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## 9. ‘The poore lost a good Frend and the parish a good Neighbour’: the lives of the poor and their supporters in London’s eastern suburb, c.1583–c.1679

*Philip Baker and Mark Merry*

Recent writing on the history of poor relief in early modern London has redirected attention from the mechanics and minutiae of administration to the lives of the poor themselves.<sup>1</sup> Research by Jeremy Boulton, Tim Hitchcock and others has shed light on the life-cycles and survival strategies of paupers in specific regions of the city,<sup>2</sup> and there is an obvious need for studies of additional and complementary areas if we are to build up an overall picture of the experience of poverty in the capital. For example, Boulton’s important work on paupers in London’s fashionable West End focuses on a region of the capital that is not normally associated with its humbler residents. This chapter, by contrast, concentrates on the parish of St. Botolph Aldgate in London’s eastern suburb, an area that has been identified strongly with among the poorest members of metropolitan society from at least the sixteenth century.

St. Botolph’s is one of the parishes on which Derek Keene worked in the 1980s as part of the ‘Social and economic study of medieval London’

<sup>1</sup> This chapter draws on research undertaken during two projects, the Wellcome Trust-funded ‘Housing environments and health in early modern London, 1550–1750’ and the ESRC-funded ‘Life in the suburbs: health, domesticity and status in early modern London’. Both projects were collaborations between the Centre for Metropolitan History, Institute of Historical Research, the Cambridge Group for the History of Population and Social Structure, and Birkbeck, University of London. For further details, see <<http://www.history.ac.uk/cmh/projects>> [accessed 5 Aug. 2011]. We are extremely grateful to Jeremy Boulton and Tim Wales for their insightful comments on an earlier version of this chapter.

<sup>2</sup> J. Boulton, “‘It is extreme necessity that makes me do this’: some “survival strategies” of pauper households in London’s West End during the early 18th century’, *International Review of Social History*, xlv, suppl. 8 (2000), 47–69; T. Hitchcock, “‘Unlawfully begotten on her body’: illegitimacy and the parish poor in St. Luke’s Chelsea’, in *Chronicling Poverty*, ed. T. Hitchcock, P. King and P. Sharpe (Basingstoke, 1997), pp. 70–86; A. Wear, ‘Caring for the sick poor in St. Bartholomew’s Exchange, 1580–1676’, in *Living and Dying in London*, ed. W. F. Bynum and R. Porter (1991), pp. 41–60.

project and the *Historical Gazetteer of London before the Great Fire*.<sup>3</sup> In addition to researching the area's property history and changes in land use, he also investigated its burgeoning pauper population in a stimulating (but unpublished) paper, which described vividly the squalid and insanitary physical conditions in which the poor lived, and detailed the extent and distribution of local poverty.<sup>4</sup> Taking its inspiration from Derek's paper and the recent literature on poor relief and charity in early modern London, this chapter examines the lives both of those who found themselves reliant on St. Botolph's welfare system and of those who actively supported them, a group that included wealthy individuals but also some of the poor themselves. In so doing, it addresses a number of important themes in the field, such as the nature and extent of relief networks, practices of informal and charitable giving, and the role performed by parish nurses. The chapter also offers a striking portrayal of the experience of poverty in late sixteenth- and seventeenth-century London.

## I

The extramural parish of St. Botolph Aldgate covered an area of just under eighty acres running south, adjacent to the eastern city wall, from the parish of St. Botolph Bishopsgate to the Thames. Less than half of St. Botolph's was conterminous with the city ward of Portsoken, while the remainder of the parish, the liberty of East Smithfield, was part of Middlesex (see Figure 9.1). As a consequence of mass immigration, this area experienced a population explosion between the mid sixteenth and late seventeenth centuries, which transformed its social, economic and topographical character. These structural changes are outlined below as they represent the essential context in which the lives of St. Botolph's inhabitants must be located, for they not only shaped those lives but increasingly determined the overall social composition of the parish.<sup>5</sup>

In the mid sixteenth century, when much of the area was gardens or wasteland, St. Botolph's housed 1,130 communicants, of whom a not insignificant number were rich residents in well-appointed properties. But around this time, the poor were already a visible presence in the community; John Stow recalled how in his youth almsgivers would visit an area of the parish inhabited by 'poore bedred people ... [and] none other ... lying ... within their window, which was towards the street open so low that euery

<sup>3</sup> See <<http://www.history.ac.uk/projects/social-and-economic>> [accessed 3 July 2011].

<sup>4</sup> D. Keene, 'The poor and their neighbours: the London parish of St. Botolph outside Aldgate in the 16th and 17th centuries'. We are extremely grateful to Derek Keene for providing us with a copy of this paper, and for much other help with St. Botolph's.

<sup>5</sup> The following overview builds on earlier work by Derek Keene.

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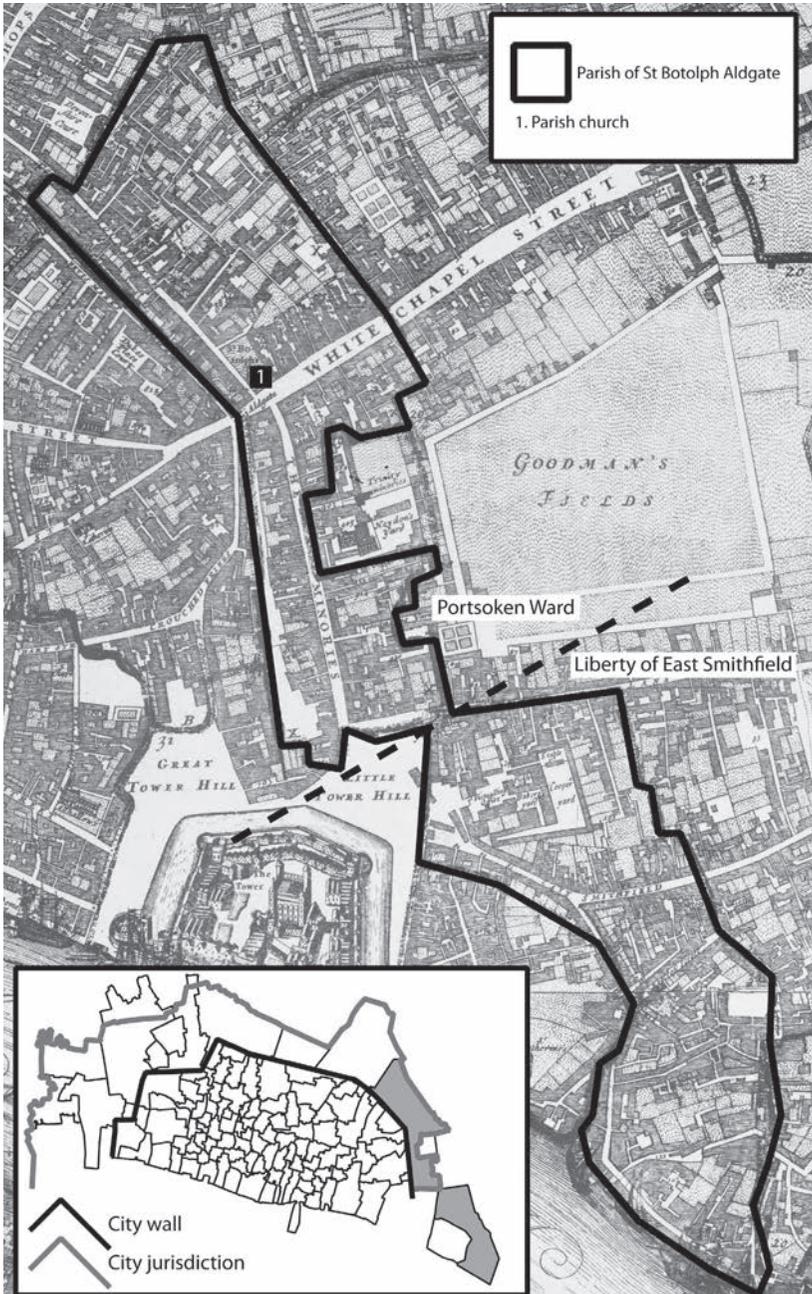


Figure 9.1. Map of the parish of St. Botolph Aldgate, from William Morgan's 1682 survey of London.

