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'Agents in their own concerns'? Charity and the economy of makeshifts in eighteenth-century Britain

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Introduction

In 1721, several 'Welsh gentlemen' complained to the governors of the Welsh Charity School in Clerkenwell, claiming that poor families were leaving Wales for London so that their children could benefit from the charity.¹ Consequently, they said, agricultural labour was in short supply, damaging the country. Their objections challenged the institution's patriotic and utilitarian credentials and adapted general criticisms – that charity schools took poor children away from husbandry, among other evils – to a recent and distinctive foundation, which targeted the Welsh for financial and political support.² What they understood by 'country' – was it Wales or Britain, for example? – was not stated in the school's minute books, and is one of a number of instances where institutional specificities cut across broader charitable discourse. The governors responded with a new rule, restricting admission to those children whose parents, friends or relations had lived in London or Westminster for at least three years.

Brief though the report is, the incident engages on a number of fronts with what historians have conceptualised as an economy of makeshifts. Although it would be difficult to confirm or deny the Welsh gentlemen's complaint without extensive reconstruction of

parish records, the governors appeared to take it seriously. If this migration was indeed happening, it suggests complex networks about which we can only speculate through which information about metropolitan opportunities travelled as oral, written or printed report, circulating across considerable distances, spreading information to particular groups who might then act upon it. And all this within barely two years of the school's opening in 1718. The governors' ruling, extended to friends and relations, also suggests their recognition of patterns of assistance that went beyond immediate kin to fill gaps or maximise chances. Whatever the geographical and social details – and it would be useful to know whether the 'Welsh gentlemen' were directly engaged in farming and came from areas connected to London by droving – this episode reveals a series of differences around the meanings of migration and disagreements between various groups over the best means of dealing with poverty. First, decisions made by the poor themselves ran against what others thought socially beneficial and appropriate, not only where adaptation and opportunity were at issue, but even survival. What was a chance for poor parents was from their employers' perspective a dangerous means of desertion, and it seems plausible to assume that such differences shaped experience and behaviour on both sides. Second, the Welsh School incident produced disjunctions between forms of charity intended to relieve the worst manifestations of poverty (destitution, idleness and insubordination) and definitions of poverty as an enforced laboriousness, for which no amelioration was required or desirable. Employers and the charity school claimed to advance national economic interests, yet for a while their approaches seemed to be incompatible. What both sides shared, however, was an extremely narrow concept of lower-class autonomy, or capacity for independent action, which they regarded as behaviour that had to be contained. Arguably, the governors' new rule was not simply a gesture of appeasement but also an attempt to restrict mobility, as the school struggled in other contexts and ways to contain parental, and in some cases pupils', assertions of control over animate and inanimate things – teachers, pupils, clothing, apprenticeships and the children's time.

In this chapter I want to elaborate on the idea of an economy of makeshifts through examining the charitable context in which the poor Welsh parents, and hundreds of thousands like them, responded to various opportunities and attempted to turn them

to a perceived advantage. What types of support did charity offer poor people; what did they value in it? How was charity constituted and experienced during the eighteenth century? As a survival strategy, the economy of makeshifts was not simply a set of economic resources, but was shaped by a network of meanings, rules, sanctions and conventions, which, in the case of charity, were the subject of intense, national scrutiny, and which in all cases generated complex power relations. Central to my argument is a conviction that, in at least this context, makeshifts operated as a form of cultural exchange. Charitable assistance could only flow through relations of uneven reciprocity, which constantly pushed the boundaries of knowledge, inclusion, expectation and endurance. While it is true that in discerning exactly how social relations worked the poor had much more at stake than the better-researched rich, it is also the case that conjecture and assumption, however ill-founded, permeated decisions about what, if anything, should be done about poverty.³ I am therefore concerned here with the ways the beliefs and actions of the poor Welsh intersected with the frameworks within which the Welsh gentlemen, charity school trustees and thousands of others operated when they determined who should benefit from their benevolence and in what circumstances. What principles and assumptions shaped the actions of donors, officials, applicants, neighbours and recipients; to what extent and how did individuals and institutions recognise and respond to survival expedients as practised by the poor?

Detailed archival research has already gone some way in mapping local economic contours and types of support available under the poor law or from charities during the eighteenth century.⁴ The sources I use in this chapter – petitions, minute books, accounts, sermons and local surveys – could be cross-referenced and incorporated into such studies. In this instance, however, I am not using them to reconstruct the experience of any social group, but selecting them instead for what they reveal about the social dynamics of charity. Running through charity records in particular are stories about the lives, behaviour and demeanour of the poor, and about their interactions with various officials. In essence, reports summarised initiatives taken to connect recipients of charity ('objects' as they were commonly termed) and their relations and friends, to the social objectives espoused by each fund (whether to ease suffering, reform morals or bring national

prosperity). The following section focuses on schools, a specific form of charity. It examines various occasions when the actions, and sometimes the words, of charity applicants, recipients and officials were reported; it traces manoeuvres around access to material benefits and the creation of social relationships. While these stories were clearly enmeshed in wider contexts, they were frequently enigmatic, not least because they were told by officials rather than by the 'objects' themselves. The remainder of the essay locates this genre of evidence within a broad eighteenth-century discourse to suggest how charity's many meanings, relationships and resources were produced. What emerges are connections and discrepancies between various understandings of charity and lower-class survival. Such complexities mattered, I argue, because they shaped the experience of poverty in the most fundamental ways; they also suggest the extent to which the practice of eighteenth-century charity was a contested attempt to manage the terms of survival. Furthermore, the detail of such encounters between the poor and the charitable invites historians to look beyond food, clothing and other material resources to consider the cultural imperatives that diffused any economy of makeshifts.

Charity schools

The Welsh Charity School had been founded in 1718 by 'a few worthy public-spirited gentlemen, of the Principality of *Wales*' to educate, clothe and apprentice the sons of poor Welsh parents living in London and Westminster and without a settlement there.⁵ The charity opened to girls in 1764, boarded children from 1768 and moved into purpose-built premises next to the Foundling Hospital in 1772; the move from Clerkenwell to Gray's Inn Road marked an expansion of the charity's pretensions and scale. Boys were instructed in the principles of the Church of England and learnt to read, write and cast accounts; girls also learnt writing and the 'four rules of arithmetic'.⁶ Boarded boys were set to work winding worsted in 1776, some decades later than the general trend in charity schooling, to inure them to labour and early rising.

While religious instruction and economic utility were emphasised in most eighteenth-century charitable endeavours, other aspects

were particular to the Welsh School.⁷ Within a couple of years of its foundation the governors, who referred to themselves as ‘the Directory’, had managed to link their institution with the stewards for the British Feast (the Honourable Society of Ancient Britons), established in 1715 to celebrate loyal Welshness.⁸ Every St David’s Day, the children marched in the Ancient Britons’ anniversary procession – an event advertised to a wide audience through the newspapers – and the collection taken after a sermon was donated to the school. This association with the socially elite Society of Ancient Britons was of the sort many charities desired, but failed to create, and it secured the school some hefty donations: from the late 1770s until the end of his life, the Prince of Wales gave one hundred guineas annually.⁹ By the late eighteenth century, histories of the school emphasised its noble supporters, obscuring its much more modest and precarious origins in Clerkenwell: in 1719 the landlord had even shut out the boys and master to the ‘Scandall of the Gentlemen Subscribers’.¹⁰ The school’s origins, connections and geographical range set it apart from the parochial charity schools encouraged by the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (SPCK), and it was not until the 1750s that the Welsh charity was included in the SPCK’s published list of schools. Its pupils were not drawn from a particular parish; they constituted a specific community of the Welsh in London. But they were selected according to their families’ neediness and the issues the governors struggled with – disciplining the children, maintaining the uniforms, controlling the parents – also bothered the SPCK. The Welsh school was thus both typical of the early eighteenth-century charity school movement and distinctive in its possibilities, limits and contingencies.

