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Conclusion

Steven King and Alannah Tomkins

Observations and questions

We started this volume with the observation that English welfare historians have developed an increasingly sophisticated theoretical framework within which to analyse the economy of makeshifts. Some of our contributors have explored the nuances of this framework. Sarah Lloyd, for instance, suggests that the texture of encounters between those applying for and those dispensing charity invite us to step beyond the material aspects of the economy of makeshifts and to locate and interpret the ‘cultural imperatives’ that wound through the makeshift economy. Steve Hindle has encouraged us to consider not only the economic angle of the economy of makeshifts, but also the socio-political significance of the construction, reconstruction and exploitation of the makeshift economy in any locality. And his term ‘economy of diversified resources’ adds a further, and very interesting, strand to the linguistic definition of the complementary or contradictory welfare strands viewed from the perspective of poor people and their communities. We also suggested, however, that the empirical base from which an analysis of the practicalities of the operation of the economy of makeshifts would have to spring was strictly limited. A range of unasked or unanswered questions suggested themselves: at a given point in time or for a given community, what was the range of the economy of makeshifts? How did the value of individual elements of the economy of makeshifts change over time? Was the economy of makeshifts quite fragile and in need of constant remoulding or was it resilient in the face of changes in land tenure and work location? How did the poor and the poor law balance the different elements of the economy of makeshifts in response to different life-cycle stages or different causes and

durations of poverty? Were there regionally distinct economies of makeshifts or were the similarities greater than the differences? How did the constellation of coping strategies employed by those who obtained poor relief differ from that assembled by those denied relief or too proud to apply? In particular, what impact did access criteria have on the usefulness of the economy of makeshifts? What impact did the rapid transition of the English population from a rural to an urban industrial population have on the value and composition of the economy of makeshifts? Did the cause of poverty or marginality have a bearing on the coping strategies assembled? In particular, did sudden need associated with sickness or trade cycles generate a distinctive economy of makeshifts? Did those at different life-cycle stages seek out and exploit very different (particularly demographic?) coping strategies, or was the economy of makeshifts immune to considerations of life-cycle? And did middling people recognise the importance of an economy of makeshifts and go out of their way to create extra strands to this economy?

Our contributors have allowed us to begin to think about providing answers to some of these questions. Steve Hindle, Margaret Hanly and Steven King all effectively point to an 'economy of diversified resources', though with charity, work and poor relief at its heart. Around this core they highlight a (potentially very valuable but ultimately inadequately quantifiable) range of peripheral avenues which might be uncertain, contested and constantly under pressure at the same time as they retained a psychological value to the poor and their communities. This said, our contributors do not always agree on the composition of the welfare net; Steve Hindle suggests, in effect, that exploitation of common rights in Geddington was too certain for this to be regarded as part of the economy of makeshifts, while Steve King regards exploitation of waste and common land as an integral feature of the economy of makeshifts in Rossendale. This difference highlights the importance of location and regionality in any approach to the economy of makeshifts. Factors such as differential elimination of the commons, differences in land tenure and the presence or absence of a charitable elite could generate very important variations in the composition and robustness of the makeshift economy within and between counties. Differences in natural resource and employment patterns might have the same effect, though Sarah Lloyd's discussion of the role and character

of London-based charity should warn us that the economy of makeshifts has more than a local flavour. Most importantly, though, we should not forget the very important intra- and inter-regional cultural variations which could impact heavily on the composition of makeshift economies and the order in which makeshift strands were put together at different life-cycle stages.

Such observations allow the marginal poor some agency. However, we should not ignore the fact that one of the enduring themes to come out of the preceding chapters is the actual or perceived fragility of makeshift economies in most areas. At one level, Alannah Tomkins's analysis of pawning practices opens up in a unique way a much neglected strand of the makeshift economy for urban dwellers in particular. However, the existence of that 'welfare avenue' is itself testimony to the fragility of the coping strategies employed by individuals and families to deal with the strains of everyday life. The same might be observed in Heather Shore's excellent linkage of crime into the makeshift economy.¹ Even where they were not fragile, the access conditions for certain avenues in the 'economy of diversified resources' could, as both Margaret Hanly and Sarah Lloyd suggest, prove onerous. Moreover, such conditions made the resources to be garnered dependent upon a cultural or political contest that might implicitly or explicitly reduce their value.

The process of obtaining access to poor law resources was also contested, as several of our contributors have pointed out. The role of those resources in the economy of makeshifts differed greatly between and within regions and between urban and rural areas, but in Lancashire at least the poor law was a minor player in the makeshift economies of most people and at most times. As vestry evidence shows, those who controlled and executed poor law policy had a keen appreciation of the outlines and value of the economy of makeshifts and, at least in some regions, maintained an expectation that these avenues would be explored. Barrett's review of the links between aggregate poor relief spending and kinship density in different Yorkshire communities demonstrates this very effectively indeed. This said, from an opposite angle, Steve Hindle demonstrates that some elements of community or county elites actively argued for a bolstering of the different resource avenues in the 'economy of diversified resources' through the donation and manipulation of charitable funds.

Clearly, then, our contributors have made important advances.