man might see them'.<sup>6</sup> Subsidy rolls of the mid and late sixteenth century reveal that, in terms of the wealth of its population, Portsoken was among the poorest of the city's wards, and a listing of 1595 records that 218 (43.6 per cent) of its 500 householders were 'wanting relief'.<sup>7</sup> A vivid account of the process of social and demographic transformation in Portsoken ward – and of the fears it engendered – is contained in a survey of 1618:

the best Inhabitants & most antients being dead & decaied & manie verie pore come in there places, most of them having neither trades nor meanes to live on, but by their handy labour, as porters carrmen waterbearers, chymney sweepers, servants in silk mylls bruers servants lyving for ye most part in allies having wyves, & most of them many children ... wch poore are & dayly doeth soe increase ... that they are ready to eat out, or els to dryve out the better sort of the inhabitants ... who at this time are very fewe, & in short time wilbe fewer if there be not some remedye founde.<sup>8</sup>

Later taxation returns offer a strikingly similar picture of the parish's social topography. In the 1638 London tithe survey, only nineteen (0.6 per cent) of St. Botolph's 2,947 households can be classified as 'substantial' (those living in property with a moderated rent of £20 or above), one of the smallest proportions among the parishes surveyed.<sup>9</sup> The mean moderated rent of the area's property, at £2 10s 4d, was also exceptionally low, as the mean across the entire extramural area and liberties was £6 8s 7d, and £13 4s 5d in intramural London.<sup>10</sup> In the 1666 hearth tax returns, the occupants of 1,352 (40.3 per cent) of the parish's 3,354 houses were described as poor, alms people or those with too few goods for a distress to be made. Appreciation for the scale of the area's poverty is only reinforced by the local distribution of hearths: just twenty (0.6 per cent) of its houses had ten or more hearths – usually indicative of a larger house – and only 314 (9.4 per cent) had five or more; the average

<sup>6</sup> *London and Middlesex Chantry Certificate, 1548*, ed. C. J. Kitching (London Record Society, xvi, 1980), p. 43; J. Stow, *A Survey of London*, ed. C. L. Kingsford (2 vols., Oxford, 2000), i. 125–9.

<sup>7</sup> *Two Tudor Subsidy Assessment Rolls for the City of London*, ed. R. G. Lang (London Record Society, xxix, 1993), pp. lxix–lxx; London Metropolitan Archives (hereafter LMA), COL/CA/01/01/025 fos. 479v, 480; Bodleian Library, MS. Rawlinson D796B fo. [86].

<sup>8</sup> Bodl. Libr., MS. Rawl. D796B fo. [86].

<sup>9</sup> *The Inhabitants of London in 1638*, ed. T. C. Dale (2 vols., 1931), i. 210–24. For the methodology behind these figures and data for other parishes, see R. Finlay, *Population and Metropolis* (Cambridge, 1981), pp. 72, 77, 168–71. The figures cited are our own and (unlike Finlay's) cover both the London and Middlesex areas of the parish.

<sup>10</sup> Dale, *Inhabitants of London*, i. 210–24. Mean moderated rents are calculated from the un-moderated figures in W. C. Baer, 'Stuart London's standard of living: re-examining the settlement of tithes of 1638 for rents, income and poverty', *Economic History Review*, lxiii (2010), 621.

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number of hearths per house in St. Botolph's, at 2.2, was the fourth lowest of all parishes in the entire metropolitan area. By contrast, the listing of 855 (25.4 per cent) of its houses as ‘empty’ was the third highest proportion within the metropolis and suggests the mobile, even transient nature of a sizeable part of the population.<sup>11</sup> Finally, by the end of the seventeenth century, St. Botolph's was a densely built-up area with approximately 20,000 inhabitants, its once open spaces having long disappeared under networks of proliferating alleys and closes.<sup>12</sup> In the 1695 marriage duty assessment for Portsoken ward, only 127 (7.9 per cent) of its 1,615 houses contained any surtax payers – among the lowest proportions within the city – and over the following years, hundreds of the ward's inhabitants were listed annually for being unable to pay even the basic tax rate, on the grounds of their poverty.<sup>13</sup>

During this period, then, the proportion of wealthy inhabitants in St. Botolph Aldgate decreased substantially, and the majority of its residents – and those responsible primarily for its dramatic population growth – were those of little or no wealth, whose subsistence revolved around casual and manual labour and the local relief system. Given the centrality of that system to the lives of the indigent, it is unfortunate that the finances of the formal poor relief efforts of the parish are extremely difficult to unpick because of the absence of a unifying series of data. Both short and longer series of accounts (covering all or part of the parish) survive in a number of sources, but it is far from clear what the distinction between them may have been, or whether there was, indeed, any demarcation in the types of information they record. However, the picture that emerges from the confusion is clear enough in outline and may be summarized briefly. Churchwardens' spending on the poor in Portsoken ward for most of our period can be gleaned from a series of churchwardens' poor accounts (see Figure 9.2).<sup>14</sup> An

<sup>11</sup> The National Archives of the UK: Public Record Office, E 179/252/32, pt. 21, fos. 33–54v; E 179/252/32, pt. 22/1, fos. 1–22; E 179/252/32, pt. 22/2, fos. 1–15v. All London-wide figures were generated from the AHRC London Hearth Tax Project database, found at <<http://sas-space.sas.ac.uk/2578>> [accessed 3 July 2011].

<sup>12</sup> The population total is based on the family reconstitution of St. Botolph's undertaken by our colleague, Gill Newton, to whom we express our thanks. For the topography of the area around this date, see William Morgan's 1682 survey of London (<<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/source.aspx?pubid=59>> [accessed 3 July 2011]), sheet 11.

<sup>13</sup> LMA, COL/CHD/LA/04/01/102; COL/CHD/LA/03/28, 30, 39. For figures on surtax-paying houses across London, see P. E. Jones and A. V. Judges, ‘London population in the late 17th century’, *Economic History Review*, vi (1935–6), 58–62.

<sup>14</sup> In the 1720s, churchwardens' disbursements made up 50.1 per cent of Portsoken's total spending on the poor; the equivalent figure in East Smithfield was 33.2 per cent, still a very substantial proportion (William Maitland, *The History of London, From its Foundations by the Romans, to the Present Time* (1739), pp. 390–1).

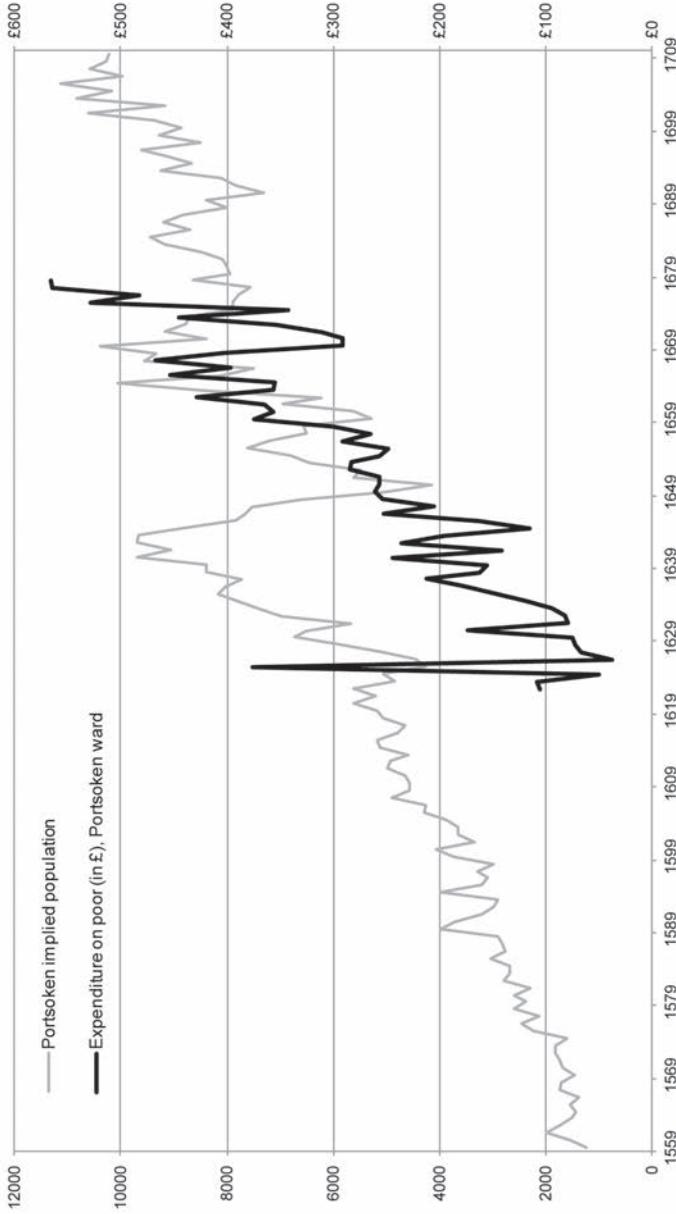


Figure 9.2. Portsoken ward's population, 1559–1709, and churchwardens' expenditure on the poor, 1622–79.