Charity schooling generally promised recipients and benefactors long-, rather than short-term benefits. If the trustees are taken at their word, the children learnt how to support themselves in useful trades in the future. In the meantime, their parents or ‘friends’ kept them, with occasional provision of food and some clothing to offset the expense. But it was not only a question of *what* the Welsh Charity School, or indeed other charities, supplied to the poor; as important is the matter of *how* this system of material benefits worked. What were the contexts in which all sorts of ‘objects’ circulated? In understanding this, makeshifts expand beyond scraps of food, cloth or cash into the social relations that contained and gave them additional meaning. And here I refer

both to the internal dynamics of charitable relationships, and to their uneasy accommodation with other social expectations, evident, for example, whenever poor parents negotiated the intersection between charity, survival and their own care for a child. If the poor were to make the most of charity or any other resource – as a framework of makeshifts invites us to consider – they had to know something of how it was managed. This might be an ‘outside’ form of knowledge or compliance that amounted to little more than wearing leeks on St David’s Day, but other circumstances required applicants to make quite complex assessments of how to present themselves and what to tolerate – a sort of ‘inside’ knowledge. Experience and word-of-mouth suggested some techniques; charity sermons spelt out the rules of giving and receiving to the poor as well as the rich. But the main point I want to reiterate here is that as the poor sought and acquired material things, they constantly engaged with – perhaps adapted or exploited – ideas and structures formed by other social groups in other contexts. Even in the matter of bread, and nothing is more symbolic of survival and of Christian charity in this period, it mattered whether it was white or brown, made of wheat or other flour. And in the battles over bread, and the meanings attached to the coarsest sort – fit only for animals, or proper for the labouring poor – survival and makeshifts were locked into broader cultural contests to which the poor were far from oblivious.¹¹ If charity and makeshifts were types of cultural exchange, what was happening the other side of the charitable relationship to shape the forms and conditions of benevolence? What exactly did charity mean in practice at the Welsh Charity School? What were the signs and how might they have been read?

The Directory of the Welsh School cultivated patrons, managed fund-raising, appointed and instructed the master, oversaw the school premises and determined the conditions under which children were accepted into and continued at the school. All aspects of their business exemplified the governors’ understandings of charity: as a Christian duty, a means to salvation, social cohesion and national prosperity, and a mark of social differentiation. The contexts in which each of these activities took place – appeals to Welsh bishops, gifts to supporters, dinners and plays, ordering uniforms, plans for a new building, nominations and expulsions of pupils – interacted with unpredictable circumstances all of which expanded the practical and symbolic operations of charity. For

many years, for example, Ynyr Lloyd, school trustee, treasurer and businessman, was paid by the charity to clothe the boys.¹² In 1759, his nephew, subsequently school treasurer, offered a portrait of his uncle to hang in the committee room, just one of the objects the school acquired from the mid-eighteenth century as expressions of institutional pride (others included a dial, names of donors on a board, black balls for balloting, the statue of a boy, a clock).¹³ Instead of dismissing either the commercial or painted versions of Ynyr Lloyd as somehow extraneous to charity, they suggest how charitable activity created a series of relationships in which the boundaries between different sorts of social participation (charity, Welshness, business, pleasure, family, conviviality, discipline) are hard to define and probably should not be drawn. And if they cannot be drawn for the school governors, they also remained fluid for the children and their parents, whose experience of charity took a number of forms and was open to their own particular interpretation too. When the boys were set to copy out notices of meetings, a means of saving money while advertising skills acquired in the school, they gathered some sense of the school's operations and social networks.¹⁴ While it is important not to overestimate this knowledge or its usefulness in gaining a subsistence, it would also be misleading to assume that the boys were merely copying machines dissociated from the governors' institutional manoeuvres. Similarly, interactions – sometimes conflicts – between parents, children, teachers and governors at the Welsh and other schools reveal the complexities in eighteenth-century charitable circulation, the influences that intruded into the committee room and school, the ways in which the poor might participate in a charity and utilise its resources. What the children and their kin saw in the entrance hall and committee room or on the school's facade imparted information about what charity meant and how it was applied. Names of donors in gilt letters proclaimed the school's status and reminded pupils of the names they should know, of deference, of difference. Statues of idealised charity children projected neatness and docility. Although they appeared to promise clothing and buckled shoes in return, we cannot assume that the poor – Welsh or not – saw these as rewards for virtue since the figures implied possibility and improbability equally; like and unlike simultaneously.¹⁵ Heterogeneous interpretations and encounters, which must often be read between the governors' lines, constituted the operational detail of charity.

Charity schools explicitly offered three benefits: clothes, a basic education and the necessary premium to secure an apprenticeship.¹⁶ The charitable relationship in clothes, as in other benefits, was negotiated at two levels: by recipients, but also by officials, who did not form a static structure against which beneficiaries struggled, but were adaptive themselves. Clothing was a valuable benefit: it cost subscribers considerable sums to provide (estimated by the SPCK in 1717 as 17s. 11d. per boy¹⁷); as the example of Ynyr Lloyd suggests, its provision was also an important opportunity for patronising supporters' businesses.¹⁸ Uniforms were regarded by officials as a means to regulate pupils' and their parents' behaviour. Clothes were prized by their recipients for whom they represented a substantial annual cost,¹⁹ making them a key item in the circulation of goods and services within the charity economy. But they were worth more than their material components, second-hand price or value as a pawn. Subscribers extracted considerable pride from clothing the objects of their beneficence; and although the evidence is more tenuous, recipients used uniforms for a variety of purposes, including an assertion of expectations, even rights, and an ingenuity in the arts of survival.

According to the Welsh Charity School rules, each boy (and from 1764, each girl), was to be 'clothed' annually on St David's Day. We do not know what happened to the remnants of the previous year's clothes: were they a perquisite, along the lines of a livery to be recycled within families or neighbourhoods or traded?²⁰ The governors recorded little interest in what happened once the clothes had served their purpose in the school, but while the uniforms remained under their eyes, they invested them with considerable symbolic weight. Thus in a special ceremony, attended by the directors, each boy received a hat, two shirts, two bands, a blue coat, breeches and a waistcoat of Welsh manufacture, and pairs of stockings, shoes, buckles and gloves.²¹ Girls got new 'Bodies', upper petticoats, hats, 'Blew Cloaks' and presumably shoes and stockings.²² The bestowal and acquisition of material benefits had performative components and prerequisites. The clothing ceremony, restricted to governors, pupils and master, enacted an idealised relationship between the charity and its beneficiaries, free of the complications introduced by publicity. The date asserted a shared Welsh connection and by adding details patrons could inscribe new messages and claims on the persons of the children: in 1777, a subscriber donated buttons with the