At the same time, there are some aspects of the economy of makeshifts that have received inadequate attention thus far, and part of the rationale of this conclusion is to draw out the writing on three of these areas – demographic strategies, self-help and institutionalised welfare – with a view to generating a platform on which to base a future agenda.

Demographic strategies

We might start with one of the coping strategies that informed the original economy of makeshifts concept – migration and demographic realignment. Historical demographers have in the last two decades been busy exploding key myths about the propensity of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century people to move and their reasons for doing so. While early commentators such as Arthur Redford lumped most poor migrants together as ‘subsistence migrants’ caught in an inexorable drift towards towns, the work of Pooley and Turnbull in particular has led to a more complex assessment of the nature of, and motivations for, movement.² Thus, it is now clear that almost all migration throughout the period covered by this volume was local and circular. Most people moved several times over a life-cycle, but relatively few ended up more than 10–15 miles from where they were born. A spell as an urban resident was probably included in many life-cycles, but the idea that people went to towns and died or stayed there has been shown to be a fallacy. In practice, the return traffic from towns as servants, skilled workers and others returned home was considerable and is testimony to one coping strategy that requires further elaboration.

Motivations for movement appear to have been varied, though work and marriage dominate the schema developed by Pooley and Turnbull, and while migration was a constant feature of entire life-cycles it was children and young adults who numerically dominated in the migration stakes. Apprenticeship – an obvious coping strategy for a family with too many mouths and an inability to put older children to truly productive work, and for a poor law wishing to cut long-term bills – was one factor in child movement, but the majority of child migrants went in tow with their families. Of course, migration carried material costs (travel, selling and re-buying of furniture or tools, etc.) and also cut migrants off

from some of the potential coping strategies that would have been available to them had they stayed, for instance access to charity or credit. Thus one of the most important advances in the migration literature has been a renewed emphasis on the way in which the poor law could reduce the actual and potential costs of movement (and hence influence which part of the economy of makeshifts paupers turned to) by financing the money cost of movement and agreeing to pay out-parish relief. As pauper letters make clear, access to such out-parish relief was an important part of the economy of makeshifts in both the north and the south, though it was more prevalent in the former.³

These are important advances, but in terms of the economy of makeshifts many stones are left unturned. We still know almost nothing, for instance, about the issue of temporary/seasonal migration even though it is clear from poor law accounts (where men would sometimes agree with the community for care of their family, to be reimbursed on their return) that it happened. And while historical demographers have reconstructed the theoretical economic benefits accruing to movement to towns⁴ there have been no detailed nominal studies relating individual migration decisions to family survival strategies of the sort which are being conducted by Paul André Rosental and his collaborators on the continent.⁵ Moreover, while we know the broad age distribution of migrants between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries, this is not enough to tell us about the place of migration in the life-cycle of coping strategies. Thus, did sudden trade-cycle crisis make physical movement more likely, and was there a relationship between need associated with having too many young children and migration? Contemporary commentators often drew such connections, but more empirical work is needed on such questions. Further work is also needed on the issue of whether migration was more likely to be adopted as a coping strategy in some types of community than in others. It is clear, for instance, that the upland communities which were to become broadly proto-industrial by the later eighteenth century lost disproportionate numbers of people to migration prior to rural industrial development. People in town hinterlands may also have seen migration as the easiest of coping strategies in the face of individual and family poverty.⁶ Such observations point up very clearly the potential disparity between the composition and richness of the economy of makeshifts in urban areas vis-à-vis rural areas, a theme which

has been implicit in the chapters of Alannah Tomkins, Sarah Lloyd and Heather Shore.

Another aspect of demographic realignment – marriage and remarriage – has been better covered by historical demographers and cultural historians. While the economic circumstances of men allowed them to remain solvent and single for longer than most women,⁷ ultimately couples are usually thought to have had greater access to material resources and a wider range of potential coping strategies than singletons. We might query whether such hard material considerations figured obviously in the decision of when and who to marry, but three things about the marriage market and process which emerge from the recent historiography are important for this discussion. The first is that both male and female marriage ages fell during the course of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.⁸ Exactly why they did so remains a matter of debate,⁹ but what the falling age must have meant is that many couples marrying for the first time in the later eighteenth century were unlikely to be economically independent of family, kin and friends. In other words, most marriages must have been undertaken firmly in the grasp of the economy of makeshifts, though few historical demographers have carried through this logic of their observation of falling marriage ages.¹⁰

The second important observation is that the rate of marital dissolution probably fell for much of the period covered by this volume, as life expectancy improved and industrialisation in much of the north and midlands cut down migration distances still further. The corollary of this observation is that one of the classic seventeenth-century coping strategies – marrying or remarriage of a wealthy widow or widower – was likely to have been less and less important over time. This is even more the case when we take account of the recent work of cultural historians such as Elizabeth Foyster and Pam Sharpe who show, through the skilful use of case studies, that the remarriage process for widows in particular was one fraught with hurdles and uncertain outcomes.¹¹ Sharpe suggests that because of their privileged access to poor relief and informal relief (gleaning, work for the parish, etc.) women may have had little incentive to remarry. This said, chronological gaps between widowhood and remarriage for those widows who eventually did get remarried tended to be narrow, something which perhaps reinforces the idea that marriage and remarriage was an important coping strategy in certain life-cycle positions.¹²