Source: St. Botolph Aldgate family reconstruction; LMA, P69/BOT2/B/031/MS09237 (as this volume is not foliated throughout, references [other than those to the entire series of accounts, as here] are given to the relevant years). The original churchwardens' poor accounts for 1674/5–75/6 are conflated but have been separated here. Expenditure figures exclude all 'disbursements' of stock and security, which were also treated as receipts in the accounts.

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obvious spike in the vicinity of the plague outbreak of 1625 aside, the figures indicate that the rate of rise in expenditure on the poor outstripped the very substantial rate of population growth in the ward. However, figures for the entire parish from the 1720s indicate that its spending, at just over *2s per capita* yearly, was far from impressive, being less than *½d* a week.<sup>15</sup>

There are no extant overseers’ accounts for our period and only occasional references to the money brought in by the local poor rate; in Portsoken ward, it varied between £12 and £22 in the late sixteenth century, and £81 and £116 between 1616 and 1622.<sup>16</sup> Whatever the total raised by the rate, it was, unsurprisingly given the parish’s social profile, insufficient to deal with the numbers of local indigent, and as a result St. Botolph’s was a recipient of the rate-in-aid that the wealthier London parishes gave to their poorer neighbours as poor relief assistance. This provided a fluctuating source of annual income, one that rose from £7 to £91 in the late sixteenth century, but brought in only around £35 for most of the seventeenth century.<sup>17</sup> Finally, and as in other poorer London parishes, a substantial proportion of the money St. Botolph’s spent on its poor was generated from the charity of individuals.<sup>18</sup> This took the form of pre- and post-mortem gifts, often in the form of one-off donations of capital to be invested or loaned, simple cash doles, annuities derived from property incomes, or funds for pensions.

A useful summary of the major ‘perpetual’ gifts – annuities, stock or properties – given to St. Botolph’s for the use of its poor is provided in John Strype’s account of the parish, drawing upon a late seventeenth-century commemoration book, and from this the scale of such charity is evident. Strype lists substantial parishioners, such as Robert Rogers and Anthony Duffield and his daughter Joan, who left annuities for the purchase of fuel; others who bequeathed tenements; while major benefactors, such as Robert Dow and George Clarke, are singled out for their lifetime charity. Nevertheless, Strype’s account underestimated the sums of money generated from such bequests. Landed income for the poor alone brought in around £150 annually from the mid seventeenth century,<sup>19</sup> and the equivalent amount was received from other gifts for the poor by the

<sup>15</sup> St. Botolph Aldgate family reconstitution; Maitland, *History of London*, pp. 390–1.

<sup>16</sup> LMA, P69/BOT2/A/019/MS09234/001-007; Bodl. Libr., MS. Rawl. D796B fos. [86], [88], [90], [92], [98v].

<sup>17</sup> I. W. Archer, *The Pursuit of Stability* (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 185–6; LMA, P69/BOT2/B/031/MS09237.

<sup>18</sup> I. K. Ben-Amos, *The Culture of Giving* (Cambridge, 2008), p. 119.

<sup>19</sup> We owe this figure to our colleague, Mark Latham, who is working on the management of St. Botolph’s parish rents.

1720s.<sup>20</sup> Given the scale of local poverty, it is unsurprising that the parish took considerable administrative pains to keep this income stream going. In the early eighteenth century, vestrymen were appointed to update the commemoration book and determine who was responsible for paying long-established and even relatively small gifts and to chase up those that had lapsed.<sup>21</sup>

Bequests from substantial benefactors represent just one element of the charity St. Botolph's received for its poor, as its records detail not only the contents of the poor box, but also one-off gifts – from parishioners and strangers alike – and the sums received at collections. The poor box provided a fluctuating, but often important, source of income, with annual totals varying between 8s 8d and £11 7s from 1583 to 1600, and £1 7s 1d and £37 8s 11d between 1623 and 1650. Money received at collections followed a similar pattern, bringing in £14 12s 7d in 1656 but only 17s in 1673. Meanwhile, one-off donations to the poor and the sick were significant, especially in crisis years, with £34 7s 4d and £130 15s 11d received during the plague outbreaks of 1625 and 1636 respectively.<sup>22</sup>

We get some indication of how this income was spent from Portsoken's churchwardens' poor accounts. These reveal that the majority of the churchwardens' disbursements were incidental extraordinary payments, often for the sick and the old, or longer-term series of payments for nursing or other forms of physical care, which constituted an increasing proportion of expenditure from the 1630s (see Figure 9.3).<sup>23</sup> Perhaps this was part of a deliberate strategy to encourage the poor to address their situation through their own efforts, while still providing aid at times of crisis, although this is impossible to verify in the absence of overseers' accounts or complete lists of rate-based parish pensioners.<sup>24</sup> However, it does seem to be the case that pensions funded by individual gifts played an important role in parish life. The most celebrated of these was that of Robert Dow (d. 1612), who set up a fund which provided for sixty pensioners, as well as a room in the Merchant Taylors' almshouses in the parish for one (subsequently two) poor local widows.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>20</sup> J. Stow, *A Survey of the Cities of London and Westminster*, ed. J. Strype (6 bks. in 2 vols., 1720), I. ii. 17–22, 24–6; Maitland, *History of London*, pp. 390–1.

<sup>21</sup> LMA, P69/BOT2/B/018/MS02626 fo. 59v.

<sup>22</sup> LMA, P69/BOT2/A/019/MS09234/001–7; P69/BOT2/B/031/MS09237.

<sup>23</sup> LMA, P69/BOT2/B/031/MS09237.

<sup>24</sup> There are no rate-based pensioner lists for East Smithfield during our period, and Portsoken's churchwardens' poor accounts only intermittently record small numbers of pension payments before the 1660s, and after then never to more than 50 people annually (LMA, P69/BOT2/B/031/MS09237).

<sup>25</sup> LMA, P69/BOT2/D/005/MS02632.

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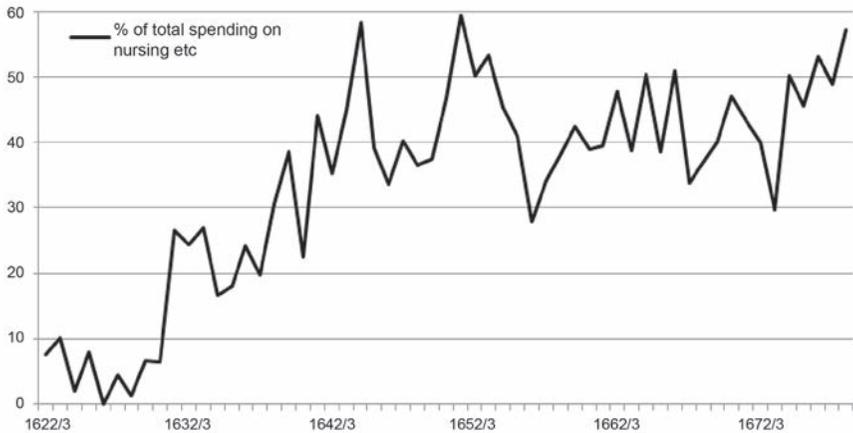


Figure 9.3. Expenditure on nursing and its associated costs in Portsoken ward as a percentage of churchwardens' total spending on the poor, 1622–79.

Source: LMA, P69/BOT2/B/031/MS09237. The original churchwardens' poor accounts for 1674/5–75/6 are conflated but have been separated here. Expenditure figures exclude all 'disbursements' of stock and security, which were also treated as receipts in the accounts.