Prince of Wales feathers pressed upon them, advertising and consolidating the charity's claim on royal patronage.²³ Bestowing the clothes marked the children as belonging to the school – evident when they accompanied the socially exalted, and nominally Welsh, Society of Ancient Britons to dinner on that day; it declared that these were the objects of charity – with its complex attendant meanings; in reaching out across social distance, it created it. In buying and displaying clothing of Welsh manufacture, the school elaborated its patriotic claims, but like the Society of Ancient Britons, this was a decidedly metropolitan phenomenon which produced a version of Welshness for a London audience, national political figures with a Welsh power base, and an expatriate community. This last included the children, their friends and relations. Although there is no direct evidence from the Welsh charity, pupils of other London schools added unauthorised items to their uniforms on special occasions, suggesting that the children had their own sense of what it meant to belong to and celebrate a charity.²⁴ The means of economic survival might thus encompass ideas of solidarity and even pleasure. Beverley Lemire's assertion, that 'the selection of apparel was replete with personal, economic and cultural considerations' which worked within and across social groups, applies also to situations where individual choice was institutionally constrained.²⁵

Clothes were a gift only in the sense that they entailed social obligations. On the governors' side, the meanings and responsibilities were quite clear. The children were to wear the full uniform on Sundays; if expelled for misbehaviour or absent, the clothes might be taken from them and given to another pupil. In 1741, a boy was readmitted to the school and allowed to wear his new outfit on 1 March, but was not allowed to have it again until he had demonstrated good behaviour.²⁶ Children and their parents might expect to keep the clothes when they left the school, but this was jeopardised by bad behaviour and expulsion. Nevertheless, the governors' uses of the clothes, and therefore the recipients' experiences of them, were more complex than simply a crude means of controlling children and their families. They were used to forge both sides of the work relationship, giving the poor an incentive to labour and employers an inducement to take children on: thus a boy expelled for non-attendance in 1774 was allowed to keep his clothes if a master could be found to take him to sea.²⁷ Sometimes clothes were at stake in a decision; the exact

reasons for which are impossible to discern from the extant minutes. In 1775 John Harris was expelled from the Welsh School's boarding house for running away too often; called before the governors, his mother behaved with great insolence and contempt (usually sufficient at this and other institutions to sever connections), yet the governors allowed Harris his 'learning' and clothes as a day pupil if he attended constantly.²⁸ Here they seemed prepared to overlook bad behaviour: was it because of Harris's sponsor, or some unrecorded context for his disappearances, or because they did not hold the son responsible for the mother; or did the governors regard expulsion as a failure of the charity? What one can say, is that uniforms were significant bargaining tokens in a series of relationships the governors did not necessarily dictate.²⁹

Within the recipients' communities it appears that other certainties flourished. From various sources of evidence, clothes emerge as an enabling commodity and they were well entrenched as a form of eighteenth-century alternative currency. Servants received liveries and their employers' cast-offs as part of their wages; clothes could be exchanged or offered in partial payment for something else (such as food or accommodation). They were pawned or sold for cash. They might be worked up in the household or semi-commercialised contexts to fit other wearers or purposes. Second-hand clothes dealing was a substantial urban trade with well-developed social networks of exchange. The circulation of clothes mapped neighbourhood economies, sociability and dispute, and records of transactions that went wrong indicate the complex conventions through which clothing was lent, borrowed and taken.³⁰ Little of this surfaces in the Welsh school records. The governors may not have known or traced the circulation of clothes. Perhaps the resale or exchange opportunities for charity clothing were limited in comparison with other garments, so that uniforms, like liveries, were only partially integrated into these markets?³¹ Whatever the case, hints about recipients' uses of clothing appeared only in the governors' suspicions and complaints, and details may have been less important to them than the general prevention of misuse. In 1721, for example, the committee resolved that parents must give a note promising to return the clothing when required or pay 25s. as a forfeit.³² Although the Treasurer was to take every measure to recover misappropriated clothes, the rules were reiterated in subsequent

years with various sureties attached.³³ From the Welsh charity's earliest days, governors worried that clothes were worn inappropriately and not cared for properly when they left the school premises. They tried to control access to the uniforms, and to this end ruled repeatedly and ineffectively that the parents were to provide clothes bags. In the 1720s, they tried a scheme whereby the Revd Williams kept the bags, giving them to the boys on Saturday ready for church and receiving them back on Monday.³⁴ Evidently the scheme failed: either the parents did not have the wherewithal to provide the requisite cloth bags, or they did not wish to divert resources that way, or they hoped to pawn the clothes between Monday and Saturday, or they wanted to keep them at home (presumably with the attendant risk of losing them to theft³⁵). Eventually, in 1751, the governors gave up and instructed the school master to get thirty 'Baggs'.³⁶

All this activity around uniforms, sureties and bags derived in part from the different, and sometimes contested, ways objects in the charitable economy 'belonged' to institutions and individuals. The evidence implies that school governors understood the charity to own the clothes absolutely until the child finished at the school and left for an apprenticeship. By threatening to prosecute, they claimed this as a legal right. However, their fears mapped the limits of the school's influence and power, which waned as children and things moved out of the charity's spatial and temporal control. To what extent, therefore, did parents and children consider that school clothes were theirs, that they owned them in some degree? For poor households, clothes were charitable benefits to be kept in the family: holding them seems to have afforded some sort of claim. In 1709 a mother petitioned the governors of another London charity school, St Saviour's, Southwark, to accept a different daughter 'she fitting the Clothes for her'.³⁷ Bags and the taking of measurements (for shoes at least³⁸) meant that each child wore his or her 'own' clothes, that they were not part of an undifferentiated pool. By pawning, parents secured access to other goods and services; families did not necessarily claim an absolute right to clothes, but in the process of lodging or redeeming them did take possession to be at least a temporary and expedient form of ownership.³⁹

Similarly, complaints about what the children were doing in their school uniforms represented a difference between benefactors and recipients over the purposes of charity. While the governors

saw uniforms as ends in themselves (a sign of belonging to the charity, decent clothing), children and their parents were more likely to regard them as something to be put to use. In short, while the governors detached the imperatives of charity from the pressures of making ends meet, parents and children did not observe such distinctions. In 1721, the governors complained that several children 'have been detected of selling Nosegays running of Errands during Divine Service of a Sunday in their Charity Cloaths'.⁴⁰ Attending church was not immune from other pressures, and we might also wonder whether the charity uniform itself circulated in a broader economy of meanings as a reference, as a guarantee of being known and reliable, which could be put to use in earning some money. William Hogarth, who identified social abuse by reversing conventional values, certainly seems to suggest this: two gin-sippers in *Gin Lane* (1751) are uniformed charity school girls.⁴¹

On a more general level, the conflicting demands of survival and charity (a variant on the Welsh gentlemen's 1721 complaint to the school) emerge through problems of absenteeism. Children stayed away from the Welsh and other charity schools when some financial difficulty or low-skilled employment opportunity arose. In 1749 a boy was removed from the school as no one could feed him while his father was away.⁴² In 1770, a mother thanked the governors for the education of her son, but asked that he be discharged: as she could no longer keep him in food, he had got a place as an errand boy.⁴³ Since the governors dismissed as ineligible children whose parents were deemed able to provide for them, such instances were hardly surprising.⁴⁴ It is significant that even in the case of the metropolitan Welsh School, rules were reiterated and boys expelled for absence most frequently in the months around harvest. Nevertheless, the governors attempted to enforce attendance. On occasion, when asked appropriately, they gave permission for a boy to go into 'the country' (probably not Wales, but outside London).⁴⁵ Permission made the difference between a boy being 'discharged' or absent, and in the latter case, the governors reasserted their authority by threatening expulsion. In an attempt to control unauthorised absences, parents were summoned to the school to explain and were threatened with forfeiting the clothes.⁴⁶ By introducing work to the curriculum in 1776 school governors attempted to institutionalise, contain and marginally profit from general – if not specific – activities some

boys were already doing.⁴⁷ They may also have sought to extend existing employment opportunities, otherwise limited by season or restricted by age. Through these arrangements, the governors brought charity and 'getting by' into line, not least by enforcing the correct work discipline.