Meanwhile, the final key aspect of marriage historiography is that English society in our period never resolves the core paradox that while couples were (and were acknowledged to be) more economically secure, commentators from Malthus backwards were persistently afraid of the consequences of pauper marriages for the moral state of communities and classes. We see this paradox reflected in poor law records, with some poor law officials actively encouraging and paying for marriage while others, sometimes in the same communities at different points in time, actively discouraged pauper unions. One of the logical extensions of this observation is that whatever the nominal shape of the local economy of makeshifts, paupers were not always in a position to make choices about the way that they combined coping strategies. This is not about access conditions but active constraint, offering further weight to the contentions of Sarah Lloyd and Steve Hindle that an 'economy' of makeshifts was actually shot through with cultural and socio-political judgements on the part of poor people and their communities. We might also consider the idea that the 'economy' of makeshifts had an emotional angle. We know, for instance, that remarriage for women was most likely in two brief windows of the life-cycle – for women who had relatively few young children and for women with grown-up children but who had not yet reached old age – and more work is needed not only on how remarriage for women fitted into a life-cycle of makeshifts but also on the emotional questions that prompted them to take the remarriage path. Men notionally found it easier to remarry at all ages, but we need to ask searching questions about how far remarriage represented a conscious coping strategy as opposed to a desire for companionship. The answers to these sorts of questions almost certainly varied by community type – remarriage rates at all ages were much higher in rural industrial communities than either towns or rural areas, for instance – and more widely the role of marriage and remarriage in the overall welfare package assembled by early modern families may have varied according to the prevailing causes of poverty and marginality.

A further and overlapping literature that we must address is the increasingly sophisticated discussion of early modern propensities to vary household structures and to be tied into complex neighbourhood, friendship and occupational networks which could be energised when sudden and short-term or gnawing and long-term poverty overtook an individual. Margaret Hanly hints at the

importance of these networks in her contribution to this volume. The earliest literature saw these as discrete coping strategies. Peter Laslett, for instance, stressed from the 1960s that English households were both small and simple.¹³ Sam Barrett deals with the details of this literature in his chapter, but in essence there have been few credible challenges to Laslettian orthodoxy. Rather, more recent historiography has moved the goalposts, asking whether the form of the nuclear family really matters and in the process combining issues which Laslett saw as discrete. Thus one strand of thinking which is important for an understanding of the economy of makeshifts is the idea that what matters is not the form of the family and household at any point in time, but its changing size and composition over the whole life-cycle of the family. Thomas Sokoll, for instance, has been able to compare pauper listings for Essex communities to suggest that far from pauper households being small and simple, they were actually large and complex. Few were solitary, many had children (single or married) to help them out, others took in servants, lodgers or (in particular) grandchildren, and still more resided together under the same roof as a collective coping strategy.¹⁴ In other words, at particular times of life-cycle stress, households showed a distinct propensity to split and reform. By using population listings that combine the experiences of family units at all life-cycle stages, we miss this basic characteristic, and thereby potentially gloss over important differences in the coping strategies employed in different regions or socio-economic environments.

A second strand of thinking is that whether people lived together is less relevant in understanding the cohesiveness of the family and its role in things such as welfare than whether kin, good friends and occupational or religious colleagues lived proximate to each other and could thus offer day-to-day aid to those in need.¹⁵ And a final theme in the modern historiography of the family which is relevant here is the idea that understanding the operation of families has less to do with ties of blood or marriage, and more to do with 'fictive kin' – the friends, neighbours, occupational colleagues and religious brethren who could be as close in emotional and financial terms as family were tied into similar systems of expectation and obligation, and who might be better resourced than family members when poverty or the need to invest in a business loomed large. As Tadmor and others have pointed out, such fictive kin frequently took kinship

titles,¹⁶ though neither social nor welfare historians have taken the next logical step and included such networks (other perhaps than ill-specified 'neighbourhood networks') into discussion of the shape and vibrancy of economies of makeshift at local level. Partly this reflects problems of source and language, but historians such as Pat Thane are by no means alone in suggesting that kinship and friendship may have been one of the great unseen props to the early modern economy of makeshifts. This in turn raises important questions for future research, notably the extent to which emphasis on such networks varied over the life-cycle and according to the exact cause of poverty. We might also ask whether there were regional differences in emphasis here, with Barrett and others suggesting persuasively in this volume that kinship density was somewhat higher in the industrial and urban north than has often been found in the rural and urban south or east. By inference, we also need to ask whether certain socio-economic community types generated a greater role for kinship and other networks in the overall economy of makeshifts than did other community types.

