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The economy of makeshifts and the role of the poor law: a game of chance?

Margaret Hanly

Overview

Ann Wilson hath this day behaved very insolent at the meeting in
Tottington Chapel Vestry – July 10th 1817¹

Ann Wilson was a weaver of Tottington Lower End aged 37 years who earned 3s. per week. She is one of the poor who appear in the pages of the Survey of the Poor taken in Tottington Lower End parish in Lancashire in 1817. Her life was not without colour, for she is shown as a woman without a husband and having three illegitimate children. The eldest, a boy of ten, worked in a local colliery and earned as much as his mother at 3s. per week; there were also two daughters, aged seven and a half and two and a half respectively, the youngest being noted as ‘a bastard by her sister’s husband’. Her possessions consisted of two pairs of looms and one bedstead and bedding; she was employed by Wm Holt, owed £2 11s. in rent and by 1819 the poor relief records reveal that she was in receipt of 3s. per week from her community. Such details, sparse as they are, begin to give a very vivid picture of the economic circumstances of one particular person, and they also open a window into the economy of makeshifts that so many of her Lancashire contemporaries had to exploit in order to survive.²

For Ann Wilson, an application for relief to the vestry under the terms of the old poor law was clearly part of her conception of the economy of makeshifts. So was work for both herself and

her children, going into arrears with rent and, perhaps, bearing an illegitimate child.³ Wilson was not alone in regarding the poor law as an important part of the makeshift economy. While welfare historians have come to appreciate that there were marked regional differences in the number of paupers recognised by the poor law and the level and form of relief given to them, what is clear is that the number relieved by the poor law increased considerably across the country after 1760, as did the cost of relieving them.⁴ If we add in those who felt poor enough to apply to vestries for relief but were turned down, then it is clear that more and more people saw a role for the poor law in the economy of makeshifts as the eighteenth century progressed and that more and more communities recognised this role too. The important question for welfare historians has been: how extensive was that role? Was the poor law an integral part of the economy of makeshifts or did it figure merely as one of the possibilities depending on the pauper rather than on their poverty? And how exactly did relief payments relate to other payments in the family economy of makeshifts?

As Alannah Tomkins and Steven King suggest in the introduction to this volume, historians disagree on these questions. Such disagreement is not surprising. Certain categories of poor people were likely to be more dependent on the parish than others at all times whereas for many it became a relevant factor at a particular phase of their lives. The family with several young children, some too young to work, those affected by illness or lack of work, those faced with low wages or who had poor skills could easily find themselves in a spiral of poverty which reduced them to pauperism. Others would escape from this when the children were old enough to work and contribute to the family economy only to find their circumstances reduced again when they reached old age. For those families where both parents and some of the older children at least could work their economy of makeshifts would be constructed largely from this source. For those with a sick or absent parent or for a deserted wife or widow with children the application for relief from the parish had a greater urgency. Understanding the role and character of poor relief in the welfare process is thus at least partly a function of reconstructing life-cycles of need, as Steven King and Alannah Tomkins suggest in their conclusion.

Even before this, however, it is necessary to try and uncover

the *sentiment* of the old poor law if one is to locate it in general terms in the wider economy of makeshifts. Again, historians disagree on this matter, but for the purposes of this chapter, which concentrates on the economy of makeshifts in Lancashire, it is appropriate to characterise the poor law as *defensive*. Despite recent attempts to rethink the powerlessness of the poor, in Lancashire power and authority very clearly lay with the officials who were charged with the obligation of both collecting the poor rate and of dispensing the amount of this allotted to the poor.⁵ Apart from the statutory duty to relieve, these officials laid down their own tacit criteria for determining what they deemed to be poverty and who was worthy to be helped from the resources available. Their responsibility lay both to the ratepayers, to whom they had to give an annual account, and to the needy, whose survival they had to be seen to ensure. The vestry or overseer therefore had to consider the legal requirements and for this reason it was necessary to ensure whether applicants for relief were the responsibility of the parish and if not whether they could be removed elsewhere. If they could establish a valid settlement the pauper had to prove need. This would include confirming to the satisfaction of the overseer that all other avenues of help had been explored. These would cover work and this would mean also their wife and children, applying for charity, selling or pawning their possessions, relying on kin, taking in lodgers and even considering emigration. Even the aged were not immune from these strictures and many worked into extreme old age, as Pat Thane has recently shown.⁶

The parish officers would, if the pauper were deemed worthy of relief, grant whatever amount and in whatever manner they chose. This did not mean that the request of the pauper was honoured; in many instances cash was not given or in small amounts and instead goods in the form of coal, cloth, clogs, or foodstuffs were provided. These often represented what the vestry could acquire at the lowest price. It does not escape attention that many members of Lancashire vestries or other prominent ratepayers were often the local manufacturers or merchants whose goods would be made available for sale to the vestry for this purpose.⁷ In practice, even the briefest survey of Lancashire poor law records reveals that parish officers faced a constant tension between thinking long-term and reacting to short-term local influences on the supply of or demand for relief. Thus the presence

of vagrants in the Lancashire market town of Garstang posed a persistent problem for the vestry, resulting in stringent vestry rules as an attempt to control their numbers and to persuade them to move on. In the meantime, the vestry took its eyes off the rising value of pensions and had to periodically cut back. In Rossendale, the existence of a factory or mill often proved to be the impetus to direct the parish relief towards apprenticeship for pauper children, or a reason to deny relief to a pauper reluctant to accept (or simply unable to survive on) a less than basic wage. This short-term pragmatism did little to address the clear over-supply of labour in the area. Meanwhile, at particular times of crisis or as the numbers of the poor simply increased many Lancashire parishes adopted a policy of judging applicants for relief by standards of morality and gave the appearance of being more concerned with the character and disposition of a pauper than with the fact that the person was in need. In such circumstances, as will be seen below, the parish was adroit in marrying its requirements to keep the poor rate at a minimum level and meeting the needs of the poor by effectively making the poor look after their fellow paupers.

