
Editorial

This issue of *Local Population Studies* is a special issue devoted to the publication of the papers given at the Local Population Studies Society spring conference held at the University of Winchester on 22 April 2017. The theme of the conference was the New Poor Law in Britain and Ireland, and the papers provided a range of regional and local perspectives on the operation of the New Poor Law, and the way it was experienced, both by those who administered it, and those in receipt of its benefits.

The issue begins with a paper by Steven King, one of the most prominent students of the New Poor Law. King's paper aims both to review the historiography of the New Poor Law and to establish an agenda for future research on the topic. In pursuit of this he identifies several gaps in the literature, notably the extent to which those who engaged with the New Poor Law were able to take the initiative, rather than being passive recipients of welfare; the religious and educational functions of workhouses; and those who continued to be in receipt of outdoor relief. We also know little about those who administered relief.

The last point is taken up by Karen Rothery in her paper on the boards of guardians in several Hertfordshire poor law unions. It is sometimes assumed that at least in rural southern England those who administered the New Poor Law were largely farmers or the local gentry. While this was true in some unions, in Hertfordshire the membership of boards of guardians was more diverse, with other occupational groups being represented. However, it does seem that the levels of activity of individual guardians varied, with middle-aged men of independent means being most prepared (and most able) to devote time to poor law administration.

The Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834 applied only in England and Wales. In Scotland, reform of the poor laws had to wait until 1845. The Scottish Poor Law had long been different from that in England and Wales, being organised through the church, and being strictly for the non-able bodied. In his contribution, Jones discusses the differences between the operation of the New Poor Law in Scotland and in England and Wales. He develops the interesting thesis that there was a distinct 'Welsh' version of the New Poor Law which historians have yet to study in any depth: Steven King points out in his review of the literature that the lack of serious research into the New Poor Law in Wales is one of the most important gaps in our knowledge.

The next two papers deal with specific aspects of the treatment of the sick. Alistair Ritch focuses on the medical care provided by the New Poor Law, using the examples of the workhouses in Birmingham and Wolverhampton. He shows that the influence of the New Poor Law on the development of medical services was more pervasive in Wolverhampton than in Birmingham. In both towns, though, the poor law authorities liaised with the sanitary authorities to help control epidemic or infectious diseases and services supplied under the New Poor Law formed an important component of the overall provision.

Cara Dobbing examines the role of the New Poor Law in caring for the mentally ill, using a case study of Cumberland and Westmorland. After legislation in 1845 requiring all counties and boroughs to construct institutions to treat and care for the mentally ill, the number of people classified as insane rose. Lunatics often moved between county asylums, workhouses and their own homes, spending time in each as their mental health changed and as the demand for mental health care varied. Dobbing illustrates this using detailed case histories of four paupers from the county.

Much of the existing empirical work on the New Poor Law has focused on the populations of workhouses, including a series of papers published in this journal over the last 20 years. This special issue does not neglect the topic of workhouses, and the last two papers are about the populations of Nottingham workhouse in the English midlands, and the populations of three workhouses in Northern Ireland: Antrim, Ballymena and Balleymoney. Johanna Purser's paper includes a study of the population of Nottingham workhouse in 1881, using census enumerators' books and the admission and discharge registers. Of equal interest is her description of how the treatment of the poor in Nottingham under the New Poor Law was affected by the local economy. Simon Gallaher focuses on children and families in the three workhouses in Northern Ireland between 1850 and 1861. Like Purser, he shows that changes in the workhouse populations were associated with variations in local economic conditions. His paper also emphasises the variety of family forms (accompanied by mother only, accompanied by mother and father, orphaned) which characterised children admitted to workhouses.

Taken together, we hope that this special issue of *Local Population Studies* demonstrates the wide range of possibilities for future research on the New Poor Law, and carries on the tradition of research on the subject published in the journal. We should like to thank the authors for adhering so assiduously to a demanding schedule for the submission, revision and resubmission of their papers. We also thank the other members of the Editorial Board who have read and commented on the contributions.

Finally, this issue of *Local Population Studies* is the last formally to be edited by Jonathan Healey. Jonathan has been Editor since issue 92 was published in spring 2014. During his four years as Editor, he has overseen the redesign of the layout of the journal, as well as its publication through IngentaConnect in an electronic format. He has maintained the high quality of the articles and is passing on a journal in excellent health. Andrew Hinde, of the University of Southampton, will be taking over as Editor on 1 January 2018. Andrew has been a member of the Editorial Board for many years, and a long-standing contributor of articles to the journal.

Andrew Hinde
Samantha A. Shave