Self-help

In some ways, of course turning to kinship, neighbourhood and occupational networks might be classified as a form of self-help, and this part of a potential economy of makeshifts has attracted a good deal of commentary too. The role of friendly societies, not elsewhere given sustained attention in this volume, is worthy of particular consideration. The literature on the subject is considerable.¹⁷ By 1803 there were almost 10,000 official friendly societies with over 700,000 members, but the true figure is probably nearer 1 million when we take account of small local societies that escaped registration. Growth in the rest of the nineteenth century was to be exponential, reaching 5.5 million by 1903. In 1850 the Manchester Oddfellows alone could boast a membership of 500,000 and the organisational form had proved its appeal to women as well as men, with the foundation of over 1,000 female-only friendly societies. These figures notwithstanding, friendly society membership has rarely been integrated into the framework of the wider economy of makeshifts. Fees are held to have been too high for the poorest sections of the labour force (and thus

those most likely to need the economy of makeshifts on a regular basis) to afford, many friendly societies were financially unstable and could provide only brief and short-term benefits and there was a massive disparity in the distribution of friendly society membership, recently highlighted again by Gorsky.¹⁸ Lancashire in particular, and urban industrial areas more generally, dominated aggregate friendly society memberships, and so even if friendly society membership was important as a coping strategy it played this role only for a limited section of the population.

Yet such commentary is misleading. Relatively few people spent their entire lives in poverty defined as dependence upon poor relief or charity. It is thus conceivable that almost everybody would at some point have had the resources to become friendly society members and that the benefits of membership could be an important part of the economy of makeshifts at certain life-cycle stages.¹⁹ The fact that the majority of friendly society members were on the books for a relatively short time and showed some propensity to drop out and then come back again, is surely testimony to this.²⁰ Moreover, the idea that poor law officials saw friendly society membership as an important alternative coping mechanism can be seen in the fact that they collected membership certificates against the event of a poor relief application by a member and that they often paid subscription arrears if people applied for this form of support from the old poor law.²¹ Such practices reflect the fact that, as Steve Hindle shows us in his contribution to this volume, communities could take an active interest in supporting the wider economy of makeshifts. Moreover, while it is true that there were wide spatial disparities in membership, it is also important to remember that membership wherever it was taken out conferred more benefits than just monetary payments at times of sickness or old age. Friendly society membership was thus often a foundation for vibrant neighbourhood networks, with fellow members visiting each other at time of incapacity and probably offering additional emotional and material support. It is not surprising, therefore, to find Gorsky suggesting that friendly society membership was most dense where poor law systems were weakest and that friendly societies took over much of the role of communal welfare, though even he fails to link such conclusions into a wider discussion of the economy of makeshifts.²² The pressing need for such integration will be clear from the foregoing discussion. This is particularly true of

the role of friendly society provision in the economy of makeshifts of female members and their families.

A further makeshift on which we have plenty of indirect discussion – and one which again falls under the general head of self-help – is modification to the income and expenditure nexus. That poor people were supposed to work even if they received poor relief is acknowledged by a wide variety of commentators, and by contributors to this volume. That poor people did work is confirmed by poor law records and letters back to their parish by or for paupers themselves. But locating the role of work in making ends meet for poor people is often problematic, and it is for this reason that we come back to the issue of work here. Snell, Lee, Valenze and others have identified long-term trends in national and regional employment patterns and they, along with Sarah Horrell and Jane Humphries,²³ have identified equally important long-term trends in the differential labour force participation of men, women and children. Contributors to the proto-industrial literature too have been active in tracing regional employment patterns and identifying influences on employment within regions such as technological redundancy.²⁴ Much of this overlapping literature highlights the decline in formal labour force participation amongst women in various regions, with inevitable knock-on effects to the robustness of the family economy.²⁵

How such broad changes manifested themselves at local level and influenced the composition or strength of the economy of makeshifts, though, is not always or usually clear. Specific local influences modified these broad trends. Moreover, the poor themselves were often the most dynamic of local groups in creating work opportunities in the service or manufacturing sector or on the margins of the legitimate and illegitimate economy. Because of the nature of our sources, much of this sort of activity goes unrecorded so that we miss a potentially important response to local pressure on the economy of makeshifts. The poor law itself could also create short-term employment opportunities, blurring the distinctions between poor relief and the economy of makeshifts in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in the same way that the overlap between charity and poor relief had blurred the same distinctions in the seventeenth century.²⁶ Nursing, laying out the dead, boarding the children of others, training the children of others, working on the parish roads and buying goods from

those who might otherwise be dependent upon poor relief²⁷ were common themes in the accounts of the overseer of the poor even before the more formal wage and employment subsidies of the late eighteenth century such as the roundsman system. So were entries for direct support of those in work such as coals for blacksmiths, looms, potatoes for seeding and cloth for selling. And, in the north and midlands in particular, it is common to find vestries ordering parish officials to negotiate actively with employers to subsidise employment and to provide work opportunities for more deserving and able-bodied paupers. Friends and neighbours, tied into relationships of obligation and trust through neighbourhood networks, might also bargain for employment on behalf of the poor.