These observations could be made about most counties at some point in time, but rarely do they apply so completely or for so long as in Lancashire. Not surprisingly – another of the general points raised by Alannah Tomkins and Steven King in their introduction – it was rare for the Lancashire poor law to provide relief at a level, or with a constancy that was sufficient to guarantee subsistence. More than the poor elsewhere, those in Lancashire had a particular need for recourse to the economy of makeshifts. The broad outlines of this economy of makeshifts are set out elsewhere in this volume, but a brief recap is useful for this chapter. Thus, as well as work, what must be borne in mind are the unwritten and unspoken factors which figured largely in the economic lives of many: the help from kin and neighbours, the reliance on credit both social and fiscal, the place of crime in the survival of many at the very edges of destitution, and the charitable grant which eased the burden of those not only without regular work but also those with low or intermittent wages. In all Lancashire communities that I have studied, certain basic expectations prevailed. These were that the poor would work if work was available unless prevented by age (and this would mean extreme old age), youth or sickness. They would have a minimum of possessions

which they would be expected to sell or pawn in times of difficulty. Some would be members of, and could draw benefit from, sick clubs or friendly societies. They would look to, and in turn give support to, their 'kin' or network of friends, family and associates often living close by and who provided a raft of help and care in times of difficulty.⁸ *Lastly*, a fact that we can see from the very sparse inventories periodically taken of pauper goods, the poor would turn to the township or parish for relief. Even then, as I have suggested, paupers would sometimes be offered relief in a form which they did not want or which was simply of little use or was insufficient. Those who were granted some relief from the parish were undoubtedly still poor in the Lancashire context.

This chapter will begin to explore the economy of makeshifts generally, and the relationship between that economy of makeshifts and the character of the poor law in particular, for one of England's most neglected counties, Lancashire. It utilises rich documentation drawn from a variety of Lancashire communities located in Figure 3.1: the Select Vestry and Overseers' accounts from Garstang, including the Survey of the Poor in 1818,⁹ the Survey of Poor Families in 1817 from Tottington,¹⁰ the Census of the Poor from Great and Little Marsden in 1826,¹¹ the View of the Poor taken by Richard Eastwood of the same townships in 1829,¹² the Census of the Poor for Ashton and Haydock in 1815¹³ and the names of the sick and poor of Barrowford.¹⁴ While poverty and welfare in growing urban centres such as Liverpool and Manchester have been dealt with by others,¹⁵ poverty, welfare and the economy of makeshifts in rural and rural industrial areas like these have more rarely been considered for the north of England generally and Lancashire in particular.

Places and sources

The townships of Haydock and Ashton-in-Makerfield were both part of the larger parish of Winwick. The main features of Haydock, described at a later period, were undulating and flat, having features typical of a colliery country, and in the east were fields and plantations in which oats, wheat and vegetables were grown. Coal was found in the eighteenth century and mining became the central industry of the place, though it did not dominate the occupational structure at any point.¹⁶ The adjacent township of

Figure 3.1 Map of Lancashire

Ashton-in-Makerfield was similarly described as being mostly flat, with cultivation of root and grain crops. Baines's Lancashire Directory of 1825 further described Ashton as 'a large and populous village the centre of a brisk manufacturing district where the

poor are industrious and their employers prosperous'.¹⁷ Collieries were also beginning to form part of the local economy by the early nineteenth century, as was small-scale metal working. In contrast Garstang, located on the main road from Preston to Lancaster, had a mainly agricultural structure with the land predominantly turned over to pasture and some wheat and oats grown. The main industry, which was situated to the south of the town at Catterall, was a calico printing works that failed in 1830. The town had an 1801 population of some 731 and was the focus of a great deal of passing traffic both in the form of goods and vagrants. The townships of Great and Little Marsden, meanwhile, were subdivisions of the parish of Marsden and both were to be absorbed at the end of the nineteenth century into the towns of Brierfield, Nelson and Colne. The agricultural land was poor in quality and used almost entirely for pasture. Industry consisted of some small-scale coal mining and cotton manufacturing and quarrying on the moorland areas. Common features can be found between these townships and that of Tottington Lower End. This place which, together with Tottington Higher End, originally formed all the northern part of the parish of Bury, was a rural area which became industrialised within one eighteenth-century generation and bore all the hallmarks by the early nineteenth century of a society in the process of very radical change. Initial industrialisation came via cotton manufacturing, and the later establishment of mill and factory sites brought with them an increasing population persistently faced with the vagaries of the trade cycle. The development trajectory of Barrowford (then known as Barrowford Booth) was slightly different. Located near the border with Yorkshire it was in hilly country with little arable land and chiefly grassland used for pasture. Cotton mills were established here but they were late in coming and transient in their existence.¹⁸

