Monastic charitable provision in Tudor England: quantifying and qualifying poor relief in the early sixteenth century

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ABSTRACT. Monastic charitable provision in the later Middle Ages through to the Dissolution has often been described as inadequate in terms of both quantity and quality. It has been accused of ineffectiveness because of its allegedly indiscriminate nature. This article suggests that in fact the religious houses and hospitals of England were providing a greater amount of poor relief in a more assiduous manner than has previously been allowed. The core of evidence comes from the 1535 national tax assessment of the Church, the Valor Ecclesiasticus. This contains details of the charitable provision carried out by most monasteries and hospitals as recorded by Crown commissions. After allowances have been made for the bias in the survey, a statistical analysis is carried out which indicates that an upward reassessment should be made of the quantity of monastic charity. Qualitative evidence from both the Valor Ecclesiasticus and from other contemporary sources also suggests that the pre-Reformation Church was providing genuinely beneficial poor relief.

THE HISTORIOGRAPHICAL CONTEXT OF MONASTIC POOR RELIEF

Both the quantity and the quality of pre-Reformation charitable provision in England have received the attention of historians attempting to define the genesis of the poor-relief systems encapsulated in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century programmes for controlling poverty. Most have taken a negative view of a system which was to a great extent ecclesiastically controlled. The most severe of this criticism has usually been reserved for monastic charity:

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There are ... very strong reasons for believing that, for a couple of centuries at least before the Reformation, the English monasteries had done little for the relief of honest poverty; and that their almsgiving tended rather to foster the growth of a class of professional beggars.¹

Sir William Ashley’s words, written in 1893, were representative of a Protestant historiographical tradition which can be traced back to Gilbert Burnet’s History of the Reformation of the Church of England (written between 1679 and 1715). Burnet’s became a key work in establishing the Whiggish/Protestant version of Reformation history.² Later eighteenth- and nineteenth-century historiography explicitly targeted pre-Reformation systems of poor relief for criticism,³ culminating in Sir George Nicholls’ A history of the English poor law in 1860.⁴ Nicholls was instrumental in the drafting and administration of the 1834 Poor Law Act, and so, coupled with the weight of a historical tradition, it is perhaps not surprising that he should assure his readers that in relation to the relief of the poor ‘[of] the evil tendencies of such establishments [monasteries] there can be no doubt’.⁵

Ashley couched his criticism in more refined language but was essentially agreeing with Nicholls’ indictment of what was viewed as the indiscriminate charity practised by the monasteries. The perpetuation of Ashley’s thesis into the twentieth century and its acceptance as standard textbook doctrine are important elements in the understanding of modern attitudes to monastic charitable provision. E. M. Leonard’s work on early poor relief (published in 1900) followed Ashley’s ideas very closely, even imitating the order of subject matter.⁶ Monastic charity was dismissed as indiscriminate alms-giving, and ‘did nearly as much to increase beggars as to relieve them’.⁷ Likewise, in 1927, the Webbs, in their influential history of the poor law to their own day, admitted their indebtedness to Ashley in their discussion of pre-Reformation poor relief, before reproducing his thesis: ‘Far from diminishing the number of people living in a condition of destitution and vagrancy, the very existence of such centres of indiscriminate almsgiving [the monasteries] perpetuated and even increased that unsatisfactory section of the population [able-bodied beggars].’⁸ This interpretation was perpetuated by numerous highly influential socio-economic and ecclesiastical historians throughout the early and mid-twentieth century.⁹ By 1959 W. K. Jordan felt able to write that ‘the quality of monastic alms was even less impressive than the quantity’ and to be secure in the knowledge that there was a wealth of historical tradition to support his contention.¹⁰

However, since Jordan wrote, the interpretation of monastic poor relief has undergone some revision. Indeed, David Knowles and Brian Tierney were both already raising a number of caveats to the received historiographical doctrine during the 1950s.¹¹ Their tentative suggestions
that monastic charity was in actual fact providing a greater amount of relief in a more effective manner than was previously supposed have been expanded by a number of historians since the 1980s. Most especially Barbara Harvey has given a lucid outline of the charitable provision carried out by the Benedictine monks of Westminster Abbey, who were catering for sections of the poorer inhabitants of both the town of Westminster and the city of London. In the sixteenth century they were distributing the very large sum of £400 per annum in various forms of poor relief – over 10 per cent of the gross income of the abbey.

