adopted until 1789 quite probably because the overseers did not feel the pressure of rapid social change so early as they would have done in a larger parish. They were, therefore, able to make sure that the local workhouse did not run downhill so early as in other places.

Too much stress has, perhaps, been placed on removals and settlements. In New Brentford at least, they seem to have become rare after 1816-17.

Finally, one must decide whether the criticisms offered by the Report of 1834 were justified. It gave the impression that the Old Poor Law had somehow been "soft" on the paupers. The vestry, in 1816, restricted the poor in the house to no more than 16 oz. of meat per week and, in 1828, ordered that the poor men there clean up some sewage.¹⁶⁶ A pauper's life was not very eligible by early nineteenth-century standards. The Report was correct when it said that the old amateur machinery could not cope. Too much criticism was offered without enough consideration of the facts. Detailed returns to the Commission's enquiries were received from only about eight places in Middlesex outside the City, although the Metropolis contained so large a proportion of England's population. A study of more places like New Brentford would have helped the Commissioners to assess Middlesex's special problems, such as the lack of an active squirearchy. As it was, the Report sweepingly condemned relief in aid of wages because Chadwick did not try to understand why it was given in urban areas. The Report concentrated too much upon the baneful effects of the Speenhamland system in agricultural districts. Although New Brentford was only a tiny stone in a big mosaic, a study of the township's administration of the Poor Law does help us to see the whole picture.

FOOTNOTES

V.M. The Vestry Minutes
P.A.B. The Poorhouse Accounts Book

1. This view of eighteenth-century institutions appears in G. M. Trevelyan's "English Social History".
2. This is a rough sketch of the view presented by J. R. Poynter in his "Society and Pauperism", 1969 (hereafter J. R. Poynter). "The typical pattern in each locality was periodic reform interrupting gradual decay"; J. R. Poynter, p. 8.
3. The rest of the paragraph is closely based on the opinions of J. R. Poynter and Dorothy Marshall; J. R. Poynter, p. 13; Dorothy Marshall, "The English Poor in the Eighteenth Century", 1926 (hereafter D. Marshall), Introduction, p. 128.
4. J. R. Poynter and Dorothy Marshall have explained these Acts. She thought Knatchbull's Act was less humanitarian than Gilbert's; D. Marshall, pp. 55, 56, 89, 159.
5. For instance, an Act in 1563 made each parish responsible for its own roads.
6. See J. R. Poynter and D. Marshall for this Act.
7. To pass the test, one had to occupy a tenement worth £10 or more annually. More correctly, a person was passed back to the parish of his (or her) last legal settlement rather than his home parish. J. R. Poynter and D. Marshall explain how settlements were gained.
8. The churchwardens and overseers comprised the parish officers. They could, if they wished, issue special certificates to anyone—in effect any inhabitant of their own area. By so doing they acknowledged that the bearer had a settlement in that particular community and that it was responsible for him, if he could not support himself. These documents were designed to facilitate travel. A certificated person could not be removed from any other parish unless he actually fell chargeable. Even if he did, he was not necessarily removed; the officers of the district that had issued the certificate might well prefer to reimburse the locality that had assisted him than receive him back. D. Marshall explains the Act of 1697.