The pattern in all of the above areas between the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries is one reflecting rapid social change as both agriculture and industry experienced some of the most intensive developments in their regional history. In Lancashire in particular, areas enjoying natural sources of energy such as water power felt the impact of early industrial development by the late eighteenth century. However, such development was not always consistent as co-requisites for long-term prosperity, such as development in communications and marketing, often failed to

materialise. Speculative ventures of the sort that we see in all of these communities often failed. For the poor these conditions produced a great time of uncertainty in which the means of drawing together a livelihood ostensibly became one of increasing difficulty. Their economy of makeshifts had in many ways lost the certainties enjoyed by previous generations. The place of work in a fixed locality had gone and the support of kin and neighbours had for many to be re-established as they migrated to find work. The poor law remained, but its role had on the face of it been altered by industrialisation. Throughout industrial Lancashire, the tension between a potentially unlimited demand for welfare but a limited willingness to supply resources for the poor law through a local rate had become keen by the late eighteenth century, and nowhere more so than in the communities described above.

The corollary of such tension, however, is that the Lancashire poor law during this period becomes extraordinarily well documented. In particular overseers, vestries, charities and philanthropists became keen to take regular censuses of the poor and the potentially poor, their family circumstances, their economic position and, when we look carefully at the sources, the implicit economy of makeshifts in which poor people were engaged. Such censuses of the poor form the empirical bedrock of this chapter. Before use is made of such sources, however, it is necessary to examine them quite closely. Although all of the census documents that I will be using contain fairly detailed information about the poor listed, it is important to appreciate the reason why they were compiled and from whose point of view.

Thus an increasing amount of legislation was passed during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in an attempt to enforce, clarify and control the earlier poor law measures, necessitating better record keeping. Parliament had already made provision for general records to be kept, and presented at certain intervals to magistrates, showing how much had been raised in each parish by way of the rate and how this was spent, which included the provision made for the poor.¹⁹ From the 1770s, and more keenly in the nineteenth century, the government sought to improve record keeping further, requiring periodic returns to parliament. Its efforts to bolster the number of vestries and select vestries also led to better record keeping at local level. Others also had an interest in keeping comprehensive records. As we have seen, local overseers and vestries faced with a tension of supply and demand

were likely to have wanted better records, whatever directions were coming from the government. Their efforts in this area were bolstered by those who kept records as a precursor to the distribution of charitable funds and religious advice or who needed to know the potential supply of labour in a locality.

Such diverse reasons for recording and retaining information about the Lancashire poor mean that we must be careful in our interpretation. There is a danger, for instance, that a survey of 'the poor' undertaken by the overseer on behalf of a vestry will record only those being paid by the parish rather than also including 'the poor' whose applications for relief had been refused. Even if this were not the case, a census of the poor would be taken at a fixed point in time or over a short period and thus can yield only a snapshot of conditions at that moment. The nature of the questions asked can also introduce bias, both in the sense that we often do not know *exactly* what was asked, nor the agenda behind the questions. Manufacturers and industrialists were anxious to know the extent of the possible labour force. The overseer or vestry needed to have some assessment of the numbers being relieved at a particular time but might also have been trying to quantify the extent of their liabilities. Other groups such as the Quakers, who had a social brief to assess the extent of the numbers of the sick and their needs through their questions obtained details as to the amount of earnings and parish relief received by the sick and poor and from this information the subscription raised by the charity was allotted. In other words, different sorts of information was collected in different surveys and a different spin was placed upon this information depending upon the circumstances. The censuses employed here demonstrate the full range of these motivations, and it is as well to describe their contents at the outset.

The first from which data as to the economy of makeshifts will be used and conclusions drawn is the 'Survey of the poor of Ashton and Haydock' taken in 1817. This would have been taken by the overseer at the request of the relief committee and details shown cover the name of the pauper, with his or her infirmities, employment and money already coming in, normally from his or her work, and any allowance made. By contrast the survey of the 'State of the poor of Garstang', reported on to the vestry in January 1818, contains details of the poor relieved with comment as to their age, income from both earnings and the parish and

information on the general condition of the pauper. Particulars are given of their possessions and details of the family size can be gathered from the comments made, as can family networks and relationships. The 'Survey of poor families' taken on 29 May 1817 in Tottington Lower End also gives details of the pauper and family, trade or other skills if any and the employer. In addition, the survey records the household goods owned and general remarks made by the officer taking the survey. These include references to the pauper's health and general situation, allowing a relatively clear picture of the generalised economy of makeshifts to appear.

Other surveys were taken with a charitable motivation in mind, and one of the major contributors in this area were the Quakers who raised funds for distribution to the poor normally through the offices of local committees. Although generous, the Quaker families who contributed to such relief efforts were nonetheless people of business and they were methodical in their recording of what conditions they found and what they felt was due in any particular situation. Questions were asked of the poor requiring details such as the numbers of children in any household, the number of looms, the weekly earnings of the household and the amount of relief from the parish. The implication is strongly given that the donors felt that the poor were unable to live on even a combination of wages and relief at the amounts earned or received from these sources and were in need of added assistance, usually in the form of clothing. For this reason details are also given of grants made by the relief committee in the form of both cash and kind, something which gives an insight into the wider economy of makeshifts. The account of 'A subscription raised for the poor' and of its distribution in 1819 to the poor within the township of Great and Little Marsden is one such source. This subscription was raised by the personal application of Susanna and Ann Eckroyd. The poor were no doubt selected both for their circumstances as well as their needs but the way in which their conditions are described helps to provide details of how their livelihood was made. The motivation of those who prepared the details of the poor and their circumstances was charitable, but they were acutely aware that they had to account to those who subscribed so the details shown are precise and methodical. They would no doubt have checked on the veracity of the replies they received in so far as wages and parish relief were concerned. This said, it must

be appreciated that those poor who were included in these surveys were those who were deemed to be in need and the number and situation of those who were excluded is not known. Neither are the criteria for assessing need given, something which is applicable to all of the sources used here.