The problem with this coping strategy is that it is difficult to pin down the local range of work opportunities available for those facing sudden or life-cycle crises, a problem exacerbated by the tendency for employment capacity of a local economy to fluctuate considerably over time and for some people to work elsewhere for all or part of the time as a coping strategy. It is even more difficult to pin down the level of individual and family remuneration from the work process, and thus to locate the role of work in generating yearly income. This is not simply a matter of lack of record survival; some income certainly came from illegal (poaching, selling stolen clothes) or semi-legal (selling or pawning goods given by the poor law) activity and would never have been recorded, while for much of the eighteenth century and even into the nineteenth century a shortage of coin encouraged barter (as Steven King has shown in his chapter) and credit economies in many regions, making it difficult to quantify the economy of makeshifts.²⁸ For other aspects of income generation records are slightly better, but historians do not agree on how to interpret them. On common rights, for instance, we now have a fairly good understanding of the dynamics of their decline but there is little agreement on how we should value them at different stages of this decline.²⁹ For other elements of 'work' of course we have an opposite problem – a fairly good understanding of who earned what from an activity, but then little genuine understanding of how widespread or robust the activity was. Income from gleaning (widely defined) is a case in point. Peter King has shown convincingly that gleaning could bolster household income in the midlands and south-east by an average of 12 per cent, more for

female-headed households. He has also suggested some of the chronology of decline in this aspect of the economy of makeshifts.³⁰ We are still very far, however, from an understanding of the nature and speed of decline in gleaning, and it is becoming ever clearer that gleaning in its widest sense was a core element of the economy of makeshifts in the early modern north whereas most historiography stresses the paucity of opportunities for gleaning in this region.

More work is clearly needed. In the meantime, household budgets of the sort constructed in the 1790s by Frederick Morton Eden and assembled and used by Sarah Horrell and Jane Humphries can help us to locate a baseline for the contribution of work to the economy of makeshifts and to understand the degree of flexibility which early modern families had to manipulate expenditure and income as a *specific strand* in the economy of makeshifts.³¹ While the data are not always consistent and showed more regional difference than has thus far been acknowledged, little has changed since Eden showed the majority of families to be fundamentally incapable of meeting even basic expenditure requirements through work alone. Indeed, there is probably a sense in which, for the majority of the potentially poor urban and rural population, work at the individual level became a less and less important strand in making ends meet. This was particularly true in the south and midlands. The opposite side of the coin is that poor and marginal people probably invested much more of their time over the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in modifying expenditure. Credit networks were one aspect of this, as were pawnbrokers. More widely, as Margaret Hanly points out in her chapter, it becomes possible from the 1760s to locate well-defined cycles of accumulation and dis-accumulation in the material lives of the potentially poor. Selling household items that were also a store of wealth had become an established plank of the rural and urban economy of makeshifts by the 1820s in a way which was not the case in the 1720s. In this sense, welfare historians might do well to remember that the development of national and regional markets meant that what was defined as saleable and what was not changed radically from the 1760s. The fact that the poor used such changes to their advantage is testimony to the regenerative capacity of the economy of makeshifts against the backdrop of local and national adversity in some of its traditional key strands.

Institutionalised welfare avenues

One of the welfare strands sometimes seen to have been subject to most pressure is formal charity, and several of our contributors have dealt directly or indirectly with this theme. As with work, however, charity is revisited here because it must be set in its widest context if we are to construct an agenda for future research. Thus the level of resources devoted to endowed, institutional and subscription charities and to informal giving to beggars or at church in urban and rural England in the eighteenth century was very considerable. Colin Jones, for instance, suggests that informal charity probably exceeded the scale of resources transferred through poor relief in most years.³² Formal charitable giving dwarfed even this in capital terms. However, the relative importance of charity and communal welfare is usually held to have shifted decisively in favour of the latter during the eighteenth century. This reflected spiralling need, the fact that bequests in wills became more and more restricted, the tendency for old charity capital provisions to be overtaken by inflation or bad management, and a tendency for the range of poor people with access to charity to shrink in the face of its institutionalisation. Prochaska has also pointed out the different levels of imbalance in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century charitable provision, with London dominating the league tables and the existence of a wide difference in charitable provision between and within regions.³³

Yet while it *might* be right to suggest that in an aggregate sense the potential contribution of charitable resources to the economy of makeshifts dwindled after 1750,³⁴ when we arrive at the local level no such generalisations are possible. Despite the work of Alannah Tomkins, Donna Andrew and Barry Stapleton,³⁵ we still have a very poor understanding of trends in the level of even formal charitable resources in most communities. We know even less about the complexities of access conditions to charitable resources, and what we do know comes from the rules of charities themselves. Welfare historians have yet to link up family reconstruction evidence of the sort used here by Sam Barrett with charity data to see whether in fact those rules were followed. Nor have they, by and large, linked up poor law and charity records to look at individual and familial overlap in claiming these two resource strands. Stapleton has used charity records to look at the issue of

inherited poverty, but he was unable to tie up charity and poor law expenditure records for Odiham in Hampshire.³⁶

Moreover, there is also a sense in which welfare historians with particular local interests have failed to appreciate just how much charity money was available from sources outside the locality, a point also made by Sarah Lloyd in her contribution to this volume. When, in 1770, the overseers of Greystoke in Cumberland sent a petition to the trustees of John Nicholson, bookseller of London, asking for an annual pension for Sarah, the widow of Nathan Nicholson of that parish, who was in need of charity by virtue of her tender and weak constitution and her age, they were employing a mechanism of resource acquisition which was familiar to many parishes in the eighteenth-century north-west. In this particular case the pension was granted, and Nicholson does not appear on the poor law accounts or in local charity accounts. More work on this area needs to be done, while the research of Shapley on the subscription funds which exploded on to the scene at times when seasonal or trade-cycle stress intersected with life-cycle stress in Manchester further highlights the need for welfare historians to appreciate the degree to which the role of charity in the economy of makeshifts could be continually reinvented.³⁷