Although we can thus reconstruct only a partial picture of St. Botolph's poor relief finances, its records are exceptionally rich in biographical information about both the receivers and providers of various forms of local relief. Three sources, in particular, have been pivotal to this study. First, St. Botolph's parish registers, which begin in 1558 and contain detailed information about residence and occupations for certain periods; second, the parish clerk's memoranda books, which run (with some gaps) from 1583 to 1625 and provide a virtual daybook of parish life; and, finally, the churchwardens' poor accounts for Portsoken ward from 1622 to 1679, which record some 6,000 payments to the poor and their supporters. The four-year period, 1622–5, in which these sources overlap – during which London experienced an exceptionally harsh winter in 1622 and a major plague epidemic in 1625 – is the one in which we might reasonably expect to recover the most information about the lives of those involved in the local poor relief system. On this basis, the names of all individuals who received or provided some form of relief in the years 1622–5 were collated; those described as 'poor' in the material were also included, on the basis that the compilers of the records clearly had an exceptional knowledge of those about whom they wrote. This produced a total of 635 distinct names, and, through a process of nominal linkage, the 'parish career' of each individual was then reconstructed using the complete range of available sources. The

remainder of this chapter takes the form of an analysis and commentary on the lives of this sample group, while also contextualizing its findings within the broader picture of poor relief in both St. Botolph Aldgate and London more generally during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

## II

For the purposes of analysis, the sample lives have been divided into three groups: those who, during the years 1622–5, received relief or support or who are described in the sources as poor ('receivers'); those who provided aid to the poor during that period ('givers'); and those who at *any* point during their residence in St. Botolph's gave *and* received aid ('both'). In line with recent writing on charity, a deliberately broad approach has been adopted in defining the characteristics of receiving and giving within this context, one that takes us beyond a discussion of pensioners and pension values and seeks, instead, to encompass the full range of care and support that an individual might receive.<sup>26</sup> This wider conceptualization of relief, as outlined below, with its emphasis on alternative, or at least supplementary, forms of aid, offers a rounded picture of the lives of the poor and their supporters and is powerfully reflected in the parish's records.

By far the largest of the three groups is, predictably enough, the 551 people (or 86.8 per cent of the sample) who received aid and at no time were providers of support. This includes those in receipt of extraordinary relief payments and pensions, but also those who were nursed or housed by local residents, on one or more occasions. The second group, the providers of aid, consists of the forty-nine individuals (7.7 per cent), who, among other things, took on parish apprentices or gave money or cared for the poor. Finally, the third group, those who were both givers and recipients of relief, numbered thirty-five people (5.5 per cent).

What types of people are found in the sample, and do the members of any group have distinctive characteristics? Beginning with the issue of gender (see Table 9.1), it is clear that the vast majority of those providing support to the poor were male, as might be expected. The greater freedom to dispose of goods and property – and therefore to dispose of it for charitable purposes – as well as greater integration into the life of the parish and significant institutions (such as the livery companies) certainly contributed to this pattern. Within the group of 'receivers', it is notable that there is no such sharp gender distinction, as has been found in other areas of London where females were prevalent among the recipients of relief.<sup>27</sup> This may be a reflection of the general economic state of the parish's population, suggesting

<sup>26</sup> Ben-Amos, *Culture of Giving*, *passim*.

<sup>27</sup> J. Boulton, *Neighbourhood and Society* (Cambridge, 1987), pp. 95–6.

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Table 9.1. Gender distribution of sample individuals

Type	Female		Male		Gender unknown		Total in group
	No.	% of type	No.	% of type	No.	% of type	
Receiver	290	52.6	246	44.7	15	2.7	551
Giver	5	10.2	44	89.8	0	0.0	49
Both	20	57.1	15	42.9	0	0.0	35
Both+Receiver	310	52.9	261	44.5	15	2.6	586
Both+Giver	25	29.8	59	70.2	0	0.0	84

*Source:* Unless otherwise stated, data in the tables and figures that follow draws on the entire range of sources used to reconstruct the lives of the sample individuals. The limit on space prevents their listing here, but all are referenced fully elsewhere in the notes.

that poverty was endemic and that it was not the case that certain types of poverty prevailed – for example, those more likely to occur to women, such as widowhood and abandonment.

The precise age of the individuals in the sample can be established only in those few instances where we have baptismal dates or given ages at death. Nevertheless, it is possible to construct a broad picture of their age profile by identifying those who are described as aged and those who are described as being children or infants (see Table 9.2). What is perhaps significant is that three-quarters of those receiving aid have no descriptor regarding their age. While this might be attributable to a simple lack of ‘labelling’ in the sources, their usual richness of detail suggests that those individuals lacking age descriptors may have been at neither extreme of the life-cycle spectrum. This would be at odds with findings elsewhere in London, where the most common recipients of relief were the elderly and the young.<sup>28</sup> A similarly surprising situation arises with the widowed, with only ninety-five (16.2 per cent) of all those who received support in St. Botolph’s being described as widows or widowers. Although this may, in part, be the result of examining a wider group than pensioners alone, it again speaks to the extent of poverty in the parish, and suggests that individuals could find themselves vulnerable and in the position of requiring relief throughout their lives or, rather, at any point in their lives.

Apart from the widowed, little is known about the marital status of the receivers of aid, but by arranging them into their distinct family units,

<sup>28</sup> R. W. Herlan, ‘Poor relief in the London parish of Antholin’s Budge Row, 1638–64’, *Guildhall Studies in London History*, ii (1977), 195.

## London and beyond

Table 9.2. Age distribution of sample individuals

Type	Child		Aged	
	No.	% of type	No.	% of type
Receiver	75	13.6	56	10.2
Giver	0	0	0	0
Both	0	0	3	8.8
Both+Receiver	75	12.8	59	10.1
Both+Giver	0	0	3	3.6

we can examine the issue of *families* receiving support. Most commonly, individuals received relief in the form of extraordinary payments because of some distress within the family, such as having a sick child or spouse. But there are also numerous cases where aid is given to, or on behalf of, multiple individuals within a family; even within the relatively short span of the sample period, there are forty-three such families. In almost all of these cases (thirty-six), the context is that of a husband and wife receiving relief individually, usually with one of the couple given aid shortly after the death of the other. This is particularly the case with the recipients of pensions (as discussed below), where individuals effectively ‘inherit’ the pension held by their spouse. The remaining seven families are instructive for what they tell us about how families incapable of supporting themselves were aided by the parish. One such family was that of the tailor Hugh Bell and his wife, who had five young daughters. In June 1623, Hugh received payments for having a sick family, and by August both he and his wife had died, leaving the daughters as a burden on Portsoken ward. The strategy for caring for the children was to divide them up around the ward, with at least six individuals (four of whom were habitual recipients of aid themselves) keeping one or more of them at a time over the remainder of the 1620s. The churchwardens made regular disbursements for the children’s care and for their shoes and clothing, and one was also ‘put to apprentice’ at the expense of the ward.<sup>29</sup>

In terms of families *giving* aid to the poor, there are no examples in the sample group of more than one individual acting in that role. There are, however, several families where one member is a recipient of aid, and another falls into the category of both giver and receiver of support.<sup>30</sup> But in all cases,

<sup>29</sup> LMA, P69/BOT2/B/031/MS09237, accounts 1623–9; P69/BOT2/A/019/MS09234/008 fo. 197v.

<sup>30</sup> E.g., Robert Breach and his wife Katherine received extraordinary payments from the churchwardens, but Katherine also tended the local poor (LMA, P69/BOT2/B/031/MS09237, accounts 1622–7).

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Table 9.3. Pensioners in sample by group

Type	Number of pensioners	% of total individuals in group
Receiver	126	22.9
Both	13	37.1
Both+Receiver	139	23.7

Table 9.4. Widowed and aged pensioners in sample by group

Type	Number of pensioners	Widowed pensioners		Aged pensioners	
		Number	% of total pensioners in group	Number	% of total pensioners in group
Receiver	126	68	54.0	27	21.4
Both	13	4	30.8	3	23.1
Both+Receiver	139	72	51.8	30	21.6

these latter are those who provided short-term care for others, rather than any kind of charitable giving, and who also received relief payments from the parish.

Interestingly, a large proportion – over a third – of those individuals who both gave and received support were pensioners (see Table 9.3), who supplemented regular relief payments with an ad hoc income based on various forms of care work (discussed in Section III, below). Pensioners made up almost a quarter of all receivers of aid in the sample, half of them being widows or widowers (see Table 9.4). However, only a relatively small proportion of them (less than a quarter) were described in some manner as aged, suggesting that pensions were not merely the province of the elderly poor of the parish.

Of the sample’s pensioners, ninety-nine were recipients of the pensions established by Robert Dow’s gift. Only twenty (20.2 per cent) of these were men, while sixty (60.6 per cent) were widows or widowers (only one of the latter). Although the number of annual pensions (sixty) was divided equally between East Smithfield and Portsoken, smaller numbers of pensioners in the ward tended to receive their pensions for longer – on average, over four years longer (11.9 years as opposed to 7.1) – than their East Smithfield counterparts (see Figure 9.4). It is also notable that pensions appear to have been transferred regularly within the family on the death of a recipient, with three widows replacing their husbands during the 1622–5 sample period.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>31</sup> LMA, P69/BOT2/D/005/MS02632 fos. 18v–22.