Likewise, several early modern historians have suggested a revision of the traditional view of monastic charity. J. F. Hadwin, Alan Beier and Felicity Heal have all suggested that, at least quantitatively, the religious houses of pre-Reformation England were providing an essential social service. Paul Slack sums up this view and the effect of the Dissolution:

The dissolution of the monasteries, chantries, religious gilds and fraternities in the 1530s and 1540s radically reduced existing sources of charity. The real aid which they had provided for the poor was no doubt concentrated geographically, but it was more substantial than has often been supposed, and its destruction left a real vacuum. It has been estimated that monasteries alone provided £6,500 a year in alms before 1537; and that sum was not made good by private benefactions until after 1580.

However, this ‘estimated’ sum deserves further examination; a more rigorous analysis of the available information which takes into consideration its potential limitations is likely to produce more realistic estimates of the actual amount of charity being provided. Without such estimates there is still a tendency for modern historians to follow the well-worn pathways of the traditional interpretation. Woodward, Jones, Elton, Milis, Youings, Dyer and Rawcliffe all evince an attitude which suggests that monastic charity was failing to provide adequate provision for the poor in the later Middle Ages and into the sixteenth century, drawing on the same line of argument used by Ashley, Leonard, Snape, Jordan et al.

Perhaps the most influential work on the state of sixteenth-century monastic charity comes from Alexander Savine’s 1909 analysis of the 1535 tax assessment *Valor Ecclesiasticus*. He calculated that the average proportion of monastic national gross income spent on poor relief was c. 2.5 per cent, and, due to Savine’s apparently rigorous statistical evaluation of the material relating to charity in the *Valor*, it is a figure that has become enshrined in later writing down to the present day. Caution has been advised in the unquestioning use of Savine’s figures, but his analysis is still discernible, explicitly or implicitly, in most modern discussions of monastic poor relief in the sixteenth century.

The following survey is a revaluation of the data contained in the *Valor*.
and other various contemporary records. It is divided into two main sections. First, the quantity of monastic poor relief is assessed in order to demonstrate that the perpetuation of Savine’s figure of c. 2.5 per cent in historical writing is not warranted, and that instead the figure should be set considerably higher. This is in line with the figures suggested by Slack and Beier, but takes the analysis of the data much further than has been previously attempted in order to provide new figures for the amount of monastic relief. The second section will attempt to show how this higher proportion of monastic income was administered effectively as poor relief – qualifying the various aspects of charitable provision practised by religious houses in England on the eve of the Dissolution.

QUANTIFYING THE AMOUNT OF MONASTIC POOR RELIEF

The survey now known as the Valor Ecclesiasticus was the result of a bill passed through Parliament in 1534 that secured for the Crown 10 per cent of all ecclesiastical income.²¹ The reason this survey allows for an assessment of monastic poor relief is because the county commissioners were under instructions to deduct from the gross income of each house – apart from legally indentured rents, stipends and pensions – any alms which the religious were obliged to give to the poor by either charitable bequests of benefactors or through custom.²² The resultant net income was the sum upon which the religious were taxed.²³ However, as evidence for the total of monastic charitable provision the Valor is problematic at several levels.²⁴

First, the great heterogeneity of entries regarding alms-giving makes it clear that commissioners in different parts of the country had differing criteria for recording the charitable activities of religious houses despite the Exchequer’s general instructions to them. The Somerset commissioners for Glastonbury Abbey, for example, were content to attribute the large charitable provision of £140 16s. 8d. to the testamentary bequests of several kings and queens and ‘aliorum benefactorum’ without further explanation, even though the list of kings included such dubious testators as King Arthur and King Lucius.²⁵ In contrast the much smaller sum of £13 19s. 2d. distributed annually by Dover Priory was accounted for by the Kent commission in the greatest detail, recording every individual testator and the anniversaries upon which the alms were given.²⁶