The economy of makeshifts: ways forward

Of course, we could have discussed more of the disparate strands of the economy of makeshifts in this chapter. The work of Craig Muldrew on the operation of, and access to, credit networks is one example.³⁸ The vigorous literature on food riots and the tendency for people to assert their customary rights in the face of pressure on their living standards also has a place in a discussion of the form and function of the economy of makeshifts. The same might be said of the non-financial lending and borrowing networks that nineteenth-century antiquarian historians identified in villages and towns up and down the country.³⁹

There is clearly a need for a properly holistic approach, incorporating more than just the charity-poor law axis that has largely figured in the literature so far. Before we collect the data, however, we need a better theoretical understanding of how we might expect the economy of makeshifts to have operated in the English context. Thus there are likely to have been subtle life-cycle, regional and

community-type (particularly urban-rural) differences in the composition of the aggregate and individual economy of makeshifts. We probably need to make a distinction between short-, medium- and long-term welfare strategies on the part of an individual or family, and between those families that had *choices* in this sense and those that did not. And we probably also need to understand how those who were poor and marginal *thought about* the economy of makeshifts and its individual components. Certainly we must pin down what was considered 'normal' and thus outside the idea of an economy of makeshifts in the contemporary mind. The selling of goods as opposed to their pawning, for instance, may have lingered differently in the contemporary mind when thinking about survival strategies than in the minds of modern historians. And above all we need to think about just how individuals and families got a map of the local and regional economy of makeshifts. How did they know about charities, work opportunities or remarriage opportunities, how did they know what routes were open, which were closed and which might be opened by adopting a particular moral stance or getting a particular type of support in the locality? Was the economy of makeshifts at individual or family level the outcome of chance or the outcome of planned response, and how did this balance change according to life-cycle stage or the particular cause of poverty?

Such questions and ideas represent the beginnings of a complex practical agenda. This agenda can be made more explicit if we return to the key questions of the opening section of this chapter: how did the poor and the poor law balance the different elements of the economy of makeshifts in response to different life-cycle stages or different causes and durations of poverty? While nominal linkage of sources cannot provide all of the answers, some of our studies have suggested that a proliferation of this technique might significantly advance our understanding of the economy of makeshifts, especially where projects systematically sample communities within and between regions. And if the key factor in the economy of makeshifts is the nature of individual and family life-cycles rather than the size and constellation of the coping avenues available at community level, then it would make sense within and between regions to try and reconstruct economies of makeshift in communities with very different life-cycle dimensions. A good proxy for this is likely to be levels of mortality. We have plenty of infant mortality data available for the eighteenth

and nineteenth centuries and, while there is no necessary link between infant and childhood or adult mortality, reconstructing the economy of makeshifts in similar communities but at either end of the mortality spectrum would surely be an excellent place to start?

Does gender matter in understanding the value, assembly or longevity of an economy of makeshifts? Continental historians such as Catharina Lis suggest that it does. So does Lane with her work on the informal economy, Valenze with her analysis of *The First Industrial Woman* and the oral historians working in the late nineteenth century. Our studies have hinted at the same conclusion, but the detailed community level analyses of female coping strategies, both within and outside the nuclear family context, needed to reinforce this view have yet to be undertaken. We also need to understand in a rather more refined way the sort of living that engagement with the economy of makeshifts yielded at individual and family level. Linking censuses of the poor and household budgets to poor law accounts, vestry minutes and family reconstitution would be a good start in this direction. For the north-west alone it is possible to link several surveys of this type to other substantial databases.

Was the economy of makeshifts quite fragile and in need of constant remoulding or was it resilient in the face of changes in land tenure, work location or age structure? Both the historiographical literature and our own contributors are divided on this issue and only sensitively chosen case studies will allow us to reach a consensus. We might also ask how the constant tension between supply of welfare from a widely conceived economy of makeshifts and potentially wide demand, notably at times of trade cycle stress, was reconciled by the gatekeepers to alternative resources. For a few locations we know something about the changing rules which governed access to gleaning or commons. For rather more places we know, at least in outline, the rules that governed who could get charity or who could become a member of a friendly society, but no one has yet put together the access criteria for a single community or attempted to model who was thus left out, even though the reconstitution studies exist to do it. A similar and related point about the need to advance our understanding of the speed with which different elements of the economy of makeshifts could respond to different sorts of individual and family need might also be made. The poor law could, depending upon the

sentiment of the officials in charge for the year, be fast or slow acting. Whether fast or slow in its own terms, it is a fact that being recorded in the books of the overseer of the poor was the tail end of a potentially long and uncertain process. Resort to the pawnshop was more immediate, as was outright sale of goods. But what about other avenues in the local economy of makeshifts, and when we assemble all of the makeshifts ranked according to potential speed of response, what can we learn about the position of the poor?