Meanwhile, there were other reasons for listing the poor than merely establishing whether they were managing to put together a basic living. Manufacturers and industrialists had a need, as I have already suggested, for establishing the availability of labour, particularly those with skills. Such surveys were records taken over a few days of the poor who were employed giving an indication of those who were working, their income composed of wages and allowances from the parish and other sources if any, together with a note of those able to work but without current employment. A survey of the 'Manufacturing and other labouring poor' in the township of Marsden, taken between 24 and 27 March 1829 by John Eastwood, was just such a listing.²⁰ The information collected gives a shaft of light on the circumstances of the poor caught at a time when poverty was increasing both as a result of the numbers moving into the developing towns and the greater demand on resources. It also gives an indication of how control of their economies of makeshifts was slipping away from the poor as vestry and manufacturer were often drawn from the same group of people and probably colluded in so far as wage and relief levels were concerned. Not only are such details given in this survey but the numbers of weavers and winders are shown and also those who were deemed able to work but had no employment. The survey was comprehensive; 301 families were visited containing some 1,850 persons. The census of 1821 had shown the population as 2,052.

The sick poor were also occasionally listed separately from other groups, usually by charitable groups. The early nineteenth-century pauper listing for Barrowford is just such a survey. It follows the model of other charitable surveys in that the emphasis is laid on the needs of the poor in so far as their possessions are concerned. Their present situation and their wants are shown, together with a note of what the committee had chosen to give. Also shown is a description of the present situation of the pauper and whether or not they are considered to be industrious. This document, like others of its time, concentrates on the character and worthiness of the paupers and not primarily on their poverty.

Each of the above sources may be said to give a different perspective on the poor and how they managed to put together a livelihood. It will be necessary to see how this worked in practice by looking at the basic components of a typical economy of makeshifts as seen in these records.

The lessons of the surveys of the poor

The central plank of any Lancashire economy of makeshifts for those who had the ability to undertake it (and often even for those who physically did not!) was work. In an objective sense, the role of work in the economy of makeshifts depended upon the amount of work available, the health and level of skills of household members, the exact composition of the household, the life-cycle stage of the underlying family and, crucially, the buoyancy of wages, which were in turn dependent upon markets, trade cycles, costs of raw materials and the transaction costs of finding work for those who were self-employed. In these senses, workers in Lancashire are often seen to have had significant advantages over their counterparts elsewhere, with wage levels higher, transaction costs lower and labour markets more open even than the neighbouring industrial county of West Yorkshire.²¹ Not surprisingly, then, the censuses of the Lancashire poor in the early nineteenth century have a considerable focus on work opportunities and remuneration both as a reason for granting help and as a source of alternative income.²²

The survey of the poor of Ashton and Haydock is a useful starting point. The majority of those listed comprised the life-cycle poor – the aged, children, overburdened young families and the sick – and almost all of them were doing some form of paid work. Some were employees, others were self-employed earners and the rest worked in the twilight zone where they worked for the parish as part and parcel of the relief process, for instance in providing a home for ‘tablers’ for whom the parish paid a rent and board. While the employment may have been diverse, the common factor was limited remuneration. The majority of those who were employees or self-employed were spinners or weavers working in a domestic context and earning on average just 5s. per week. This was low even by the standards of agricultural wages in the south at the same juncture. Even worse was the plight of those who

were feltmakers, tailors or who carried out metal working on a small scale by making needles and pins. Wages for the former were on average 4s. per week and for the latter, often a 'female' occupation, they could be as low as 6d. Low pay was thus both a reason for people to appear in the census of the poor *and* a central part of the economy of makeshifts in the township. Even the aged and sick worked here. Simultaneously, bolstering the work component of the economy of makeshifts was seen by the vestry as part of the solution to poverty. On several occasions, for instance, the response of the vestry to the survey was to buy a 'card and wool' for hard-pressed paupers. The parish also repaired looms and on two occasions even purchased the finished cloth from the paupers. Ultimately, though, the poor law drew an implicit connection between the work and community welfare angles of the economy of makeshifts. Thus Margaret Longworth, aged 83, described as 'crazie', earned 6d. per week from spinning and the parish paid her rent and gave her a cash allowance of 3s. per week. Peter Morrison, aged 60, had a lame wife of 55. He earned 3s. per week for haymaking and other casual or seasonal work opportunities, while the parish paid an allowance of 1s. 6d. At the other end of the age scale, George Crompton and his wife were both aged 35 and had five young children under 9 years of age. Their joint earnings were 4s. per week, with the parish paying the rent for the family and a cash allowance of 2s. 6d. Even children were caught up in this work-poor relief contract, with Benjamin Wright, an orphan aged 12, earning 6d. per week and getting a further 2s. from the parish. Such observations should not perhaps surprise us – King has recently argued for a work-welfare nexus in seventeenth-century Bolton²³ – but they do imply that the remuneration from work was part of the economy of makeshift mindset of both paupers and officials in nineteenth-century Lancashire.