Added to this, there are 277 religious houses and hospitals recorded in the Valor which apparently provided no charitable provision at all.²⁷ At most small houses, with a net income under £50, this lack of poor relief was possibly a realistic assessment simply because the income was so little
as to leave no surplus revenue beyond what was needed to maintain the few inmates. The small Cistercian nunnery of Arthington in Yorkshire, for example, was assessed at a net value of only £11 8s. 4½d., despite containing 11 nuns who received a pension at the Dissolution. It is little wonder that there was no recorded alms provision. But a large number of houses and hospitals which have no recorded charitable provision were not small under-endowed houses; rather they were religious corporations whose net income should have obliged them to provide poor relief and yet the Valor records that in 1535 they were giving nothing. In all, 152 institutions with net incomes over £50 were registered as entirely lacking any charitable provision. Such figures are particularly surprising when applied to a house such as the Benedictine Tavistock Abbey in Devon, which had no alms listed from a net income of £842 3s. 4½d. However, they become completely unbelievable when it is found that there survives a series of almoners’ accounts for the abbey which list large amounts of legally defined charity to the poor, and that there stood an almonry inside the main gates.

A check of the cartularies of some houses which, according to the Valor, provided no poor relief also demonstrates that they were legally bound to provide charity as a condition of the testamentary contracts donating land and rents to them. Newnham Priory, Blythburgh Priory and Edington Priory were all obliged to provide poor relief as part of their agreed corporate functions, while the presence of an almoner at all these places clearly demonstrates that they did. Likewise, the lack of recorded alms provision in the Valor at all but one of the Gilbertine houses is contradicted by the cartulary evidence which shows that many houses were legally obliged to provide poor relief as part of the agreement of their land grants. Table 1 gives the numbers of all houses and hospitals, with their net values, which were listed as providing no charity.

Realistically, the most likely explanation for a house with a net income of over £50 being listed as not providing charity in the Valor is not that there was no charitable provision but that the investigating commissioners decided not to allow it to be set as a reprisal against taxation. The commissioners were certainly keen to tell Cromwell that everything was being done to maximize profits for the Crown from taxation: ‘we have laboured as much as we can for the king’s profit, even exceeding the interpretation of the statutes’. Potential commissioners would often solicit Cromwell or Chancellor Audley for the chance to be a part of the administration of the survey, and, once appointed, the advancement of their careers could depend upon their efficient extraction of the maximum amount of tax from the monasteries for which Dissolution, even in 1535, was a looming reality. Add to this the overwhelming secular make-up of
the commissions and it is likely that ecclesiastical tax reprisals were going to be minimized. For example, an average of less than 6 per cent of the monastic gross income in the county of Devon was allowed to escape taxation. At several houses in the county the only reprisals against tax allowed were for the fees of the very local commissioners who were conducting the survey. Thus at Newenham Abbey and Polsloe Priory one of the chief commissioners, Sir Thomas Denys, only allowed his own annual fee as seneschal of the abbey and the fees of two auditors (at Newenham) and another commissioner, Thomas Bonysaunt (at Polsloe), to escape taxation from gross incomes of £232 and £170 respectively. At Dunkeswell Abbey the commissioner, Thomas Sydenham, only allowed a total of £3 3s. 4d. in tax-reprisal from a gross income of almost £300 – this for his own and an auditor’s annual fee. The implications for any assessment of poor relief using the Valor evidence from Devon are evident. The county commission was not following Exchequer instructions and was thereby not allowing for any charitable provision. Most other county surveys did allow more reprisals against taxation than the Devon commission, but in terms of allowances for charity the reprisals were minimized. This provision was occasionally even further diminished when poor relief allowed by the local commissioners was disallowed by Exchequer officials unconvinced of the legitimacy of certain claims. These reprisals were subsequently struck off and became liable to tax despite their apparently genuine nature. In some parts of the country charitable provision was just not recorded in the Valor, either because the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Net value</th>
<th>Number of monasteries</th>
<th>Number of hospitals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under £50</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>£50–£100</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>£100–£150</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>£150–£200</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>£200–£300</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>£300–£500</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>£500–£1000</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over £1000</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Not including the 73 houses in Berkshire, Cambridgeshire, Essex, Hertfordshire, Northumberland, Rutland and parts of Yorkshire for which no details of gross income or expenses are available.
local commissioners’ returns are lost or because – as in Wales, Devon, Staffordshire, Bedfordshire and certain deaneries in Lincolnshire – monastic charity was simply unrecorded or undifferentiated from other expenses.