Most of the contributions to the economy of makeshift historiography implicitly accept that the poor had relative freedom of choice, subject to obvious access conditions, in where they deployed effort in the economy of makeshifts, but how far was this true? In particular, we might ask what the role of the poor law was in directing paupers in particular ways. Through their employment practices, the relative balance of payment in cash/kind or regular/irregular relief and through their manipulation of local employment and residential arrangements, overseers and vestries had the power to direct paupers, both those on relief and those not. Even their practices with regard to providing clothing for paupers could determine where effort was applied by well or poorly clothed paupers in the localised economy of makeshifts. Linkage between vestry minutes, poor law accounts and charity records would help to resolve such questions and remains entirely feasible.

Did middling people recognise the importance of an economy of makeshifts? An analysis of the rise of institutional charity or the urban subscription charity suggests that they did. However, analysis of the literature on gleaning or common rights and on the opposition to allotments⁴⁰ suggests a contrary picture. Which perspective is right? And how did poor people themselves perceive the economy of makeshifts in different socio-economic settings, at different life-cycle stages or in different periods? In particular was navigating a yearly living when on the margins of poverty an acquired skill and one which required familiarity with the seasonal and life-cycle manipulation of different welfare avenues? The more sophisticated use of pauper letters employing typologies like those suggested by Sokoll may help here,⁴¹ and, when combined with family reconstitution, will allow us to confront the equally intriguing question of whether there was any difference between the culture of poverty and the culture of makeshifts

between those who were caught in grinding whole-life poverty and those who only experienced the odd incident.

While we have achieved much, as this complex practical agenda demonstrates, much remains to be done.

Notes

- 1 We have not really explored the complementary theme of the ability of the poor to constantly remould the economy of makeshifts, except perhaps in the chapter by Sarah Lloyd, but pauper letters frequently hint at the resourcefulness of the poor in this direction.
- 2 A. Redford, *Labour Migration in England, 1800–1850* (3rd edn, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1976); C. G. Pooley and J. Turnbull, *Migration and Mobility in Britain Since the 18th Century* (London, UCL Press, 1998).
- 3 See J. S. Taylor, 'A different kind of Speenhamland: non-resident relief in the industrial revolution', *Journal of British Studies*, 30 (1991).
- 4 J. G. Williamson, *Coping With City Growth During the British Industrial Revolution* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1985).
- 5 C. Lemerrier and P. Rosental, 'Pays ruraux et découpage de l'espace: Les réseaux migratoires dans la région Lilloise au milieu du XIX siècle', *Population*, 55 (2000); J. Bourdieu, G. Postel-Vinay, P. Rosental and A. Suwa-Eisenmann, 'Migrations et transmissions inter-générationnelles dans la France du XIX et du début du XX siècle', *Annals*, 4 (2000).
- 6 See S. King, 'Sharing the urban graveyard: Sterblichkeitsdynamik im städtischen Hinterland, England 1680–1820', in J. Voegle and W. Woelk (eds), *Stadt, Krankheit und Tod* (Berlin, Drucker and Humboldt, 2000).
- 7 P. Sharpe, 'Literally spinsters: a new interpretation of local economy and demography in Colyton in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries', *Economic History Review*, 44 (1991).
- 8 See E. A. Wrigley, R. S. Davies, J. E. Oeppen and R. S. Schofield, *English Population History From Family Reconstitution, 1580–1837* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997).
- 9 See the debate in *International Review of Social History*, 44 (1999).
- 10 The fact that few young workers appear to have managed to save anything towards their marriages reinforces this point. See J. Styles, 'Involuntary consumers? Servants and their clothes in eighteenth century England', in S. A. King and C. J. E. R. Payne (eds), *The Dress of the Poor, 1700–1900* (London, Pasold, 2002).
- 11 See E. Foyster, 'Marrying the experienced widow in early modern England: the male perspective', in S. Cavallo and L. Warner (eds), *Widowhood in Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Harlow, Longman,