## London and beyond

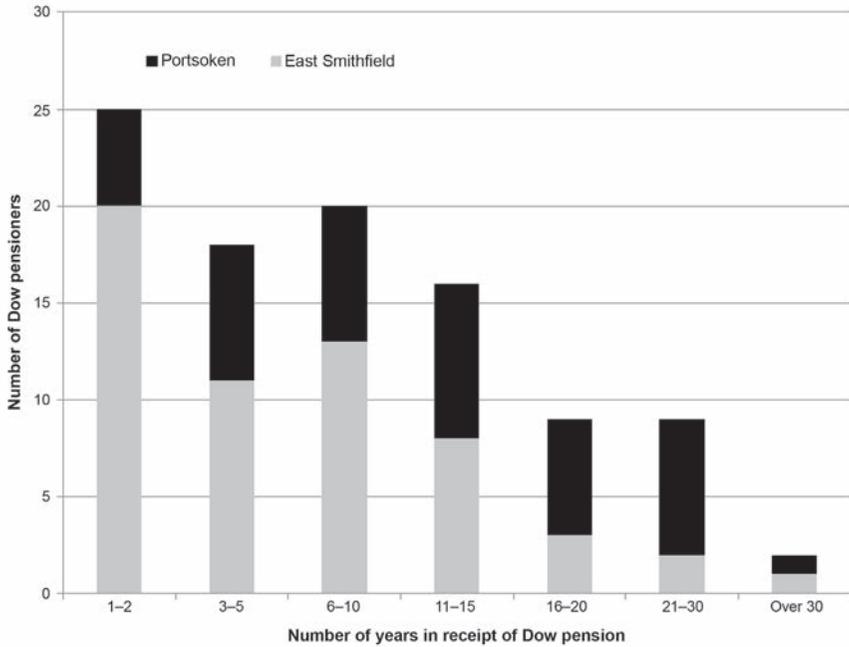


Figure 9.4. Dow pensioners in sample years: period in receipt of pension.

Source: LMA, P69/BOT2/D/005/MS02632.

Ideally, we would chart the social and economic status of pensioners and other members of the sample group across time, but, unfortunately, the necessary sources are not extant. There is no series of inhabitants' listings, merely a single poor rate listing for 1598, and only parts of the 1621 subsidy returns are legible, in which two givers of aid, William Hart and John Webster (both rated in land), are the only sample individuals to appear.<sup>32</sup> It is possible, however, to get a broad notion of the sample members' status from other factors, such as occupational structure. From our various sources, occupations (sometimes several) were recovered for 143 individuals (22.5 per cent) in the sample, and these are arranged into broad categories in Figure 9.5. The numbers involved are small, but those in receipt of relief are prominent in the transport, manual labour, building and textiles categories, while providers of aid are notable among those involved in the retail clothing and household goods industries. Interestingly, this replicates closely the findings of research into the

<sup>32</sup> LMA, P69/BOT2/A/019/MS09234/007 fos. 149v-150[iii]v; TNA: PRO, E 179/147/500 rots. 1-2d; E 179/142/279 rots. 3-3d.

‘The poore lost a good Frennd and the parish a good Neighbour’

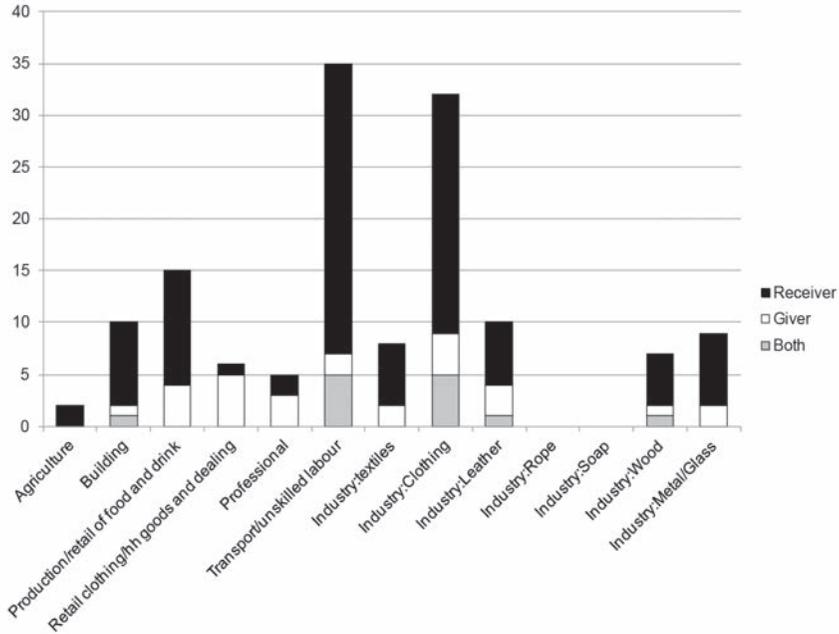


Figure 9.5. Occupational structure of sample individuals.

The categories follow those used by Boulton in *Neighbourhood and Society*, pp. 66–9.

relationship between wealth and occupation in Southwark at exactly the same time.<sup>33</sup>

Additional sources from outside the 1622–5 period illuminate the circumstances of a number of the sample individuals. For example, eight people – five receivers of relief, two individuals who both gave and received support, and one provider of aid – are listed in the 1637 survey of the poor of Portsoken ward. Of the receivers of relief, two had been and still were Dow pensioners, and two were described as blind.<sup>34</sup> The two individuals who both received and gave aid were the pensioners Widow Harrington and Goody Sarah Adams, who supplemented their regular payments by taking in lodgers or caring for sick individuals.<sup>35</sup> Finally, as one of St. Botolph’s sextons during the early seventeenth century, Edward Hawes supported and

<sup>33</sup> Boulton, *Neighbourhood and Society*, pp. 116–18.

<sup>34</sup> LMA, P69/BOT2/D/005/MS02632 fos. 5v–33v; TNA: PRO, SP 16/359 fos. 89, 90, 94v.

<sup>35</sup> LMA, P69/BOT2/B/031/MS09237, accounts 1625; P69/BOT2/A/015/MS09222/002 fo. 107; P69/BOT2/A/003/MS09223 fo. 243; P69/BOT2/D/005/MS02632 fos. 18v–34v; TNA: PRO, SP 16/359 fos. 89, 90.

housed a number of parish children, although the ward paid for a least one of these. The apparent tenuousness of his economic stability is evident in his inclusion in the 1637 survey, which describes him as an aged widower who lived alone and was unable to work.<sup>36</sup> That more of our sample individuals, notably recipients of aid, do not appear in the survey suggests that a decade is 'a long time' in the life-cycle of the poor, with many of them dying or perhaps moving out of the parish in the intervening years.

Similarly, only four members of the sample are listed in the 1638 tithe survey of St. Botolph's, although we know from other sources that many more were still resident in the parish. Those absent from the survey lived in the groups of up to 100 tenements in alleys or yards which were not individually assessed, and we can presume that all such dwellings were relatively humble. Of the listed individuals, one was Sarah Adams from the 1637 survey of the poor, who lived in a property with a moderated rent of just £2,<sup>37</sup> while two of the others were providers of aid. The first, the tailor Primeius Elson (or Nelson) of Rosemary Lane, dwelled in a house with a moderated value of £3, where a number of individuals are known to have lodged during the 1620s.<sup>38</sup> The second, Jeremy Argyll, victualler, who adopted a number of parish children (as discussed in Section III, below), lived in a more substantial property rated at £8 moderated rent.<sup>39</sup> The final person listed in the survey from our sample was Francis Eastgate, a currier, who received an extraordinary payment from the churchwardens in 1625 and appeared in the 1637 listing of the poor. Nevertheless, Eastgate's house had a moderated rental value of £8, indicating that house values and personal wealth were not always related directly.<sup>40</sup>

One fairly reliable indicator of poverty is if an individual's burial costs were met by the parish, and Table 9.5 records the results of applying this test to the sample individuals. At the time of their death, no givers of aid lacked the means to pay for their burial, while nearly one in five of the receivers did. These are likely to have been the poorest of those individuals who received relief, or, perhaps more accurately, those in extreme poverty at the end of their lives. Notably, a greater proportion of those who both gave and received support left their burials unpaid, with a quarter of such people depriving the clerk of his fee. This fits the profile that is emerging

<sup>36</sup> LMA, P69/BOT2/A/019/MS09234/008 fos. 233v, 258v; TNA: PRO, SP 16/359 fo. 94v.

<sup>37</sup> Dale, *Inhabitants of London*, i. 214.