However, some of these vagaries of the commissioners’ returns should be partially offset by the under-recording of the gross income of certain houses. It has been acknowledged that many of the Lancashire houses and some Yorkshire houses had an under-assessed gross income from their land endowments, which may account for their higher than average proportion of alms to income.\textsuperscript{42} But, with some exceptions, the \textit{Valor} can be credited with supplying a reasonably accurate valuation of monastic gross income in 1535.\textsuperscript{43} As discussed above, the more important problem with the survey was the reduced reprisals allowed by the commissioners and thus the high net income sums recorded – a problem which has been incorporated into the regression analysis below.

These considerations must be kept in mind when any statistics are drawn from the \textit{Valor} in relation to the quantity of charitable provision. Savine was aware of the problems of the source and only came to overall figures after supplying a number of caveats.\textsuperscript{44} Despite this, his figure of c. 2.5 per cent as totalling the entire proportion of monastic charitable provision was based on gross monastic income, was derived \textit{only} from untaxed alms and included in the equation all the monasteries where no alms were recorded. He also does not include hospitals in his analysis (whether dependent on a monastery or not) and omits 47 monasteries from his list of alms-providers, among which, inexplicably, are two of the biggest distributors of poor relief: Bury St Edmunds (£379 1s. 1d.) and St Mary’s, York (£196 3s. 5d.).\textsuperscript{45} Neither is any account taken of the non-compulsory alms in the form of second-hand clothing and the often considerable amounts of food left over from the refectory and additional uncovenanted gifts of the abbot and officials.\textsuperscript{46} The figures from the \textit{Valor} thus represent the absolute minimum of monastic poor relief, and Savine’s proportion of charity to income is certainly considerably less than the true amount. Yet it is this percentage figure that has become ingrained in historical writing as an accurately assessed proportion of all monastic alms-giving prior to the Dissolution. It is surely time that both the quantity and quality of monastic charitable provision in the sixteenth century be reassessed.

The total figure of all monastic poor relief in England and Wales, as recorded in the \textit{Valor}, comes to £5218. This sum is made up from 306 houses and hospitals where alms are recorded, so the average provision of each of these institutions works out at just over £17. The average proportion of poor relief to the net income, before alms have been
reprised, is thus 5.3 per cent. If all the houses and hospitals which have no 
alms recorded are added then the average drops to 3.9 per cent – although, 
as discussed, it is unreasonable to include the majority of these houses 
because of their lack of assessment. If only the 125 houses with a net 
income under £50 are added to the 306 houses then the average proportion 
is 4.9 per cent – a more realistic minimum provision. If this proportion is 
also applied to the other 152 houses worth over £50, and those houses 
(also worth over £50) where no details of expenses were recorded in the 
Valor then the total monastic charitable provision would come to just over 
£7403 from a total monastic national net income (as recorded in the Valor) 
of £142,834. But such crude averages limit unrealistically the level of 
monastic poor relief in the 1530s.