- 1999), and P. Sharpe, 'Survival strategies and stories: poor widows and widowers in early industrial England', in *ibid.*, who notes that getting rid of a bad money manager through death of a spouse and/or obtaining a good money manager through remarriage could actually be a core plank of a coping strategy.
- 12 Sharpe, 'Survival'; for those who did not remarry, prostitution was an alternative option. On this matter in London see T. Henderson, *Disorderly Women in Eighteenth Century London* (London, Longman, 1999).
 - 13 For the classic statement of this view, see P. Laslett, 'Mean household size in England since the sixteenth century', in P. Laslett and R. Wall (eds), *Household and Family in Past Time* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1972).
 - 14 T. Sokoll, *Household and Family Among the Poor: The Case of Two Essex Communities in the Later Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries* (Bochum, Verlag für Regionalgeschichte, 1993).
 - 15 For a good review of the debate on this theme, see B. Reay, *Micro-histories: Demography, Society and Culture in Rural England, 1800–1930* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996).
 - 16 N. Tadmor, *Family and Friends in Eighteenth Century England* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2001).
 - 17 For key contributions, see P. Gosden, *The Friendly Society in England, 1815–75* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1961); D. Neave, *Mutual Aid in the Victorian Countryside, 1830–1914* (Hull, Hull University Press, 1991); B. Supple, 'Legislation and virtue: an essay on working class self-help and the state', in N. McKendrick (ed.), *Historical Perspectives: Studies in English Thought and Society* (London, Europa, 1974); G. D. H. Cole, *A Short History of the British Working Class Movement 1789–1947* (London, Allen and Unwin, 1966) and E. Lord, 'Weighed in the balance and found wanting: female friendly societies, self-help and economic virtue in the east midlands in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries', *Midland History*, 22 (1997).
 - 18 M. Gorsky, 'The growth and distribution of English friendly societies in the early nineteenth century', *Economic History Review*, 51 (1998).
 - 19 See E. Hopkins, *Working Class Self-Help in Nineteenth Century England* (London, UCL Press, 1995).
 - 20 See D. G. Green, 'The friendly society and Adam Smith liberalism', in D. Gladstone (ed.), *Before Beveridge: Welfare Before the Welfare State* (London, IEA, 1998).
 - 21 Payment of subscriptions was technically forbidden under the new poor law. However, archival evidence suggests that subscriptions did continue to be paid in certain localities after 1834. This was particularly the case where the establishment of the new poor law was contested.
 - 22 Gorsky, 'The growth'.

- 23 S. Horrell and J. Humphries, 'Women's labour force participation and the transition to the male breadwinner family, 1790–1865', *Economic History Review*, 48 (1995) and S. Horrell and J. Humphries, 'The exploitation of little children: child labor and the family economy in the Industrial Revolution', *Explorations in Economic History*, 32 (1995).
- 24 For a review of this literature, see P. Hudson, 'Proto-industrialization in England', in S. Ogilvie and M. Cerman (eds), *European Proto-Industrialisation* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996).
- 25 On this, see J. Long, *Conversations in Cold Rooms: Women, Work and Poverty in Nineteenth Century Northumberland* (Woodbridge, Boydell, 1999).
- 26 P. Slack, *From Reformation to Improvement: Public Welfare in Early Modern England* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1998).
- 27 It is too often overlooked that net poor law expenditure in places, even in the north, was high and growing during the eighteenth century. This may have led to a net redistribution of income, but it also meant that the poor law became the largest single source of demand for goods and services in many places.
- 28 See S. King and J. C. Muldrew, 'Cash, wages and the economy of makeshifts in England 1650–1830', in P. Scholliers and L. Schwarz (eds), *Worlds of Wages* (Oxford, Berghahn, 2003).
- 29 On common rights and their value, see J. Humphries, 'Enclosures, common rights and women: the proletarianisation of families in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries', *Journal of Economic History*, 50 (1990), and J. M. Neeson, *Commoners: Common Right, Enclosure and Social Change in England 1700–1820* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1993).
- 30 P. King, 'Customary rights and women's earnings: the importance of gleaning to the rural labouring poor 1750–1850', *Economic History Review*, 44 (1991); *idem*, 'Female offenders: work and life-cycle change in eighteenth century London', *Continuity and Change*, 11 (1996).
- 31 S. Horrell and J. Humphries, 'Old questions, new data and alternative perspectives: families' living standards in the industrial revolution', *Journal of Economic History*, 52 (1992), and F. M. Eden, *The State of the Poor: A History of the Labouring Classes in England* (New York, Blom, 1971).
- 32 C. Jones, 'Some recent trends in the history of charity', in Dauntton, *Charity*.
- 33 F. Prochaska, *The Voluntary Impulse: Philanthropy in Modern Britain* (London, Faber, 1988); *idem*, *Women and Philanthropy in Nineteenth Century England* (Oxford, Clarendon, 1980).
- 34 We must, though, make important distinctions between north and south in terms of charity and its relationship to relief. Parts of Durham, north Lancashire and large parts of Cumberland and Westmorland frequently failed to raise a poor rate, or if they did

- raise one it was so nominal that the magnitude of relief is dictated by the scale of the collection, not the scale of need.
- 35 D. Andrew, *Philanthropy and Police: Charity in Eighteenth-Century London* (Oxford, Princeton University Press, 1989); B. Stapleton, 'Inherited poverty and life-cycle poverty: Odiham, Hampshire', *Social History*, 18 (1993); A. Tomkins, 'The experience of urban poverty – a comparison of Oxford and Shrewsbury, 1740–1770' (unpublished DPhil, University of Oxford, 1994).
 - 36 Stapleton, 'Inherited poverty'.
 - 37 P. Shapley, *Charity and Power in Victorian Manchester* (Manchester, Chetham Society, 2000).
 - 38 C. Muldrew, 'Credit and the courts: debt litigation in a seventeenth century urban community', *Economic History Review*, 46 (1993).
 - 39 J. Lawson, *Letters to the Young on Progress in Pudsey Over the Last Sixty Years* (Chichester, Caliban, 1977).
 - 40 J. Burchardt, 'Rural social relations, 1830–50: opposition to allotments for labourers', *Agricultural History Review*, 45 (1997).
 - 41 T. Sokoll, *Essex Pauper Letters, 1731–1837* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2001).