Contrary to school propaganda, therefore, charitable assistance and labour were frequently at odds in practice, a discrepancy which duplicated tensions over the purpose of a charity school and who should receive the education: the extremely poor, who drained resources, or the self-sufficient. But what made these problems greater were conflicts about who had authority over the children. These questions emerged at all charity schools and were made urgent by occasion and place. Thus complaints about the behaviour of children and their parents at the anniversary meeting of all the charity schools of London and Westminster risked those schools' relationship with the SPCK and disrupted the symbolic values they crafted. In daily business, the dynamic surfaced as a direct clash between parents and governors, or their proxy, the teacher. In several instances, the Welsh School governors claimed that an absent boy's mother had encouraged him to stay away. The governors of St Saviour's Girls Charity School (in a poorer part of town, with less prestigious supporters) also complained about absenteeism and parental indifference or connivance, battling to secure the children's presence and time: girls absconded to sleep in the warmth of the glass works in January 1710; mothers were ordered to appear before the trustees to explain why they kept their daughters at home.⁴⁸ Disputes between parents and charity officials over clothes, discipline and apprenticeships – three major elements of a charity education – were fuelled by differences about what behaviour was justified and what outcomes were desirable. In the process they revealed poor parents' attempts to make the charity suit their ends, both legitimately and fraudulently.

Discipline may not seem to fit within the conceptual framework of makeshifts. As exercised in charity schools it was not immediately linked to present survival; it did not hold body and soul together; it was not a direct equivalent to food, shoes or shelter. Nevertheless, the management and compromises of discipline exemplify the degree to which material opportunities were permeated by social negotiation. If power relations saturated makeshifts, as the history of clothes suggests, then discipline was a key field of operation for benefactors and recipients whose activities and knowledge

ensured the production of charity and access to what it offered. Traffic around rules produced the contexts in which long- or short-term benefits were won or lost. Most frequently evidence concerns breaches, not observance, of the rules, responses indicative of alternative social strategies and the limits of what could be tolerated on either side. Misuse and disrespect tested officials' forbearance; conformity and deference stretched recipients' patience.

Disputes over discipline – both that exercised on the children, and their parents' lack of restraint – suggested how, contrary to the idealised social relations of school propaganda, the poor had limited but effective power to obstruct, constrain or redirect charitable intentions. In 1708, for example, the governors of St Saviour's Girls Charity School

Order'd that Elenor Simpson be discharg'd ye School; her Mother having come and scolded ye [Mistress] and at [one of the trustees] for giving ye Child due Correction for coming late, and having also pawn'd her Child's Clothes, and slighted the Charity.⁴⁹

By taking action the governors simultaneously asserted their authority and registered its loss. In the absence of lower-class gratitude, a sort of eighteenth-century institutional grease, the school committee comprehensively failed to control its reputation in the broader community and maintain discipline at the school. In response to many such incidents at St Saviour's, the governors made new rules which threatened expulsion if a child's parents or relations were rude or quarrelsome. Mothers were the most significant offenders, but fathers, aunts and 'friends' also participated, turning up to scold and abuse the schoolmistress, refusing to let their daughters 'Submitt to the orders of the School', showing 'sawciness' in correcting the mistress for her faults and behaving in a 'very rude and unhandsom mannor'. They were ordered before the trustees to explain themselves: some asked the mistress's pardon or made their 'submission'; others failed to turn up and their children were duly expelled. In one case the governors agreed that girls of good character were not responsible for their mother's 'passion and indiscretion': they were allowed to stay.⁵⁰

Disputes over food, which carried complex social meanings of care, sociability and connection, indicate that incidents commonly represented by middling-class governors as plain proof of immorality or rudeness were moments when power relations within and

outside an institution – when practices and expectations – became particularly entangled. London and Westminster charity school trustees tried to stop parents turning up at the anniversary service with food and drink for their children.⁵¹ Was it the sign of disorder officials feared or a jab at the dignitaries who had kept the children walking or standing for hours without refreshment; was it an assertion of parental ‘rights’ or a moment of shared festivity? A late-century mother persisted after warnings in taking cakes and gingerbread to her daughter at the York Grey Coat School; eventually she was called before the Ladies Committee and proved ‘troublesome’ (tenacious of a prerogative to treat; critical of the charity’s fare?). Threatened with her child’s expulsion, however, she became ‘very penitent’.⁵² At the Welsh School, the governors noted ungrateful and insolent mothers, but the teacher did not complain of parental rudeness. This difference may be attributable to the social provenance of the Welsh school’s pupils about whom we know little other than that their families survived without a settlement – a variant on the usual practice of offering charity education to those whose families were not currently on the parish.⁵³ Or perhaps St Saviour’s regime of discipline (early on the governors ordered a wooden ‘Ruffe’ to punish those who misbehaved⁵⁴) was especially contentious; or the difference may have arisen from the gender dynamics of a schoolmistress disciplining girls. Whatever the case, in all such incidents, mothers and others asserted their authority over and care of the child, and challenged those who claimed an authority derived from hierarchy (it is no coincidence that repentant mothers made a *submission*). In some circumstances, the authority the parents challenged was itself differentiated along lines shaped by tradition and degrees of ceremonial weight and publicity, as was the case at the York Grey Coat School where ‘ladies’ made the decisions, and ‘gentlemen’ decreed at their request. Some of those hauled before committees retracted their criticisms and accusations. A sufficient number refused to submit to the trustees to suggest that either the putative advantages of a charity education were insufficient to outweigh issues of control and direction, or their desire for that education had ceased, releasing them from the necessity of conforming to the governors’ expectations.

Apprenticeship, secured with a fee, also brought parents and governors into negotiation and sometimes conflict. At issue were the time at which the governors released a child and the choice

of trade. Since apprenticeship was a resource with cash value, charity school governors were generally concerned to assert control and detect any abuses. In the first half of the eighteenth century, Welsh School boys were apprenticed to surveyors, watermen, builders, blacksmiths, basket-makers, shoemakers and soap boilers, or sent to sea. Girls were put into domestic service and branches of the clothing trade. Parents who asked the governors to release their child took the appropriate action; those who took children out of school without 'acquainting' the trustees lost the benefit of the charity.⁵⁵ In matters of apprenticeship, mothers again emerge as key intermediaries both at the Welsh School and at St Saviour's, and not just in the absence of another parent, nor simply where their daughters were concerned.⁵⁶ In 1722, for example, the Welsh School governors ordered that a boy was to be put on any trade his mother thought proper.⁵⁷ In 1777, a mother brought a watch-case maker to the school to take her son apprentice.⁵⁸ Mothers, and less frequently fathers, turned up at the trustees' meetings to make their requests, and it is worth recalling that the other context in which they appeared was when called to answer for their own or children's breaches of discipline. They entered what the governors knew to be their own space, furnished with objects signifying power and possession: chairs upholstered with leather, a large round table, plans of the school, a list of subscribers, a steel stove and a lock and key to the committee room door.⁵⁹ The politics of trustees' meetings required the performance of appropriate behaviour and sentiment: solicitation, submission, gratitude. Were women particularly adept at or dependent on using this to secure specific objectives? Was their participation an aspect of familial and neighbourhood relations? Again, the evidence is indicative, but cannot be conclusive.