9. Sydney and Beatrice Webb, "English Local Government".
10. The Act of 1601 laid down a provision that justices could levy extra rates in one parish to help another which could not raise sufficient money. This procedure was scarcely ever implemented.
11. "The local officers . . . waged internecine war over settlements"; J. R. Poynter, p. 7.
12. For example, *V.M.*, 4 March 1789. See J. R. Poynter on the complications of the settlement laws.
13. Marc Blaug, "The Myth of the Old Poor Law and the Making of the New", *The Journal of Economic History*, June 1963.
14. These places set up workhouses in the 1720's.
15. Some pensions went up in winter, when employment was scarcer, and down again in summer, when more work was available.
16. *V.M.*, 8 November 1751.
17. New Brentford covered 230 acres; Isleworth Parish, 3,120; Ealing, with Old Brentford, 1,120; Census Report, 1833.
18. During the 1710's New Brentford was elevated from the position of a hamlet within the parish of Hanwell to the level of township. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the vestry usually used the terms "township" and "parish" indifferently to describe New Brentford. For ecclesiastical purposes, this district remained a chapelry within Hanwell.
19. For some early examples taken at random see the accounts of the overseers for 1732, Leach and Garrard, and of those for 1733, Jennings and Cripps.
20. Investigations conducted into marriage registers have shown that a higher proportion of people in the Metropolis could sign their names than in most other districts. It would appear, therefore, that Middlesex had a higher rate of literacy by eighteenth-century standards.
21. The vestry found a petty fault in the accounts of one of the overseers; *V.M.*, 18 June 1733.
22. *V.M.*, 8 April, 9 February 1733; 20 May, 9 October 1735.
23. A copy of the circular is to be found in the Charity School Minute Book.
24. *V.M.*, 19 September 1722.
25. For examples, see *V.M.* 19 February 1753; 31 December 1766.
26. For a later example, see *V.M.* 15 June 1760.
27. It appears from the overseers' accounts for 1733 that she died in that year. For the case, see *V.M.* 4 February 1732; 21 July 1734; 3 May, 27 July 1736; an undated meeting, probably in 1736; 23 May 1737; 13 November 1738; 1 June, 26 December 1739.
28. *V.M.*, 8 December 1753; 7 March 1754.
29. *V.M.*, 20 April 1767.
30. For bread prices and figures of annual expenditure, see Tables 1 and 2 respectively. See footnote 46.
31. In 1744 and 1745, especially elaborate precautions were taken to make sure people could not complain that they had been overcharged on the rates. See Rate Book.
32. *V.M.*, 21 May, 23 July 1753; 15 October 1756.
33. *V.M.*, 19 February 1753; 8 November 1751.
34. *V.M.*, 2 November 1753.
35. For the establishment of the workhouse, see *V.M.* 31 December 1756; 15, 18 January 1757.
36. *V.M.*, 15 January 1757; 13 May 1789.
37. *V.M.*, 18 January 1757.
38. In 1759-60 each pauper received an average of 3 - 3½ lb. of meat per week. This figure was derived by calculation from the meat bills in P.A.B. Meat was eaten three times a week according to the bill of fare; *V.M.*, 18 January 1757.
39. *V.M.*, 18 January 1757.
40. *V.M.*, 27 January 1757.
41. *V.M.*, 15 January 1757.
42. *V.M.*, 28 November 1787.
43. *V.M.*, 15 January 1757. The vestry failed to stipulate what proportion of the profits the poor ought to receive.
44. It was laid down that the paupers were to receive twopence in the shilling; *V.M.*, 13 May 1789.
45. The inventory is at the back of P.A.B.
46. *V.M.*, 18 January 1757.
47. *V.M.*, 18 January 1757. A child had to be removed from the house lest it infect others with whooping cough; *V.M.*, 25 January, 1769.
48. P.A.B. Inventory; see footnote 46.
49. *V.M.*, 12 April 1762. A recommendation was not made in 1763 but was every year thereafter.
50. *V.M.*, 15 April 1805; the justices had rejected the vestry's nominees.
51. D. Marshall states that by about 1750 most communities nominated their own overseers.
52. D. Marshall points out these difficulties.
53. The overseers served thus:
- | | | | | | |
|---------|----------|---------|----------|---------|----------|
| 1756/57 | A plus B | 1763/64 | J plus K | 1770/71 | R plus S |
| 1757/58 | A plus C | 1764/65 | K plus L | 1771/72 | T plus U |
| 1758/59 | C plus D | 1765/66 | L plus M | 1772/73 | V plus W |
| 1759/60 | D plus E | 1766/67 | N plus O | 1773/74 | W plus X |
| 1760/61 | F plus G | 1767/68 | O plus P | 1774/75 | X plus Y |
| 1761/62 | F plus H | 1768/69 | P plus Q | 1775/76 | X plus Z |
| 1762/63 | I plus J | 1769/70 | Q plus R | | |
54. *V.M.*, 31 December 1756; 21 February 1757.
55. *V.M.*, 31 December 1756.
56. *V.M.*, 31 December 1756.