<sup>38</sup> Dale, *Inhabitants of London*, i. 219; LMA, P69/BOT2/A/019/MS09234/008 fo. 245; P69/BOT2/A/015/MS09222/002 fos. 23v, 42.

<sup>39</sup> Dale, *Inhabitants of London*, i. 217.

<sup>40</sup> LMA, P69/BOT2/B/031/MS09237, accounts 1625; TNA: PRO, SP 16/359 fo. 89; Dale, *Inhabitants of London*, i. 211.

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Table 9.5. Unpaid burials of sample individuals

Type	Total in group	Unpaid burials	
	Number	Number	%
Receiver	551	98	17.9
Giver	49	0	0
Both	35	9	25.7
Both+Receiver	586	107	18.3
Both+Giver	84	9	10.7

Table 9.6. Servant-keeping households of sample individuals

Type	Total in group	Having servants in sample period		Having servants at any time	
	Number	Number	%	Number	%
Receiver	551	8	1.5	10	1.8
Giver	49	8	16.3	9	18.4
Both	35	2	5.7	6	17.1
Both+Receiver	586	10	1.7	13	2.2
Both+Giver	84	10	12.0	15	17.9

of individuals in this category as being the long-term poor for whom the provision of relief to others was a means of generating income; in other words, they may well constitute the chronic poor who spent large periods of their life floating above and below the poverty line.

Another means of examining the wealth of our sample individuals, at least obliquely, is through identifying those who at any point accommodated servants within their households (see Table 9.6). As one would expect, very few receivers of aid had servants, although a small proportion did, even at a time when they were definitely in receipt of relief. This is something of a contrast with the Boroughside area of Southwark, where 12.7 per cent of householders not rated for the poor rate still had servants, perhaps underlining the relative level of poverty in St. Botolph's.<sup>41</sup> Less surprising is the fact that those individuals who gave aid were significantly more likely to have servants, especially during the sample years. It is important to

<sup>41</sup> Boulton, *Neighbourhood and Society*, pp. 111–13.

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Table 9.7. Duration of residence of sample individuals

Minimum residence	Type of individual		
	Both	Giver	Receiver
Snapshot	2	21	314
2–5 years	6	6	79
6–10 years	4	4	42
11–20 years	10	5	68
21–30 years	5	5	21
31–50 years	7	5	25
50+ years	0	0	2
Average (including snapshot)	17.3	9.6	6.3
Average (excluding snapshot)	18.3	18.4	13.3

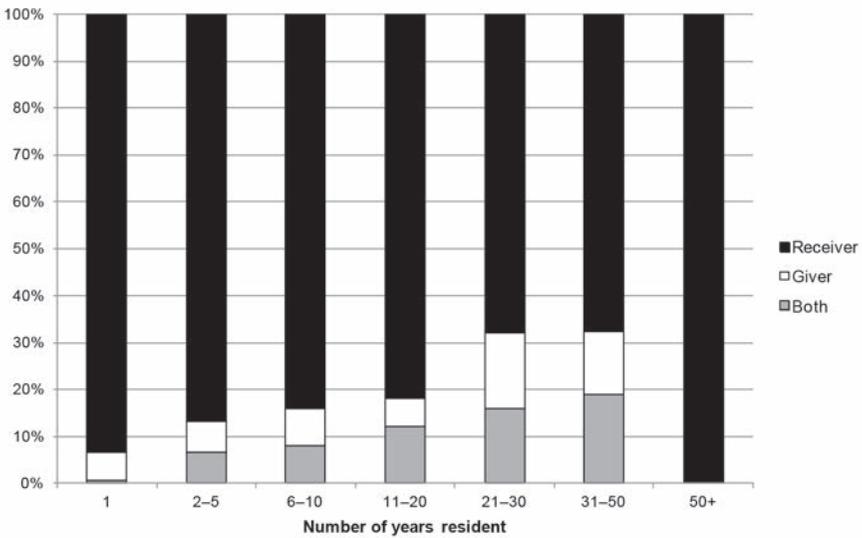


Figure 9.6. Length of residence of sample individuals.

note, however, that the evidence for servant-keeping households does not include any type of inhabitants' listings and is entirely serendipitous, so the numbers of individuals with servants in all groups (but especially those providing relief) is likely to be under representative.

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Finally, it is possible to consider our sample individuals in terms of their duration of residence in St. Botolph’s, as determined by their appearance in the sources (see Table 9.7 and Figure 9.6).<sup>42</sup>

The figures show that givers of aid tended to be resident in the parish longer than those to whom they provided aid; when examining those individuals resident for over a decade, the bias shifts further towards the givers. This suggests that the provision of charity and support were the activities of persistent inhabitants, an impression that is reinforced if those individuals who appear in the sources for a single year only (the ‘snapshots’) are excluded from the calculations. But there are also two patterns of note: first, the length of time that the recipients of aid reside in the parish is relatively high, even when including the snapshots; second, the group longest resident in the parish (including snapshots) were the givers and receivers of relief, who may well have comprised the chronic poor. These results certainly lend support to the thesis that the degree of transience and residential mobility among London’s poor was not as pronounced as once thought.<sup>43</sup>

### III

Having examined some of the overall characteristics of the sample group, it is time to explore in greater detail the individual lives of the poor of St. Botolph Aldgate and their supporters. As something has been said about the standard forms of financial aid that the indigent received, such as extraordinary payments and pensions, this section focuses on alternative types of relief. Such relief might come about through the intervention of other members of the community, but there were also recognized methods by which the poor could support themselves. The parish often played an important role in instigating or co-ordinating this form of relief, and we begin by exploring the lives of those who received or provided aid through the formal attributes of the relief system. But this support was based, in part, on informal and customary practices, and the people involved in this less well-known and harder to recover aspect of poor relief are also considered. Finally, the section emphasizes the likely relationship between some of the formal and informal ways in which the indigent received aid.

As was the case in many London parishes, the number of pauper and orphaned children was a persistent problem in St. Botolph’s and in 1623 the vestry approved a standard policy for dealing with older parish children: that of binding them out to service. As a result, nine children kept by Portsoken

<sup>42</sup> As there is no series of inhabitants’ listings, periods of residence should all be treated as *minimum* values.

<sup>43</sup> Boulton, *Neighbourhood and Society*, pp. 217–27.

ward were placed into service between 1623 and 1625.<sup>44</sup> Of these, at least one, Ellin Goldwell, who was aged nine at the time of her placement, had an impoverished background. Her father, a currier, was noted as poor at his (unpaid) burial in October 1620, while her mother, who was described as poor two months after her husband's death, was in 1624 branded 'a Lewd widow, & base Strumpett' when she gave birth to illegitimate twins.<sup>45</sup> A second child, the unnamed son of John Mosley, may have entered service following the social decline of his family as a result of life-cycle poverty. John Mosley, a painter, was once of some economic standing as he acted as a surety for a bond in 1611–12, but in 1622 he received an extraordinary relief payment and died the following year. No payment was received for burying another of Mosley's children in 1625, and his wife was described as a pensioner at her death in 1631.<sup>46</sup>

Less is known about those individuals with whom the ward's children were placed, and although there is no indication of whether or not they took on such children voluntarily, it is clear that they often received premiums for doing so. The payment of financial inducements to masters was far from standard practice in the case of pauper apprenticeships, but they were made for all nine children bound out between 1623 and 1625, their value ranging from 8s to £2 11s 10d. Such sums were low on a national scale, and the total expense, of £6 19s 6d, for binding out all nine children represented good business for the ward given that the annual cost of care for a single child could be well over £3.<sup>47</sup> One of the masters, John Knight – who took on three children – may have lived outside St. Botolph's as there are no further references to him in parish records, reminding us that the poor might find support from those outside, as well as within, their own parish. At least one child was bound out to a local resident, for which Robert Owen, a Houndsditch silk-weaver, received a premium of £2 11s 10d. It was not uncommon for parish apprentices to be taken on by the poor, for whom even a small premium was welcome income, and this may have been the case here. Owen, who resided in St. Botolph's for at least twenty-five years, was unable to pay the christening and burial fees for his numerous

<sup>44</sup> LMA, P69/BOT2/B/031/MS09237, vestry minutes 1623, accounts 1623–5.

<sup>45</sup> LMA, P69/BOT2/A/003/MS09223 fo. 248v; P69/BOT2/A/019/MS09234/008 fos. 116, 120v, 241. Prostitution, of course, was one means by which poor women might seek to earn an income. For additional references to local prostitutes, see T. R. Forbes, *Chronicle from Aldgate* (New Haven and London, 1971), pp. 32–4.