Since they valued appropriate display or performance, trustees sometimes worried that appearances were misleading and suspected that all was not as it seemed. In 1776, a father petitioned the Welsh School for the bounty money to be paid out to his son's master. The Vice-Treasurer, however, suspected a fraudulent combination between the father and master as the boy was still living with his father: it is unclear whether the information came fortuitously or was sought out.⁶⁰ Although this incident is unique in the eighteenth-century Welsh School minutes, it does suggest how informal or alternative arrangements might have penetrated the more formal dispositions charity officials wished to make and

enforce. Apprenticeships – like uniforms – could be put to creative use in raising ready money (the bounty). The governors response – that for the boy's sake, they would pay if he were put out to a master of good character – demonstrates again that children were not necessarily punished for parental misdemeanour, and perhaps that the father's fraud was regarded in its informal rather than legal context, as connivance not theft. Mary Alexander, an orphan with no friends, was called before the Welsh School trustees in 1775 to explain that she had run away from her place because it was too hard; she was allowed to return to the school until another arrangement could be found for her.⁶¹ In theory at least, dealings with orphans were more straightforward, uncomplicated by parental interference. Much of this discussion remains highly speculative and cannot be pushed too far: we know too little of how the governors judged individual characters, or what local information they had, to be able to discern their reasoning and priorities. But such material does demonstrate the sorts of relationship governors contemplated in their dealings with poor 'objects'. Thus despite the language of binaries through which charity was represented – the rich and the poor, donors and objects – charitable practice required that some account be taken of the social environment beyond institutional walls, beyond the rooms and spaces in which officials dispensed benevolence. And even in the most literal ways, these other worlds called: the Welsh School governors ran a losing battle to stop the boys disappearing on their own affairs, either when sent on errands, or when they purloined the key of the gate to let themselves out. Eventually the governors had the height of the school wall raised and the top set with broken bottles to stop the boys absconding.⁶² Trustees might have preferred to represent charity children standing alone with only their benefactors to help, but in practice relations and friends frequently intruded to insist on their connections with the children and any material benefits they held.⁶³

Taken together, these fragments of evidence suggest the resourcefulness of children and parents, who seized opportunities and chose between limited options. Thus pupils climbed walls, obeyed the teacher or stayed away; parents marched into the yard, faced the governors, or placed their children simultaneously in two different institutions.⁶⁴ Without knowing the specific reasons for their decisions, these episodes nevertheless invite us to re-examine the ways beneficiaries dealt with governors and

teachers. Rudeness and sauciness were not necessarily mistakes of the sort that jeopardised the future in a Hogarthian moral tableau; they manifested a form of authority, marking the limit of what was acceptable, bearable or feasible in a social environment where resourcefulness and assertiveness were wielded and honed as survival skills. As we have seen, some parents later changed tactics. In much the same way, submission also had more than one meaning. It could be just what it seemed. But it could also be a form of camouflage, of assertion (witting or not) which operated strategically through conformity, denial or silence: economy with the truth during settlement examinations would be an obvious parallel.⁶⁵ Parents asked permission to take their children out of the school, preferring immediate employment opportunities to education. Some parental statements, accompanied by the appropriate gestures of thanks, conveyed the failure of charity: children had to starve or leave, a message the governors understood and debated as an impossible choice between usefulness (with starvation) and ruin (without an education).⁶⁶ Yet again, while benefactors and commentators generally insisted that charity ensured survival – a move that asserted their control by narrowing the gap between charity and quotidian struggles – poor parents often seemed much less convinced by the correspondence. In this sense charity institutions operated a compromise between philanthropic ambitions to regulate the lives of the poor and lower-class attempts to preserve maximum room for manoeuvre.

Charitable interactions, whether marked by conflict or agreement, extended in many different directions. In the case of the Welsh School, the charity created material opportunities for parents and children, for the trustees and their businesses, for all who sold their services to the school, and for prominent Welshmen, such as Sir Watkin Williams-Wynn. If charity is regarded as a form of circulation rather than a material thing, it tied all these groups into various relationships of application (whether of parents to trustees or governors to wealthy patrons) and it created uneven relationships of acquiescence and power. Here the connections with 'makeshifts' were most straightforward. But as other historians have pointed out, economic benefit alone cannot explain why poor children attended school.⁶⁷ Nor can the eighteenth-century virtue of benevolence be reduced to financial profit. And charity had other qualities too, creating spaces in which all sorts of association might be made. This particular charity was an institution through

which questions of belonging were negotiated. The Society of Ancient Britons' sermon was preached in the 'British tongue' (Welsh), which the Prince of Wales would certainly not have understood, but meaner members of the congregation might have followed. It is unclear how many of the children, their teachers or the governors spoke Welsh; the strength of their individual connections with Wales, and through Wales with one another, would have varied. Welshness, like the uniforms of Welsh manufacture, cockades and leeks, operated most powerfully in public.⁶⁸ But before asking whether Welshness or any other form of cultural representation has a place in the framework of makeshifts, I need to discuss the Welsh School's broader context: what did eighteenth-century charity offer, how were its meanings constructed, and to what extent did it accommodate lower class social networks?

Charity

So far, I have argued that we need to complicate our approaches to makeshifts and charity, if we are to understand how the eighteenth-century poor survived. Charity was not equivalent to poaching as a way of getting by, and I would suggest that this was as obvious to the poor as it was self-evident to the rich. Charity was more than its material benefits, both in the meanings attached to alms and in the expectations of donors and recipients. While the system of charity and lower-class survival were deeply implicated, there was no direct or coterminous match; both had additional and different imperatives. In the most extreme cases, charity failed altogether; at other points it offered a guide to survival. For most of the century it had very little to say about how the poor might fend for themselves.