We might make similar observations about both of the listings of the poor of Great and Little Marsden. While the terms of reference for these surveys were probably wider than those for Ashton and Haydock, it is clear that great importance was attached to work. Both surveys record the number of looms owned or rented by the family listed as poor, suggesting the ubiquity of low-paid weaving as a component in the Lancashire economy of makeshifts as late as the 1830s.²⁴ Moreover, the later listing (1829) details not only the wage levels of those poor and in

work but also those able to work but who were unemployed or under-employed. Such was the case, for instance, with Ann Whittaker who headed a household with two children and was described as a weaver willing to work but unable to get it. As with Ashton and Haydock, then, work was a key variable in the economy of makeshifts. A further aspect of the Marsden surveys, however, is worth highlighting. Thus it is clear that in the eyes of contemporaries it was possible for even relatively high family wages to be outstripped by particular family circumstances. One family with four handlooms earned £1 7s. per week in 1829, while families working in mills generated 18s. per week. Notwithstanding these wages, such families are labelled as 'poor' in the survey, a sign that even deploying a family labour force could not make work the sole pillar of the economy of makeshifts. The case of Thomas Hartley, a dyer, illustrates the complex place of work in the makeshift economy. He had a family of nine, and although Hartley and four of his working children were able to put together an income of 18s. per week, four other household members were either unable to get work or were too infirm. The family was thus classed as poor by the census takers. Poor relief once again figures as an important boost to this sort of work-related remuneration. Some 34 per cent of the families in the 1829 listing combined work and poor relief payments, and the vestry clearly had an implicit notion of the income appropriate to certain family circumstances. Thus Henry Thornber was a weaver with a family of six. Thornber and three of his sons managed to scrape together a collective income of 5s. per week, while two of his other children working in the mills generated a further 7s. While the takers of the survey considered the family poor, no poor relief was apparently directed to support the family. Robert Rushton was also a weaver and had exactly the same family size. However, collectively the family income from work was 6s. 6d. per week and the parish supplemented this figure with weekly relief of 1s. 6d.

In Tottington Lower End the 'Survey of poor families' taken in May 1817 records 'poor' family units weaving fine quilts that could earn 14s. per week alongside weaving families having one or two looms and earning wages as low as 2s. per week. That work as a cornerstone of welfare was prominent in the psyche of these poor people can be seen by the listing of possessions that accompanies the survey. Thus Ashton Rothwell was a 43 year old carter who owned his own cart and horse. He earned 8s. per week while his

wife, a weaver, contributed a further 2s. per week. A family income of 10s. per week to support two adults and three young children would have been roughly adequate. However, the family also possessed three pairs of looms, with the clear implication that man and wife undertook domestic weaving on an ad hoc basis to supplement their income. John Holt, 30 years of age, was in a similar position. He earned 15s. per week as a collier and his total family income was 20s. per week. However, he still retained two pairs of looms, presumably as insurance against the seasonality and short-term nature of the mining industry. At the opposite end of the life-cycle, Thomas Booth, described as nearly blind, and his wife, who were aged 81 and 79 respectively, demonstrate even more powerfully the desire to make work a part of the makeshift economy. Despite their age, the couple still retained a pair of looms which it is stated 'he would not give up'! The parish allowed them 3s. 6d. per week in cash and paid their rent, testimony again to the link between work and poor relief that we have seen for the other townships considered above.

The survey of Garstang gives less detail about the work patterns of the poor who are listed, probably because it was taken with the prime purpose of monitoring allowances which were subsequently ordered to be cut. Those who appeared in it were predominantly old or infirm, and where income from work was noted it was because of special circumstances such as particularly poor wages or a very young family. The survey shows, for instance, that Martin Holmes aged 73 years earned the sum of 3s. per week, with the vestry supporting him in his bid for independence by allowing him his rent and 2s. relief each week. Paradoxically, it is the lack of information in this survey that confirms the centrality of work to the local economy of makeshifts. The vestry *presumed* work was available and it ensured that those who could work did so by offering very low levels of relief to any who thought otherwise. There was a presumption that work was available and the vestry were particularly keen to bolster a local work ethic by forcing the apprenticeship of older children in families that applied for relief. In a general sense, then, the story of Ann Wilson at the beginning of this chapter, in which her son aged ten earned as much as his mother through working in a colliery, gives an indication of how the economy of makeshifts was slanted for most of the Lancashire poor.

What becomes clear from the censuses of the poor, however, is

that work alone was often not a sufficient avenue to guarantee subsistence in these rural Lancashire communities. Some families certainly earned relatively high wages, while the connection between work and poor relief could also generate comfortable family incomes. However, if we consider all of the census documents side-by-side, it is clear that the majority of those listed did not have a subsistence income either absolutely or compared to the agricultural labourers of the rural south. The recorded income of some childless couples from work and poor relief was lower than 3s. per week, while some widows with children were ostensibly surviving on less than that. For families containing children income levels were generally higher, but even in this context family incomes of less than 5s. per week are apparently recorded in the surveys. In other words, individuals and families *must* have had access to other strands in the Lancashire economy of makeshifts.