57. When the offices of beadle and bellman were separated from the workhouse-master's function in 1789, a single man took over the house, although the vestry usually preferred a married man to be master. Presumably, the master just could not support a wife on the profits alone. The advantage of appointing a married couple was that the township did not have then to pay a salary for the mistress. See *V.M.* 21 February 1757; 16 June 1758; 29 April, 13 May 1789.
58. From 1757 to 1769 the numbers at the house fluctuated between about 19 and 30; *P.A.B.* Spinning was not men's work.
59. The inventory in *P.A.B.*; see footnote 45.
60. *V.M.*, 15 January 1757.
61. The workhouse-master and his family were usually included without distinction with the rest of the paupers whenever the people in the house were listed in *P.A.B.* On occasion, the list was headed as though it contained only paupers.
62. Mr. and Mrs. Biggins were appointed in 1758; *V.M.*, 16 June 1758. The vestry gave gratuities to her on account of her good management; *V.M.*, 26 December 1761; 26 December 1764.
63. The vestry thanked James Clitherow III for the enormous amount of work he had done; *V.M.*, 18 July 1766.
64. *V.M.I.*, 4 May 1766.
65. *V.M.*, 10 November 1784.
66. The first mention of Dr. Walter Johnson in *V.M.* occurs in the 1770's. He owned a starch mill in the township. Phillip Norbury, the local printer, attended the vestry for the first time in the same period.
67. *V.M.*, 18 January 1757.
68. A vestry meeting is recorded in *P.A.B.* in 1766; a pair of scales were to be bought in order that the officers could check the weights of goods supplied. One suspects the vestry was shutting the door after the horse had bolted.
69. He does not appear as a victualler in any other year; *V.M.*, 28 September 1775.
70. Robert Avery, an overseer in 1770/71, was not allowed to charge two bottles of wine to his official account. He was too blatant.
71. No more entries were made in *P.A.B.* after 1769.
72. *V.M.*, 2 December 1784.
73. 52 persons: 7 men, 19 women and 26 children; *V.M.*, 2 December 1784.
74. James Clitherow III signed the rate assessment in his capacity as a justice for the last time on 21 September 1782. John Drinkwater's last signature in the Rate Books appears under the entry on 1 March 1780. These two had nearly always signed the assessments previously. A succession of magistrates from outside New Brentford performed the task from then onwards.
75. See Robbins, "Middlesex", pp. 119-120.
76. Robbins "Middlesex" (hereafter Robbins), p. 121; Sydney and Beatrice Webb, "English Local Government".
77. See K. B. Smellie, "Two Centuries of Local Government".
78. Faulkner, "Antiquities of Brentford, Ealing and Chiswick", 1845 (hereafter Faulkner). Dr. Glasse was the largest landowner in the Parish of Greenford; K. A. Smalley, "Greenford", 1963.
79. *V.M.*, 25 May 1797.
80. See footnote 50. After 1805, the vestry sent a list of a dozen or so names each year to the justices, who chose two men from it to be overseers.
81. When James Clitherow IV retired in 1839 he received encomiums from the vestry and the divisional magistrates; Faulkner.
82. When James Clitherow IV died in 1842 he was holding 18 important offices. Many, such as the vice-presidency of the Royal Humane Society, were fairly recent innovations.
83. *V.M.*, 3 November 1825.
84. They had to perform many new tasks connected with the militia. The overseers took the censuses; *V.M.*, 18 March 1801; 27 August 1811.
85. The records of casual disbursements in the last decade of the eighteenth century tell us very little when they are compared with those of, say, the 1730's; see especially the accounts of Silvanus Ronalds, 1794/95; Henry Eyles, 1795/96; and Christopher Glover, 1797/98.
86. *V.M.*, 25 May 1797.
87. *V.M.*, 24 May 1810.
88. *V.M.*, 17 December 1829.
89. *V.M.*, 15 April 1811; 24 March 1821; 5 August 1828. There is no record of the appointment of Mr. Head at all in *V.M.* We cannot be sure who was master from 1791 to 1795, and 1807 to 1810; *V.M.*, 27 July 1791; 12 December 1795; 30 March, 25 June 1807; 15 April 1811.
90. Accounts of William Turner and John Collet.
91. *V.M.*, 11 June 1791.
92. *V.M.*, 15 December 1789. The pensions being paid in 1833 were lower than the amount that the farmer received for each pauper; 22 September 1832; 9 May 1833.
93. *V.M.*, 5, 11 July 1832.
94. None of the pensions being paid in 1800 came up to the level of the four shillings per head being paid to the farmer; *V.M.*, 3 July 1799; Overseers' Accounts. At least one person received only a shilling per week as a pension. This must have been relief in aid of wages; no one could live on such a pittance in 1800.
95. See George Rudé, "Wilkes and Liberty".
96. Many of the pensions in the early nineteenth century were too small to provide total subsistence; e.g., *V.M.*, 17 April 1828; particularly 7 November 1828; 13 May 1830. The shilling paid to Callis, the workhouse-master, was definitely relief in aid of wages; *V.M.*, 17 April 1828. Payments to militiamen's families seem to have followed some sort of scale.
97. *V.M.*, 28 November 1787.
98. *V.M.*, 18 July 1791.