Failure, survival, neglect and charity were all evident in a 1763 case that was singled out by J. P. Malcolm for his *Anecdotes* of the eighteenth century (1810).⁶⁹ When two dead, naked women were discovered in an empty London house, several other women, including one Elizabeth Pattent, were found upstairs. The details can be read on a number of levels: as a mediated story of survival and as an explicit commentary on what charity should be, but in its difficulties and paradoxes, it becomes an account of charity's shortcomings, whether practised between peers or across social divisions. Pattent, an out-of-place servant, told how she had learnt

at the Fleet Market that the house was empty. She worked for food at her late mistress's cookshop and had pawned her apron for 6d. to buy beef and plum pudding for the women downstairs. She also nursed a girl who had recently arrived in the house, but denied all knowledge of the dead women's clothing. The parish, organised charity and alms were strikingly absent from all but the girl's story: she had been wrongly denied relief under the poor law and the alms she received still left her 'emaciated beyond description'. The dead women, for whom Pattent could only supply the name 'Bet', were isolated and anonymous. Malcolm drew many lessons from this, all of which corresponded with conventional eighteenth-century morality. The dead women, who had starved rather than steal, 'met death ... supported by pure consciences' and deserved 'statues to their memory'. The virtuous Pattent worked every day for a miserable pittance and passed the night relieving the sick. Pattent's story also tells how care and information were shared among the poor; odd hints depict communities of market traders, single women and even petty patriots, who consumed that archetypal British food, beef and plum pudding. Pawnbrokers and ex-employers were a means to survival, but assistance was limited: Pattent stopped going downstairs when the women sickened. It would have spoilt Malcolm's account, and jeopardised Pattent, to suggest that she had stripped the bodies of the dead and returned to the pawnbroker's, so that detail and the possibility that Pattent knew more than the names she divulged was left hanging. Instead, Malcolm reflected on what charity should have meant:

Is it not shocking to think on this catastrophe, when we reflect on how many would have contributed to the relief of this family of misery, had they known their wants, when advertisements for daily relief appeared from the distressed and were successful.

In emphasising the reactions of the newspaper reading classes, Malcolm closed questions about how those dead women might have signalled their needs and to whom. He downplayed the crucial issue of what measures were legitimate to take, which was particularly relevant when those without means helped those with even less, and he evaded the paradox that virtuous, uncomplaining submission meant starvation. He shifted attention from co-operation among social equals to condescension and sentiment across social ranks, a distinction that underwrote both the material

benefits and theoretical literature of charity. It is Malcolm's understanding of charity, not Patten's experience of neighbourliness that dominates historical records and therefore shapes the following characterisation. But that characterisation also exemplifies the disjunctions – potential or real in the case of 'Bet' – between charity and survival, between assistance proffered vertically or horizontally.

Charity was an important source of assistance to the eighteenth-century poor, particularly to the young, sick and elderly, supplementing diet and income, providing shelter, clothing and basic education. The scale and duration of such benefits (how substantial the aid, whether it was a one-off payment or continued support) depended upon local social and economic resources and patterns of initiative, fashion, history and tradition which were also geographically specific. Claims on relief might be parochial, denominational, occupational or regional, and benefactors drew on their familial or personal histories to create patterns of memory and commemoration. The map of charity did not therefore correspond to a map of destitution, and formal charities required the poor, or their sponsors, to insert themselves into existing structures and meet admission criteria. The mixture of charitable forms shifted during the eighteenth century as, for example, metropolitan opportunities – especially schools and hospitals – expanded and long-established cash doles lost purchasing power. The balance between testamentary donation and lifetime charity also changed. Throughout the century, from whatever sources, substantial sums were disbursed: in the 1790s, Frederick Eden opined that 'more is expended annually on those objects, who are selected by the discretionary charity of individuals, than on the national Poor [the statutory relief system]'.⁷⁰ Given the amounts raised through donation, subscription and testamentary bequest, questions about how and why funds should be distributed loomed in discussions of the poor law, and shaped strategies for soliciting charity. New entrepreneurial institutions (including the Welsh School) adapted a long tradition of Protestant commentary to attract supporters, raise money and promote certain understandings of charity.⁷¹ For both donors and recipients, the type of material assistance mattered, but so did the form and content of these exhortations to charity.

The rules of charitable giving were expounded in an extensive literature that was intricately bound up with individual charities' strategic purposes and thus determined to a significant extent

what was available to the poor and how they might grasp it. From at least the early eighteenth century, published sermons and accounts were part of a charitable market embedded in the increasingly elaborate structures of urban and print culture, and formed through the politics and spaces of hearing and reading. Charity school sermons not only reached several audiences when first preached (governors, benefactors, teachers, the children), but constituted new audiences once printed. Issues and debates circulating in print shaped ideas about charity and mediated them to those practising benevolence in various contexts. The production of knowledge about charity was therefore enmeshed in broader cultural politics – whether concerning governance, pleasure or profit. Print became both a channel and a space for philanthropic action as charities used the press to gather supporters, convey expectations and demonstrate merit, particularly through advertisement. The Foundling Hospital, for example, in addition to advertising various fund-raising entertainments and religious occasions, also publicised the time at which a new set of children would be taken in. Ostensibly, this was directed at those with children to leave.⁷² Did lower-class mothers burdened with children read the newspapers? Did other sources of information prompt them to search for this announcement? Or were these notices directed at their 'friends' and advisers, who perused papers in coffee houses, lodgings, above or below stairs? What negotiations of association, hierarchy and patronage did these advertisements open or exploit? Simultaneously, as a piece of administrative information, these notices reminded another reading public of the charity's work. The power relationships created in and maintained by print defined charity and created opportunities: directly in the case of the begging letters published as newspaper advertisements to which Malcolm alluded;⁷³ and proximately in relations between recipients, officials and donors. In short, the system of eighteenth-century charity was permeated by novelty and survival strategies were adaptive, incorporating new elements along with more familiar methods and gains.

*'The nature and extent of charity'*⁷⁴

To whom should charity be given? Answers to this question determined access to charity and its points of intersection with

lower-class survival strategies. Clerics and moralists – the theoreticians of charity – included ties of family and friendship in its orbit and supposed that even the poor were capable of exercising it, but in practice they concentrated discussion on the destitute and on those with ample means to relieve sufferings.⁷⁵ This was significant in excluding charity circulating within lower-class networks and in suppressing knowledge of the uneasy relationship between charity and making ends meet evident whenever the poor Welsh manoeuvred for maximum benefits. As I shall argue, this silence had at the very least the theoretical effect of constraining lower-class autonomy. Towards the end of the eighteenth century, William Paley acknowledged other meanings of charity, but concerned himself only with ‘promoting the happiness of our inferiors’.⁷⁶ Throughout the century, debate on this matter was shaped both within the discourse of charity and through its intersections with a parallel discussion of statutory relief (the poor law) which also worked around the central categories of the deserving and undeserving. A third definition spanned both charity and parish relief: that of poverty, understood variously as the mass at the bottom of the social heap, and as a much smaller group who had fallen into destitution. Most secure in their claims to material assistance during the century were those who faced extraordinary difficulty through no apparent fault of their own: either because afflicted by some disaster carrying no suspicion of moral culpability, inability to work or because they were particularly vulnerable. Impoverishment through the effects of bad weather or fire was a well-established occasion for soliciting and receiving charity, so was sickness. Pregnant (married) women, orphans and elderly spinsters attracted attention because of their condition or because they had no parent or child to turn to. Archbishop Secker (1693–1768) thought age, infirmity and a large family had the strongest claim on the charitable, a definition the Welsh School governors also applied. Religious education targeted the spiritually destitute, those in whom poverty had bred ignorance.⁷⁷ And finally, the ‘charity of due correction’ was reserved for the idle, vicious and vagrant poor.⁷⁸ Although commentators thought it important to set out the principles of charitable giving, details concerning how much should be donated, for example, were difficult to define exactly: ‘[God] hath not indeed fixed the proportions of any kind of charity: for circumstances vary so infinitely, that general rules concerning such matters are impossible.’⁷⁹ Claims made by

particular charitable institutions and organisations were therefore important in applying, elaborating and modifying general rules. Hospital supporters asserted that those who had suffered crippling injury at work were worthy recipients of charity. More controversially, from the late 1750s the Magdalen Hospital proposed prostitutes as members of the deserving poor, qualified by penitence. The proliferation of specialised charities subdivided the deserving even further, targeting specific types of people or social groups, carving out fields of expertise from a broad, heterogeneous category of need. Thus in the early eighteenth century, the SPCK identified children as a means to national moral reformation. In the second half of the century, various societies, hospitals and dispensaries singled out the unvaccinated, lunatics, foundlings, sufferers from venereal disease, distressed musicians, the blind, unmarried but pregnant women, debtors, abandoned girls and sick children, devising forms of assistance outside traditions of almshouses, food hand-outs or cash.⁸⁰