One other potential source of support was kinship networks and the benefits of social and fiscal credit which resulted from their exploitation. This might be said to be a hidden factor in the economy of makeshifts, one which depended greatly on the individual circumstances of the pauper, the size and location of the extended family and the community in which the pauper lived.²⁵ Of course, others in this volume have pointed to the difficulty of reconstructing kinship networks and measuring their potential impact on welfare,²⁶ and in one sense this chapter is no different from the rest in this difficulty. The censuses of the poor used here do not conveniently record kinship details or the lending and borrowing networks of which people would have found themselves part. However, if we make two very crude assumptions – that the density of surnames correspondence in a community is some indication of the density of kinship links in that community, and that the ordering of paupers in the census of the poor bears some resemblance to their residence patterns – then we *can* begin to say something about the broad outlines of kinship support. Two things are particularly striking. First, that there were wide differences between communities in implied kinship density. The survey of the poor for Ashton and Haydock suggests that some 40 per cent of paupers may have been related to each other when we employ our crude assumptions. Moreover, since people sharing the same surname often appear in sequence it is perhaps a reasonable presumption that relatives lived proximate to each other. Indeed, in this small and stable community it is perhaps

not surprising that dense kinship networks emerged. As Barrett suggests elsewhere in this volume, a symbiotic relationship existed between members of such communities, one which was weakened only as the economic basis altered. Such alteration was taking place in Tottington Lower End and Great and Little Marsden, where rural industrial development stimulated in-migration and diluted pre-existing kinship networks. While censuses of the poor in these places do provide evidence of shared surnames – in Great Marsden in 1829, for instance, one quarter of all people listed shared the surnames Hartley, Rushton, Greenwood and Varley – the overall numbers are small compared to say Ashton or Garstang. More importantly, those sharing surnames are generally recorded as living in many different districts rather than immediately proximate to each other, and this might be read as an indication of a looser and less functional kinship system.

Of course, this is largely speculation. However, for one Lancashire rural community – Garstang – we can link vestry records with the census of the poor to confirm that *apparently* dense kinship networks feed through to *real* kinship networks. In Garstang, then, 42 per cent of those who appear in the pauper survey of the town in 1817 can be shown to be related to each other using the vestry records to reconstruct kinship networks. This is only just more than the 34 per cent who would have been considered as ‘kin’ using my assumptions above. However, the Garstang records also allow us to go further, for they begin to show the functionality of kinship too. Children are shown as residing with grandparents and vestry evidence tells us clearly that the earnings of resident children contributed to the family economy of the older generation. Sometimes, the relationship was reversed. In 1816, John Leatherbarrow attended before the vestry to say he *could not keep* his father for the 2s. per week that he had been granted previously by the vestry and asked for 3s. This was allowed and even by 1818 Edmund Leatherbarrow is still shown as receiving this amount.²⁷ In effect, the vestry had formed a partnership with the family of Leatherbarrow, to the advantage of all parties except perhaps Edmund Leatherbarrow himself. Sometimes the arrangements were more complicated. Ann Kitchen received 2s. 6d. per week and had her rent paid by the township. However, her relief was contingent on boarding Lawrence Dickinson (for whom she received an additional 2s. per week) and Grace Kay (an additional 1s. per week), both of whom were her in-laws. Once more, the

vestry sought to bolster a primary kinship connection through imaginative use of small relief payments.

Such observations lead us back to the role of the poor law in the economy of makeshifts, an important topic little covered in the rest of this volume. With one exception, all of the surveys used in this chapter detail the amount of parish relief and its mode of payment, whether in cash or kind, something that we have seen in reviewing the connection between work and poor relief earlier. Not surprisingly given what we know about the tenor of relief policy in Lancashire, none of the surveys record generous allowances.²⁸ On average regular payments amounted to just 2–3s. per week, confirming the limited role for relief in the economy of makeshifts. However, such figures tell only part of the story. Relief often came with strings in the form of parish duties such as looking after the old or young who had no other support and who were labelled ‘sojourners’ or ‘tablers’ in the pauper censuses. This observation applies particularly to Ashton and Haydock, where some 15 per cent of those listed were ascribed as ‘tablers’. Perhaps a more important drawback than the strings, however, was the apparent uncertainty of relief payments in some communities. The vestry in Garstang, for instance, kept a very tight control over expenditure, granting relief at a low level on a short-term basis even to the aged. Pensions were reviewed (and cut) regularly and little by way of changing circumstances escaped the gaze of the overseer. In Tottington Lower End, pensions were apparently more generous and more certain. However, since this survey also recorded the material condition of ‘the poor’ it is possible to highlight a further drawback to incorporating the Lancashire poor law as a main pillar of the makeshift economy. Widow Smith had four children aged between two and ten years and was described as a nurse. She earned 1s. 9d. per week and her 10 year old daughter earned a further 1s. Parish relief gave her 5s. each week, a generous allowance by poor law standards. However, her possessions at the time of the survey were described simply as ‘neither bed nor bedding, only a little straw’. Thomas Nuttall, with a wife and three children all under seven years, earned 7s. 6d. as a weaver. He received no poor relief at the time of the survey but rent of £4.4s. was owed. A chest of drawers had been taken away by the landlord as partial settlement of the debt. John Howgate, a 27 year old weaver, is recorded as having lost his wife two weeks previously, and already his domestic