<sup>46</sup> LMA, P69/BOT2/B/001/MS09236 fos. 106v, 108v; P69/BOT2/B/031/MS09237, accounts 1622; P69/BOT2/A/019/MS09234/008 fos. 197v, 255v; P69/BOT2/A/015/MS09222/002 fo. 50v.

<sup>47</sup> LMA, P69/BOT2/B/031/MS09237, accounts 1623–5. For national premium rates, see S. Hindle, *On the Parish?* (Oxford, 2004), p. 216.

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children, and it is interesting to note that he had a number of apprentices or servants during that time. In 1637, by when he was widowed and any surviving children had moved on, he was sharing his house with an inmate family, which, as we shall see, was a fairly common way of supplementing household income within the parish.<sup>48</sup>

Another, less common, strategy that the authorities employed in seeking to reduce the number of parish children was to find individuals who would formally adopt them, and one local resident we have encountered already, Jeremy Argyll, did this on more than one occasion. Argyll lived in St. Botolph’s for over two decades, during which time he held a number of ward and parish offices, and in 1622 he entered into a bond with local officers ‘of his love and free good will ... to take and keepe [John Parrey] as his owne’. At the same time, the churchwardens gave Argyll £1 5s, and in the following year paid him 18s 6d for keeping Parrey, suggesting that his charitable instincts did not rule out financial inducements.<sup>49</sup>

John Parrey was a two-year-old orphan when he entered Argyll’s household, his family perhaps having once been of some wealth as they had had a number of servants. Following the death both of his father, a glover, and his mother in 1622, the parish responded by binding out his older brother and placing John with Argyll. John died in 1625, but in the same year Argyll received £1 4s 6d from the churchwardens to take another child, John Price, as his own. The same type of arrangement may explain the payment of £2 10s from the churchwardens to Argyll in 1626 ‘for John Birch due by bond’, indicating that Argyll was a persistent supporter of local poor children.<sup>50</sup>

A constant source of pauper children in St. Botolph’s was illegitimate births, and one way in which the parish sought to protect itself from the cost of maintaining such children was through bastardy bonds. These were sometimes posted by local residents, as in 1590, when William Lawdian of East Smithfield provided a bond for a ‘bace borne’ child delivered in his house.<sup>51</sup> But individuals living outside St. Botolph’s are also found acting as sureties, as in the case of the two men who bonded to keep the parish safe from any charges following the birth of an illegitimate child to a non-

<sup>48</sup> LMA, P69/BOT2/B/031/MS09237, accounts 1623; P69/BOT2/A/019/MS09234/008 fos. 15, 146v, 222v; P69/BOT2/A/015/MS09222/002 unfol. entry for 2 March 1642; TNA: PRO, SP 16/359 fo. 94.

<sup>49</sup> LMA, P69/BOT2/B/031/MS09237, accounts 1622–3; P69/BOT2/A/015/MS09222/002 unfol. entry for 29 Sept. 1643; Bodl. Libr., MS. Rawl. D796B fos. [103], [105]; LMA, P69/BOT2/B/020/MS10026 box 1, bond dated 18 Feb. 1622.

<sup>50</sup> LMA, P69/BOT2/A/019/MS09234/008 fos. 108, 159v, 177, 257; P69/TRI2/A/001/MS09238 p. 25; P69/BOT2/B/031/MS09237, accounts 1622–6.

<sup>51</sup> LMA, P69/BOT2/A/019/MS09234/002[b] fo. 9v.

parishioner in 1622. The first was a cordwainer from St. Katherine Cree, of whom nothing further is known, but more has been uncovered about the second, William Butts, a Westminster gentleman. Quite why a seemingly unrelated man of status from the opposite end of London would be willing to act as a surety for an illegitimate child born in St. Botolph's becomes clear only through his will. This reveals that, among many other lands and properties, Butts owned a house in the Minories, and it thus seems likely that his involvement was based on his position as a local landlord.<sup>52</sup>

So far, the poor themselves have appeared as passive figures who were dependent entirely on the intervention of others for their receipt of alternative types of support through the formal relief system. Although this characterization may have some validity, especially with regard to pauper children, it is clear that poor individuals in St. Botolph Aldgate, when given the opportunity by the local authorities, took on a broad range of tasks that provided them with additional sources of income from the parish. Some held minor positions in local office, such as Francis Bird, a regular recipient of the charity of George Clarke, who served at the same time as Portsoken's beadle for the poor.<sup>53</sup> Others received one-off payments, like the 'towe pore women' paid 1s each for sweeping the church in 1630.<sup>54</sup> Another standard service the indigent provided was to take the sick and the poor into their own homes on a temporary basis. This was a major local industry in the parish; between 1622 and 1658, Portsoken ward's churchwardens made payments to 222 individuals, most of them women, for the provision of this type of maintenance.<sup>55</sup> It is quite possible that the unique level of detail in the records illuminates relief networks that were entirely typical in their scope. But some parish authorities are known to have preferred the temporary cost of boarding the poor to providing them with pensions,<sup>56</sup> which were normally for life, and, given St. Botolph's precarious financial position, this may have been the case there, too.<sup>57</sup>

Not all keepers of the parish's sick and indigent were poor themselves; Jeremy Argyll received 4s for a month's care of a poor child in 1623.<sup>58</sup> But,

<sup>52</sup> LMA, P69/BOT2/B/020/MS10026 box 1, bond dated 5 Oct. 1622; TNA: PRO, PROB 11/177 fos. 430–1. It remains possible, of course, that Butts was the actual father of the child.

<sup>53</sup> Bodl. Libr., MS. Rawl. D796B fos. [99], [103]; LMA, P69/BOT2/B/031/MS09237, vestry minutes 1624; P69/BOT2/A/015/MS09222/002 fo. 23v.

<sup>54</sup> LMA, P69/BOT2/B/012/MS09235/002/002 fo. 372.

<sup>55</sup> LMA, P69/BOT2/B/031/MS09237, accounts 1622–58.

<sup>56</sup> Hindle, *On the Parish?*, pp. 64–5.

<sup>57</sup> As noted previously, the absence of key sources makes this point impossible to verify. However, there are extremely few references to rate-based parish pensioners in St. Botolph's voluminous records throughout our period.

<sup>58</sup> LMA, P69/BOT2/B/031/MS09237, accounts 1623.

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from what we know of them, the vast majority of the individuals who performed this task were of little wealth, as in the case of both Sarah Adams, the widow of a poor lame man, who received 1s for keeping a sick woman in 1625, and Anne Gouldwyer, a Dow pensioner, who was paid 3s for accommodating two sick individuals in 1622.<sup>59</sup> These are the only references to these particular women housing others, and they, like many other local residents, provided this service on a seemingly ad hoc basis. However, of the 222 individuals who received payments between 1622 and 1658, a minimum of twenty-eight (12.6 per cent) did so over a period of at least five years, indicating that the provision of this type of support could be a more regular source of income. One person for whom this was certainly true is the widow and Dow pensioner Kate Tanner, who, over twenty-three years, kept infants, young children and adults. Although she perhaps housed no more than three or four people at a time, she was evidently operating as a multi-functional parish nurse. This brought Tanner only a modest financial return, however: by the time of her death in 1647, she had been paid £118 4s 6d for her services, a return of less than £5 per year. But perhaps this contributed to her ability to maintain an independent household, as she appears living on her own in the 1637 return of Portsoken’s poor residents, and seemingly occupied one of twenty-four tenements in an alley that were rated for £40 moderated rental value in the 1638 tithe survey.<sup>60</sup>

The local authorities no doubt encouraged and co-ordinated those instances of boarding and nursing for which they paid parishioners, and an agreed fee structure clearly existed as disbursements were made according to set weekly or monthly rates.<sup>61</sup> But while this points to the systemization of such care, there is evidence to suggest that identical practices were also occurring outside the formal relief system. Between 1588 and 1599, the widow Ellen Wright, who lived in a garden house in the poorest area of the parish, operated a form of hospice that took in women in childbirth, the diseased and the sick, and those recuperating from treatments. No payments to her are visible in the parish records, and her clients – who included gentlemen – came from all over London, and even further afield, suggesting strongly that her establishment ran outside the formal local welfare system. This impression is reinforced by the fact that in 1595, the parish took out a bond to prevent itself from becoming liable financially for an infant delivered in her house, and that four years later Wright was excommunicated from St.

<sup>59</sup> LMA, P69/BOT2/A/019/MS09234/008 fos. 129v, 252v; P69/BOT2/B/031/MS09237, accounts 1622, 1625.