The poor law had long effected distinctions between those requiring assistance (the impotent) and those in greater need of employment or discipline than doles (including the able-bodied who refused to work). In practice, however, many parishes included able-bodied poor among their pensioners.⁸¹ Charity worked in an opposite direction, from a principle of latitude towards more restricted application, to produce a similar pattern of discretion and variation. According to one extremely inclusive interpretation of Christian tradition, the poor were God's representatives on earth. Charity was therefore not something done simply to benefit the poor, or for immediate social gain, but as a sign of duty to God. Clerics emphasised that charity only worked if practised with an appropriate religious sense, elaborating on the meaning of charity for the donor (literally the difference between death and salvation).⁸² From this perspective, the poor were a spiritual conduit or currency converters, a means to lay up 'Treasure in Heaven', a line of argument that deferred questions of the recipient's merit.⁸³ This principle was in decline during the first half of the eighteenth century. Discrimination was anyway extensively practised by individuals throughout the century – encouraged even by clerics who recommended the spiritual merits of expansive giving while simultaneously stressing the necessary prudence and regularity through which the truly Christian donor would easily discern the 'due limits and measures of charity'.⁸⁴ The new associational

charities – including schools – emphasised their ability to channel assistance in the most socially efficacious directions. Competition for funds between various organisations intensified arguments about how money would be spent and the benefits of clubbing together: to discern the true circumstances of applicants and achieve more with amalgamated sums.⁸⁵

As it became less interesting – or perhaps less convincing – to consider the poor as witnesses who would testify for the rich at the day of judgement, so the immediate effects of charity and the duty of bestowing it responsibly became more important to preachers. Such changes in rhetoric accompanied shifts in charitable practice and new management techniques that institutionalised applications for relief and located charity as an instrument of social, economic and national priorities.⁸⁶ But some remnants of those other traditions continued in the writings and practice of William Law and John Wesley, and in habits of casual almsgiving.⁸⁷ Although the scale of this last is impossible to quantify, its traces survive in account books and diaries – in small sums paid to beggars or ragged children encountered while travelling, for example.⁸⁸ The practice of answering begging letters – both personally addressed and published in the newspapers – bridges almsgiving tradition and new ways of communicating through print.⁸⁹ Overall, however, increasing and systematic attention was given to the effects of charity on recipients, a focus that borrowed from and consolidated a late seventeenth-century economic tradition which calculated the cost and value of the poor. Recipients were not necessarily more ‘individual’ or autonomous, but they were more firmly established as human actors, stripped of what now seemed simply a metaphoric role as Christ’s representatives on earth.⁹⁰ But this, and complaints about indiscriminate charity along the lines advocated by Law, did not necessarily demonstrate a secular rationale for charity. For commentators writing at both the beginning and the end of the century, charity education was predominantly religious; work was a moral duty; throughout various national emergencies patriotism operated within a providential framework. Donors’ behaviour and sentiments still mattered both in determining the value of a gift and the effect of giving on the donor; a spiritual dimension survived.

While discussions of charity focused on poverty and its relief, they had little to say about scraping a living. Why? First, failure to survive, not success, was the starting point for benevolent

intervention; second, the way the legitimising framework was constructed made questions of agency, which the concept of makeshifts privileges, extremely problematic.

Assertion and rights

Charity operated within a framework of application and supplication. Petitioners did not assert a much-debated right to assistance that emerged most clearly in relation to the poor law.⁹¹ In contrast, as supporters pointed out, charities were characterised by a regime of voluntarism shaped by patronage, benevolence and gift. Nevertheless, matters were not quite so clear cut. In practice, as the Welsh School evidence suggested, the management and control of resources was a sensitive issue which raised issues of entitlement and claim. Petitions for charity – standardised by institutions such as the Magdalen Hospital, which printed blank forms for applicants to fill in – coexisted with assertive political conventions in which petitioners demanded redress, expressed grievances and claimed a right to participate in government.⁹² Nor were these complications simply an effect of practising charity. In theory the rich were obliged to assist the poor, and distinctions between parochial welfare and charity were only drawn in an argument secondary to the broad principle. Matthew Hutton, Bishop of Bangor, told supporters of the London Infirmary in 1746 that the poor had a 'natural right' to charity and compassion from their rich neighbours.⁹³ The concept of stewardship, according to which the rich managed rather than possessed wealth absolutely, enforced this obligation in the language of liberality and justice.⁹⁴ A convention of designating illustrious patrons as 'stewards' of a charity's annual meeting perpetuated at least a trace of this idea. While establishing the duty of charity, understood in its widest sense as relief, social commentators – including those who used the strongest terms to characterise the obligation – limited the poor's scope to enforce this claim. In withholding assistance, the rich man broke his faith not with the starving and cold, but with the absolute proprietor, God. For this reason, the poor's rights to charity were unenforceable with no redress possible on contractual grounds.

In a parallel move, social institutions, providentially arranged, gave donors additional rights while further restricting the poor's right to relief. In the 1770s, one subscriber to the Welsh charity

claimed that choosing children to attend the school was his 'property'.⁹⁵ Legal frameworks, in particular, were significant in shaping answers to questions about charity. In the 1730s, Joseph Roper asserted that by law and in respect to all except God, 'we' have an 'exclusive' property.⁹⁶ It was significant that Hutton designated the poor's a *natural* right, that is a right that existed outside of or prior to human institutions. Hutton declared that no laws or regimes of property should abridge the poor's rights to take what they needed to keep life and soul together.⁹⁷ But for much of the century the definition of that moment of absolute necessity was extremely narrow, hedged about with prudential considerations. Mary Astell asserted that 'it is better to suffer some real Wants than by invading a Neighbour's property, the Laws of Society and Good Government are broken'.⁹⁸ To compensate for these restrictions, preachers insisted that the rich should seek out the poor and hear the cries of the modest and downtrodden, a responsibility absorbed by institutional charities and hedged with suspicions. The unintended consequence of deserving, uncomplaining, docile poverty was, of course, that the poor might starve to death, like Elizabeth Patten's neighbours.

If the foregoing discussion seems very broad compared with the details of charity schooling, this is because charity schooling operated in a field whose generalities preoccupied commentators, not least because the rules of charity were deemed universal, god-given, natural principles. The governors of the Welsh and other charity schools made their decisions in a context that included, but was not restricted to, questions of education and the circumstances of a particular group of children. Their actions had resonances in a general discourse they and others promoted, shaped and adapted. Thus the question of rights inflected their dealings with both the poor Welsh and affluent donors; it permeated their interpretation of lower-class behaviour; it was partially resolved through determinations in the minute books that asserted the rights of the Directory to propose and dispose. The Welsh School governors emphasised the duty of helping those with large families and their contribution to the nation; but their Welsh focus created a variant of mid-eighteenth-century patriotism and benevolence. They followed the standard recommendation of caring for neighbours, but gave it their own meaning – the Welsh in London – creating a particular sense of community, which was neither wholly geographical nor simply differentiated economically.

in its constitution. Other variants on community were less acceptable to the philanthropically minded. Elizabeth Patten's world of markets, cook shops, squats and pawnbrokers may have been close to that of many charity school children, but for the rich it was conceptually very different.