environment had been denuded of every comfort. These are interesting cases, showing as they do that selling or pawning goods was another part of the makeshift economy, just as Alannah Tomkins suggests elsewhere in this volume. More generally, however, the Tottington survey highlights a general scarcity of household possessions, indicating that before the poor could even begin to think about the poor law as part of their makeshift economy, they would have to be in a severely distressed state. The contrast with Essex pauper inventories is substantial.²⁹ The final problem for those who might have wished to incorporate the poor law into their makeshift economies is illustrated by the surveys of Great and Little Marsden and Barrowford. In these places, substantial amounts of relief were given in kind rather than cash, introducing rigidity into the coping strategies of poor families, where flexibility was the valued prize. The poor law, then, was just a small part of the potential Lancashire economy of makeshifts.

Perhaps a more important component is evidenced by the taking of some of the pauper surveys in the first place. Thus, established religious groups such as the Quakers collected from their number on a countrywide basis to help the poor and the outcome of their work is seen in the surveys of Great and Little Marsden and, it is thought, Barrowford. From the listing of the sick and poor of Barrowford, details can be found of the residence of the poor together with the number in the family and the beds, looms and blankets that they had. Details were then recorded of the items requested by the poor, including petticoats and clogs. Before it is shown what they were given there is a comment as to their 'present situation'. Thus the residence of Ann Bury was described as 'very bad', as was the condition of her furniture. Her present situation was stated to be 'not well off' and she was recorded as 'not active'. Her family of three had only one bed and one blanket, and the Quaker relief committee awarded her the one blanket that she had requested. Such 'relief' illustrates clearly some of the major drawbacks facing those who wished to pursue charity as one element of an economy of makeshifts – charity was often intermittent, could come in a form that was not particularly useful, and was rarely generous. A further problem is that those who controlled charity – even the Quakers of Barrowford – often employed moral judgements in deciding who to relieve and what relief to give, a point raised by Sarah Lloyd elsewhere in this volume. James Hargreaves had a family of five and possessed

three looms. He was described as 'middling well off and industrious' and received a blanket. Jude Robinson who had a family of six with two beds and blankets was described as being of 'bad character' and was only awarded one petticoat for a child. Others were presumably turned down altogether before they made it to the lists.

The 1819 survey of Great and Little Marsden, also taken as a record of the dispensation of Quaker charity, provides similar detail. The subscription raised was distributed between the poor chosen and details of their residence, number of children under eight years, the number of looms held, weekly earnings and parish relief were recorded. Mary Grimshaw of Heyhead was one recipient. She had six children, three being under 8 years and two under 6 years, and two looms and she earned 7s. 6d. per week. She received 4s. per month from the poor law and was granted a blanket and stockings to the value of 7s. 5d. The story of Mary Grimshaw, one of dozens that could be told, is both an indication of the diversity of the economy of makeshifts and confirmation of the value of charity in some cases. In money terms, this one charitable payment had provided almost as much as two month's worth of relief from the parish. If we in turn recognise that all of the places mentioned here supported several small charities giving relief in cash or kind, it will be apparent that charity might be a substantial element of the economy of makeshifts in rural Lancashire. This said, there were once again moral overtones covering the gateway to charity. John Edmundson, for instance, had three children, all under 8 years of age, and earned 13s. a week. He also kept two looms, presumably as a precaution against trade downturn. However, he was deemed 'not deserving', despite being on a lower income than others who were successful, and he got nothing. The economy of makeshifts was thus a complex maze of opportunities in which some planning and a lot of luck were necessary to generate a living income.

This discussion does not, of course, exhaust the information on the economy of makeshifts that can be gained from the pauper censuses. Thus in Ashton there is evidence that paupers were able to earn money from seasonal work such as haymaking, while in Tottington Lower End John Holt managed to keep two cows on the waste to bolster his income. Moreover, in all of the places mentioned here, illegitimate births were numerous, with Tottington Lower End registering a particularly high rate during the first

two decades of the nineteenth century. Given that even Lancashire parishes would generally assume responsibility for an illegitimate child born within their boundary, allowing the mother also to claim and rely on poor relief whilst the child was young, it might be correct to style this 'demographic strategy' as part of the economy of makeshifts. Nor were families in these surveys averse to criminal activity. Again in the survey of poor families in Tooting Lower End it is noted that two paupers were transported, leaving their families to be assisted by the parish. Samuel Ogden was transported for stealing, leaving a wife, who was lame, and four children. The two elder children earned 7s. 4d. between them, their possessions were minimal and rent was in arrears. Such observations confirm once again that a diverse economy of makeshifts of the sort that we see in these communities did not in any sense guarantee subsistence.