<sup>60</sup> LMA, P69/BOT2/B/031/MS09237, accounts 1622–46; P69/BOT2/D/005/MS02632 fos. 19v–42v; TNA: PRO, SP 16/359 fo. 95; Dale, *Inhabitants of London*, i. 217.

<sup>61</sup> See LMA, P69/BOT2/B/031/MS09237.

Botolph's for allowing an illegitimate child to be born at her home.<sup>62</sup> In addition to private nursing, local records reveal that the taking of lodgers, as formal, paying house-guests, was a widespread service industry from at least the late sixteenth century.<sup>63</sup> This was both a means by which the poor might find accommodation, as in the case of Isabell Peterson, a poor woman, who lodged with an East Smithfield lighterman, or else supplement their income, as with Thomas Baylie, a poor man of Nightingale Lane, who took in Richard Sharpe, 'a seafaring man'.<sup>64</sup> Again, these were seemingly private arrangements, perhaps based on older customary notions of neighbourliness and mutual support, with no evidence for the involvement of the local authorities.

The co-existence of these formal and informal relief practices raises a number of important issues, beginning with their likely relationship. It seems quite possible that the growth of St. Botolph's extensive, seventeenth-century, parish-financed system of boarding and nursing represented the formulization, to some extent, of earlier private practices. The area's dramatic demographic expansion would have generated an obvious need for such services, through which the poor (and others) could earn additional income, and we can presume that those who provided them independently from the auspices of the parish did so voluntarily. Whether that applies equally to those who provided relief through the formal welfare system is harder to ascertain. In some London parishes, pensioners were forced to carry out specific tasks under threat of the loss of their pensions,<sup>65</sup> but there is no evidence of similar general requirements in St. Botolph's. Nevertheless, in 1663 the churchwardens paid the mother of Mary Airee 2s 6d, having 'forced her' to take care of her own daughter, although this is the only explicit reference to the use of compulsion found in the records.<sup>66</sup>

#### IV

Over thirty years ago, Valerie Pearl argued for the existence of an effective system of poor relief in early modern London, emphasizing the extent of public action and provision based on a powerful sense of communal

<sup>62</sup> LMA, P69/BOT2/A/019/MS09234/005[a] fo. 74v; Wear, 'Caring for the sick poor', pp. 57–8; L. C. Orlin, 'Temporary lives in London lodgings', *Huntington Library Quarterly*, lxxi (2008), 237, 241–2.

<sup>63</sup> Orlin, 'Temporary lives', pp. 238–40.

<sup>64</sup> LMA, P69/BOT2/A/019/MS09234/008 fos. 250, 249, 186, 195v. The two latter references reveal that Baylie also adopted another common survival strategy of the poor when he remarried only four months after the death of his wife.

<sup>65</sup> Wear, 'Caring for the sick poor', pp. 46–7.

<sup>66</sup> LMA, P69/BOT2/B/031/MS09237, accounts 1663.

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responsibility.<sup>67</sup> Although her thesis has been criticized for ignoring the link between social discipline and relief and for its narrow focus on practice in wealthy city-centre parishes,<sup>68</sup> the notion that the institution of poor relief helped to bind a community together for its collective good continues to find favour with some scholars.<sup>69</sup> By way of a conclusion to this chapter, we may consider what light our sample lives and the records of St. Botolph Aldgate throw on this ongoing debate.

The act of providing relief was an occasion when the lives of the rich and poor of the parish intersected, and there is evidence to suggest that social relations between the two were, at times, far from harmonious. We have noted already, in the 1618 survey of Portsoken ward, the sense of fear generated by the influx of poor families, and the same account confirms the existence of social stratification by revealing that other residents challenged and refused to pay the rates for the maintenance of the indigent.<sup>70</sup> The vestry showed a comparable lack of disregard when it decided to demolish and rebuild an alley of parish tenements for the poor in the early seventeenth century. The residents did not go quietly and took some months to be removed, whereupon all those who were pensioners were rehoused by the parish, with the others – including one of our receivers of aid – seemingly left to fend for themselves.<sup>71</sup>

Historians have long recognized that the gifts of wealthy individuals like Robert Dow often had as much to do with exerting control over the poor as relieving them, while at the same time enhancing the standing of the benefactor. Dow’s gift stipulated stringent standards of good reputation, moral standing and neighbourly consideration as qualifying requirements, and it was Dow himself who personally nominated one poor local widow to the Merchant Taylors’ almshouses. His attitude towards the indigent was not uncritical, bemoaning that ‘the poore in these daies are given unto to much Idlenes and litle labour ... and much seeking after Almes how litle soever it be’, and perhaps this provoked opposition towards him: in 1598, three local women were questioned for the offence of ‘casting Fowle bowles of beastlynes agaynst Mr Robert Dow his backe doore’.<sup>72</sup> But as

<sup>67</sup> V. Pearl, ‘Social policy in early modern London’, in *History and Imagination*, ed. H. Lloyd-Jones, V. Pearl and B. Worden (1981), pp. 115–31.

<sup>68</sup> Archer, *Pursuit of Stability*, pp. 149–50.

<sup>69</sup> Wear, ‘Caring for the sick poor’, pp. 52–3; Ben-Amos, *Culture of Giving*, pp. 343, 373.

<sup>70</sup> Bodl. Libr., MS Rawl. D796B fo. [86].

<sup>71</sup> Bodl. Libr., MS Rawl. D796B fo. [29]. We are grateful to Mark Latham for help with the details of this incident.

<sup>72</sup> LMA, P69/BOT2/D/005/MS02632 unfol. preamble; P69/BOT2/A/019/MS09234/007 fo. 137.

Derek Keene identified in the 1980s, recalling the discourse of Dives and Lazarus, Dow was not without compassion entirely. When given licence to rent a parish property for the poor that abutted his house, he chose ‘not [to] offend an owld woman of long tyme Dwelling in the Tenement’ and waited until she died before assuming the lease.<sup>73</sup> Similarly, and in spite of its extensive rules and provisions, recipients of Dow’s charity among our sample group included those who had, in their earlier lives, given birth to illegitimate children, been presented for abusing the local minister and even excommunicated from the church.<sup>74</sup>

Such findings make it necessary to qualify the more pessimistic view of the capital’s relief system on two main points, the first being that self-aggrandizement is unlikely to have been the purpose of every benefactor. Anthony Duffield, who left the indigent of St. Botolph’s a substantial gift in his will, made regular donations to the poor in his lifetime and even took poor individuals into his house – evidence for the persistence of the older custom of ‘hospitality’. A parish clerk noted that Duffield was ‘godly bent euer vnto the poore’<sup>75</sup> – suggesting that a strong religious impulse lay behind his charity – and a clerk’s epitaph for another local lifetime-giver of aid, Ezekias Le Roy, provides the epigraph for this chapter, with its implication that good neighbours were indeed those who supported the poor.<sup>76</sup> Second, the scurrilous backgrounds of a number of Dow pensioners can be supplemented with much wider evidence that the local authorities made no distinction between the deserving and undeserving resident poor when it came to the provision of relief. Those among our sample individuals who received some form of parochial aid were, at other times, described by the clerks as ‘Lawles’, ‘ill members of o’ parish’, ‘a Grace-les widow’, ‘a (Drunken) Porter’ and ‘Two filthy Couples’.<sup>77</sup> The clerks obviously had little time for such persons, and it seems likely that the churchwardens and overseers would have thought likewise. But relief was given to them, nonetheless, and perhaps not simply as an attempt to preserve the stability of the local community but also because it was the neighbourly thing to do.

<sup>73</sup> Keene, ‘Poor and their neighbours’, pp. 34–6; LMA, P69/BOT2/A/019/MS09234/005[a] fos. 137v–138.

<sup>74</sup> LMA, P69/BOT2/B/001/MS09236 fo. 13v; P69/BOT2/A/019/MS09234/002[b] fo. 73v; P69/BOT2/A/019/MS09234/005[b] fo. 161v.

<sup>75</sup> LMA, P69/BOT2/A/019/MS09234/001[b] fos. 28v, 35v; P69/BOT2/A/019/MS09234/002[b] fo. 11v; P69/BOT2/A/002/MS09221 unfol. entry for 23 Oct. 1589.

<sup>76</sup> LMA, P69/BOT2/A/019/MS09234/008 fo. 123.

<sup>77</sup> LMA, P69/BOT2/A/019/MS09234/008 fos. 261v, 238, 120v, 89v; P69/BOT2/A/003/MS09223 fo. 242v.