Makeshifts and virtue

The qualities sought in and impressed upon the poor during the eighteenth century are well known: deference, submission, humility, gratitude, contentment, social usefulness, piety, frugality, industriousness, honesty, obedience, loyalty, chastity;⁹⁹ and, less consistently, self-reliance and cleanliness (early in the century, the SPCK declared that parents should send their children to school 'clean washed and comb'd', but arrangements for washing were first discussed by the Welsh School trustees in 1773¹⁰⁰). Piety and obedience required and got much attention to bridge possible conflicts of virtue; self-reliance was a later contender in a long list of not necessarily compatible elements. Expressed in sermons and moral tracts, all of these qualities floated in general, idealised contexts; utilised by charity officials in their dealings with the poor and in their records of actions taken, they assumed specificity and context. Institutional charity regimes were organised around these 'duties'. Thus charity schools taught Christian doctrine, sought to prepare their charges for a life of useful toil, required obedience to school rules and so on. The Welsh School, in common with many lying-in hospitals, enforced Christian virtues – and new legal frameworks – by demanding to see marriage certificates.¹⁰¹ Almshouse trustees evicted the drunken and quarrelsome. In shaping arrangements, virtues and duties therefore amplified the opportunities and restrictions each institution presented to those wanting access to its resources, both the material and less tangible assets. While complicating charity, this material does little to disturb that apparently closed system of rich and poor, moral theory and practice.¹⁰² Although evidence from charity minutes and parish records goes further in suggesting that these regimes operated within broader networks of social relations (especially neighbourhood and kin) and economic openings (employment and the poor law) these other contexts were not widely recognised as a locus of virtue and social connection.¹⁰³

One of the most explicit discussions of lower-class networks operating independently of other classes' charity appeared in Archbishop Secker's sermons. Preaching in 1754 before supporters of the 'London Hospital for the relief of sick and diseased persons, especially manufacturers, and seamen in merchant service', another cause justified by a national utility argument, Secker offered a generally negative view, but one which, interestingly, not only recognised social relations among the poor but also set them within a persistent pattern of debt:

They follow, at random, the suggestions of neighbours, no wiser than themselves: or, after languishing long, and growing worse than they needed, have recourse for cure, often to ignorant, often to rapacious creatures; who, if they chance to recover, yet strip them of all, and load them with debts, that disquiet the rest of their days.

Secker described the Hospital's intended beneficiaries as lacking any economic leeway: 'many also, with the utmost diligence and parsimony, can but just live'.¹⁰⁴ Elsewhere he assumed that families had (and took) primary responsibility: hospitals' great charity was in giving the sick 'helps' their distressed families could not.¹⁰⁵ As a young man in London and Paris, Secker had studied physic and his professional expertise may have been important in shaping these insights.¹⁰⁶ In general, however, such perspectives did not permeate charity sermons, either because they were regarded as extraneous to the preacher's argument or because he lacked the necessary anecdotal evidence. What is certain, is that during the mid-eighteenth century lower-class survival networks and charity practised by the poor lacked two vital ingredients: it denied the rich an opportunity to demonstrate their benevolence and thus it also stifled the hierarchical dynamic thought so essential to social order and cohesion. Were the poor to stay at home, they would not only be at the mercy of unskilled advisers, but would be beyond the reach of 'vigilant Superintendence': religious instruction given in the wards.¹⁰⁷ Set in this context, general silence in sermons and commentaries about an economy of makeshifts speaks loud about its irrelevance to the theory of charity, even though access to charity was an important element in making ends meet and kindness among equals, however poor, fell within the general eighteenth-century definition of charity. Clerics and moralists regarded independent action, unmediated by social difference, much as the Welsh gentlemen saw it, as a disruptive influence.

Potentially different were new charitable initiatives of the last third of the eighteenth century: friendly societies and savings banks sponsored and directed by the benevolent, and those shifts in established charity institutions which Donna Andrew has traced, all of which made much of enabling the poor to fend for themselves.¹⁰⁸ In the same period, discourse on poverty revalued the quality of independence as something worthy of the labourer. As a commentary on matters agricultural suggested in 1810, the poor should be 'as much as possible the agents in their own concerns'.¹⁰⁹ The qualification is significant. I want to conclude by considering how a philanthropic interest in independence might shed light on those earlier awkward intersections of charity and survival; and reflect on what the evidence of charity can add to our understanding of makeshifts in eighteenth-century Britain.

Conclusions

The actions of the Welsh pupils and their parents were not simply self-reliance *avant la lettre*; at times their behaviour skirted perilously close to insubordination and theft. Crucially, their activities lacked the orderliness and supervision recommended in many late-century proposals. In a sense, therefore, the notion that the poor should be agents 'as much as possible' recognised the economic and moral restrictions on the practice of independence as promoted by commentators who formalised practices and contexts evident earlier. However, the process that legitimised making-do and now incorporated it into a discourse of charity worked to contain its creative and ingenious potential. It narrowed charitable opportunities for both the rich and the poor, limiting the latter to saving from wages and cheap cookery.¹¹⁰ What distinguished relations at the Welsh School from late-century theories were their respective cultural exchanges, and it is these that emerge as crucial to understanding a whole area of social, economic and even political life historians now term 'makeshifts'.

Take charity uniforms, for example. As pieces of clothing, uniforms circulated, like other garments, within families and in exchange for goods and services. But the social circumstances through which uniforms were acquired differentiated them too. We diminish our historical understanding of the poor and of charity if we reduce them to a set of objects in search of objects:

ciphers like the buttons on which the Prince of Wales's emblem was pressed. The ceremonies in which the boys were clothed or walked with the Society of Ancient Britons made the uniforms part of a much more complex system of social relations in which the children participated, albeit on an unequal footing (and indeed inequality was the point). And the cultural exchanges that occurred, that gave encounters between governors, parents, pupils and teachers meaning, included salvation, 'friendship' (in the eighteenth-century sense of sponsorship), tradition and history. Broadly elaborated theories of charity, expressed and applied in different contexts and spaces, framed these encounters and provided a powerful set of general principles and injunctions. Interpretations emerged from different levels of exposure: snippets carried away from hearing a sermon or reading a newspaper; benevolent clichés of self-congratulatory after-dinner gossip; market conversation; systematic enquiry; visual memories; and experiences of alms and prayers. Sometimes parents and officials had explicitly different intentions and expectations of what charitable exchanges should be. At other times, the evidence of acquiescence leads to no certain conclusion, but could include a sense of belonging and ownership independent of that which clerics and shopkeepers, among others, enjoined. We should not be romantic about makeshifts, nor allow it to produce an over-determined concept of agency (a formula in which action equals autonomy and resistance). But if we examine charity as just one element in a network of makeshifts, we begin to discern the religious, material and cultural opportunities charity mediated and shaped, and so uncover the complexity of makeshifts itself.

Notes

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