99. *V.M.*, 12 December 1795.
 100. *V.M.*, 7 December 1796.
 101. J. R. Poynter states that this was a favourite device in the second quarter of the eighteenth century; by the time Eden wrote, farming had fallen into disrepute.
 102. *V.M.*, 7 November 1796; 22 September 1802; 30 March, 25 June 1807; 22 September 1832; 25 October, 15, 18 November 1833.
 103. *V.M.*, 29 April, 13 May 1789.
 104. *V.M.*, 7 September 1796.
 105. *V.M.*, 7 October 1830.
 106. *V.M.*, 27 January 1831.
 107. See the loose inventory of goods in the house, dated 1802, which is amongst the manuscripts. This document will henceforth be called the *Inventory of 1802*. See also *V.M.* 7 October 1802.
 108. Inventory of 1802.
 109. D. Marshall.
 110. Inventory of 1802.
 111. Ditto.
 112. *V.M.*, 3 July 1799.
 113. *V.M.*, 23 December 1802; 22 September 1806. See also footnote 17.
 114. D. Marshall, pp. 131-132. The farmer who was paid so much per head made his profit from the margin between the *per capita* payment and earnings accruing from each pauper on the one hand, and the cost of his keep and raw materials on the other. The greater were the efficiency of the workhouse and the number of inmates, the larger were the marginal profits. The contractor who was paid a lump sum usually tried, by fair means or foul, to reduce the numbers of poor in the house. Every additional pauper, even if his labour helped to support him, represented another deduction from the money paid over by the parish.
 115. *V.M.*, 16 May 1804; 11 July 1833.
 116. *V.M.*, 22 September 1806.
 117. *V.M.*, 7 September, 7 November 1796.
 118. For extra payments made to Povey, see *V.M.* 28 November 1799; 10 May, 18 July, 10 December 1800; 28 January, 14 May, 11, 18 June, 13 August 1801; for Jeffries, see *V.M.* 23 December 1802; 9 February, 11, 22 September 1806; for Edghill, see *V.M.* 14 April 1836. Clements ran the house for only a year.
 119. *V.M.*, 15 April 1811.
 120. *V.M.*, 17 April 1816.
 121. *V.M.*, 10 April 1818; 22 September 1828.
 122. *V.M.*, 15 April 1811.
 123. *V.M.*, 5 August 1828.
 124. See footnote 96.
 125. *V.M.*, 7 October 1830.
 126. *V.M.*, 28 September 1826.
 127. *V.M.*, 1 March 1832.
 128. The overseers served thus:

1792/93 A plus B	1794/95 C plus D.
1793/94 B plus C	1795/96 D plus E.
129. *V.M.*, 25 March 1823; 26 February 1828 (in fact, 1828 should read 1829).
 130. See footnote 129; *V.M.*, 3 April 1823; 12 March 1829.
 131. *V.M.*, 17 April 1816.
 132. *V.M.*, 18 April 1821.
 133. Ditto.
 134. *V.M.*, 24 May 1810; 2 May 1816.
 135. *V.M.*, 17 April 1816.
 136. No one bothered to send in tenders for 7 April 1819; see *V.M.*
 137. *V.M.*, 17 April 1816.
 138. See e.g. *V.M.* 4, 24 March 1827.
 139. *V.M.*, 25 April 1834.
 140. *V.M.*, 17 April 1816.
 141. *V.M.*, 23 June 1831.
 142. *V.M.*, 15 January 1757; 2 December 1784.
 143. *V.M.*, 2 December 1784.
 144. *V.M.*, 25 February 1830; 14 April 1831; 9 December 1831.
 145. *V.M.*, 14 April 1831.
 146. *V.M.*, 2 April 1818. Jones was ordered to supply food to the workhouse; *V.M.*, 27 June 1821. Gregory often supplied bread to the workhouse. On nine occasions between 1820 and 1827, he was ordered to do so by the vestry.
 147. *V.M.*, 2 December 1784; 30 September 1796; 24 May 1798; 25 February 1830; 14 April 1831.
 148. *V.M.*, 17 April 1816.
 149. *V.M.*, 20 July 1832. The vestry claimed to believe that farming "would be alike to the interest of the Poor and of the Township". An *ad hoc* committee considered this measure would "promote the welfare and comfort of the poor".
 150. 3 October 1795; Royal proclamation on the reduction of wheaten bread.
V.M., 27 January 1796; a special meeting of the principal inhabitants resolved that they would voluntarily restrict the consumption of wheaten bread by their families.
V.M., 10 December 1800. Royal proclamation on corn shortage.
V.M., 8 February 1801; a proportion of outdoor relief to be given in food not money.

151. Industrialisation caused river pollution, which, in the early nineteenth century, decimated the fish in the Thames. Faulkner noted that there were some fishermen still when he was writing.
152. The township's population after about 1821 seems to have grown much more slowly than that of England as a whole. Unless one is going to assume that the birth or the death-rate in New Brentford was extremely peculiar, emigration from the township seems to be the only way to explain the slow increase.
153. *V.M.*, 5, 11 September 1791; 24 March, 6 April 1795; 4 March 1796; 18 October 1797; 14 July 1806; 10 February, 4 September 1815; 3 April 1816.
154. In the year 1814/15 the expense incurred through persons travelling with passes amounted to £45.19.3. The annual average for the ten years from 1800-1810 was £8.2.1.
155. A parish from which a pauper was being removed had to bear the costs of transporting and maintaining him only until he reached the parish boundary. Then the next community had to shoulder the burden of conveying him to the next border and so it progressed until he reached his destination. New Brentford lay on the main road to Bath.
156. The Act placed everybody on the same level as the certificated person. After 1797, only people who had actually become chargeable could be removed. It seems probable that, in the last decades of the eighteenth century, parish officers, in the Metropolis at least, were acting very much as though the 1797 Act had already been passed. The complexities of urban life must have been hindering any attempt to remove people on mere suspicion that they might become a burden to the community, even if removals had not become as difficult as in the early nineteenth century.
157. *V.M.*, 16 May 1804.
158. *V.M.*, 20 April 1835. The Vestry ordered that five parish apprentices' indentures, dating from 1826-1833, be deposited in the chest. Two boys had been bound in 1833.
159. *V.M.*, 23 October 1791; 9 March 1800.
160. The Act of 1601 empowered the overseers to bind poor children without reference to the parents' wishes and to take measures to force tradesmen to accept parish apprentices. No case has come to light in New Brentford of a master being compelled to employ an apprentice. This procedure went out of fashion very early on, except in the North of England; see J. R. Poynter and D. Marshall.
161. See footnote 17.
162. For instance, the vestry ordered that the parish children be maintained in Isleworth Workhouse. It is not unlikely that they were never sent there; even if they were they did not stay for long.
163. The township had a long tradition of local patriotism. On one occasion in the sixteenth century, the men of Isleworth, who were beating the bounds, fought the men of Hanwell, who were likewise perambulating their borders, on Brentford Bridge; see Robbins. At that time New Brentford was part of Hanwell; see footnote 18. In the mid-Victorian period, there was a sizeable agitation in New Brentford against co-operation with Old Brentford in a national celebration.
164. Faulkner.
165. See footnote 17.
166. *V.M.*, 17 April 1816; 10 April 1818.