Conclusion

The role of the poor law in the economy of makeshifts was an uncertain one for many. In the Lancashire context, its benefits were harsh and were not readily given without other avenues of support being tried and exhausted first. For many paupers the application to overseer or vestry must have been a sign of desperation, and even then the outcome of such application might be the granting of relief for a short period only or sometimes in a form not wanted such as a referral to the workhouse or, if settlement was uncertain, a removal to another parish. A policy of short-term measures, frequent reviews of relief, even of cash pensions for the old, and in general an approach that was mean and selective resulted in the role of the poor law being pushed to the margins of the economy of makeshifts for many in rural Lancashire. Including the poor law in a makeshift economy really was a game of chance and, for much longer than was the case elsewhere, a diverse economy of makeshifts had to be the mainstay of welfare for the majority of the Lancashire poor. Using rich pauper census material, I have begun to outline this economy of makeshifts. When properly contextualised with pauper letters, overseer accounts, vestry minutes, diaries and other material, these sources may eventually go some way to allowing us to fulfil the research objectives set out in the conclusion to this volume. In

the Lancashire context, however, we must come back to the idea that while the number of strands to the economy of makeshifts may have been greater than was the case, for instance, in the rural south-east of England, effectively navigating within and between these strands was also more difficult. Nor should we forget that a relatively harsh and non-interventionist poor law, when viewed against the backdrop of substantial life-cycle and cyclical poverty, probably diluted the value of some of the strands of the economy of makeshifts by forcing larger numbers to pursue limited resources. Luck, chance and some forward planning were vital elements in successfully making do and a sensitive reading of pauper censuses of the sort available for early nineteenth-century Lancashire begins to show this very clearly indeed.

Notes

1 Manchester Central Library (hereafter MCL) L 21/3/12, 'Survey of poor families in Tottington, 1817'.

2 The literature on the economy of makeshifts has been dealt with in the introduction to this volume, and is not considered here for that reason. For details on the very substantial level of background poverty in Lancashire, see S. King, *Poverty and Welfare in England 1700–1850: a Regional Perspective* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2000).

3 In Lancashire, having an illegitimate child made getting relief more certain and keeping it more definite, though of course the poor law would have tried to recoup the cost of relief through a bastardy affiliation order.

4 For recent synthesis, see King, *Poverty and Welfare* and A. Brundage, *The English Poor Laws, 1700–1930* (Basingstoke, Palgrave, 2002).

5 On the power of the poor, see contributions to T. Hitchcock, P. King and P. Sharpe (eds), *Chronicling Poverty: The Voices and Strategies of the English Poor, 1640–1840* (Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1997). For the interesting view that 'the poor' were very likely at some point in their lives to have been involved in local political processes and thereby possessed implicit power, see T. Harris, 'Introduction', in *idem* (ed.), *The Politics of the Excluded, c. 1500–1850* (Basingstoke, Palgrave, 2001), pp. 11–13. Much of the rest of the discussion in this section is drawn from my Oxford Brookes PhD thesis 'Poverty and welfare in rural Lancashire, 1750–1834'.

6 P. Thane, *Old Age in English History: Past Experiences, Present Issues* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000).

7 For more on this, see S. D. Chapman (ed.), *The Autobiography of David*

Whitehead of Rawtenstall (1790–1865) Cotton Spinner and Merchant (Helmshore, Helmshore Local History Society, 2000).

8 The physical location of the poor became of great importance in a rapidly expanding urban situation such as we find in Lancashire, where social and fiscal networks of kin were often not immediately available and had to be re-established.

9 Lancashire Record Office (hereafter LRO) DDX 386, 'Vestry minutes'.

10 MCL L21/3/12, 'Survey of poor families'.

11 MCL L1/2/24/1, 'Poor within the township of Great and Little Marsden, 1819'.

12 MCL L1/2/24/19, 'Statement'.

13 LRO DDKe 24/10/1, 'Survey of the poor'.

14 MCL L1/41/9, 'Names of the sick and poor of Barrowford'.

15 See for instance G. B. Hindle, *Provision for Relief of the Poor in Manchester, 1754–1826* (Manchester, Chetham Society, 1975).

16 E. Baines, *History, Directory and Gazetteer of the County Palatine of Lancaster, volumes 1 and 2* (reprint, Newton Abbot, David and Charles, 1969).

17 *Ibid.*, volume 1, p. 74.

18 For more on the general background of the development of the Lancashire economy, see J. G. Timmins, *Made in Lancashire* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1998); C. B. Phillips and J. H. Smith, *Lancashire and Cheshire from 1540AD* (London, Longman, 1994); C. Aspin, *Manchester and the Textile Districts in 1849* (Helmshore, Helmshore Local History Society, 1972).

19 It is important to note that the money raised by a notional 'poor rate' could actually be spent on a wide variety of things other than the poor, including meeting county rate obligations.

20 He was the clerk to the vestry, but the survey was made by direction of the Master manufacturers.

21 M. Huberman, *Escape From the Market: Negotiating Work in Lancashire* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996).

22 Work patterns do not feature in the listing of the sick and poor of Barrowford. However, the charitable donations in the township were not given lightly and certainly not without there being evidence of need in terms of earnings forgone due to sickness.

23 S. King, 'Locating and characterising poor households in late seventeenth century Bolton: sources and interpretations', *Local Population Studies*, 68 (2002), 42–62.

24 On this, see J. G. Timmins, *The Last Shift* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1993).

25 A point made several times by Pat Thane in her discussion of the support mechanisms available to old people. See Thane, *Old Age*.

26 See chapters by Barrett, Tomkins and King.

27 DDX 386/3, 'Garstang vestry minutes'.

28 King, *Poverty and Welfare*.

29 P. King, 'Pauper inventories and the material lives of the poor in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries', in T. Hitchcock, P. King and P. Sharpe (eds), *Chronicling Poverty: The Words and Lives of the English Poor, 1640–1840* (Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1997).