Although the mean is a reasonable point estimate of the percentage of 
poor relief to net income, it is a problematic predictor for two reasons. 
First, the distribution of the indicator is skewed rightward, meaning that 
the mean may be a higher than desirable predictor of the typical house’s 
provision of relief. However, the downward bias of the alms data due to 
the general under-recording of charitable provision by the commissioners 
means that it is difficult to say whether or not the predicted measure of 
alms using a crude average is a lower or upper bound for the true value. 
But most importantly, a mean also assumes the same percentage for all 
houses without taking into account the other, variable-specific, in-
formation which might bring about a more precise estimate. For this 
reason a parametrized line was fitted through the data for the 306 houses 
recorded as supplying poor relief so as to relate net income, religious 
order, urban/rural location and regional location to charitable provision. 
The results from the OLS (Ordinary Least Square) regression were then 
used to predict the amount of poor relief provision as a percentage of 
income for the remaining 277 houses. Taking actual values from the 
original 306 houses and combining them with the predicted values for the 
remaining houses in the sample, an estimated national percentage of 
6.9–7.9 per cent, in alms to net income before alms reprisals, is obtained. 
This allows for a predicted figure of £10,216–11,696 as the total annual 
amount of poor relief being distributed by the religious houses and 
hospitals in 1535. These figures are close to the £11,500 suggested by 
Beier, and which he postulates, allowing for inflation, could have been 
greater than the annual amounts of secular-controlled poor relief for the 
whole period 1540–1614.

These predicted estimates require further explanation. In order to 
justify the predicted relatively high proportion of net income being spent 
on poor relief it is necessary to look in more depth at the variables which 
affect the estimates. First, there are three dependent variables recorded
in the *Valor* which are vital to the interpretation: religious order/hospital, urban/rural location and regional location. These are considered in turn below, and their consequences discussed in terms of the upward adjustment of the amount of monastic charitable provision. Secondly, poor relief in kind is discussed. The provision of consumables and clothing was evidently an important element of charity as recorded in the *Valor* and was usually given a monetary value which allows for a separation of sums distributed in money and in kind. Finally, the provision of monastic indoor relief is considered in the light of a series of central government visitation reports which were conducted in 1536, one year after the completion of the *Valor*.

*Variation in the extent of poor relief provision by religious orders/hospitals*

The religious houses of England and Wales were certainly not a homogenous network – there were 14 separate orders of religious in 1535 as well as at least 6 different orders of friars and the hospitals. The friaries were generally very poor on the eve of the Dissolution and were more likely to receive alms than to give them. Besides, very few are listed in the *Valor*. Of the remaining orders of religious men and women, poor relief was recorded in most of the houses but there was considerable disparity in the amounts and proportions of charitable provision. Table 2 shows the national figures of all religious houses recorded in the *Valor* as providing official charity, distinguishing the religious orders involved.

Of the religious orders the main provision of charity in terms of both quantity and as a proportion against income evidently came from the Benedictine houses. This was partly due to their being the oldest and best-endowed monastic establishments in the country, and so able to afford the £2404 minimum provision of poor relief. But it was also due to their internal organizational structure which was better suited and more able to deal with the demands of caring for the poor, sick and destitute. It can be no accident that most known almonry sites in England are from Benedictine houses.

The arrangements made at Glastonbury in 1335 for the existing almonry to be expanded and for the office of almoner to be divided between two officials (termed as an intern- and an extern-almoner) demonstrate a complex administrative framework for dealing with the abbey’s charitable obligations – a framework shown to be still fully operational at the Dissolution by the copious almoner’s and sub-almoner’s rolls. The almoner, Robert Gylde, had the largest responsibility and accounted for £51 1s. 7½d. in items of charitable
Inter-order differences in monastic charitable provision recorded in the Valor Ecclesiasticus (monetary amounts to nearest pound)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religious order</th>
<th>No. of houses</th>
<th>Net income (£)</th>
<th>Total alms (£)</th>
<th>Average alms per house (£)</th>
<th>Proportion of alms to income (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male Female</td>
<td>Male Female</td>
<td>Male Female</td>
<td>Male Female</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benedictine</td>
<td>68 23</td>
<td>44,803 4,264</td>
<td>2,272 132</td>
<td>33 6</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Augustinian</td>
<td>75 7</td>
<td>17,390 849</td>
<td>848 22</td>
<td>11 3</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cistercian</td>
<td>38 6</td>
<td>10,222 484</td>
<td>431 14</td>
<td>11 2</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cluniac</td>
<td>10 1</td>
<td>3,383 119</td>
<td>115 1</td>
<td>12 1</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Premonst.</td>
<td>13 0</td>
<td>2,349 —</td>
<td>110 —</td>
<td>8 —</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knights Hosp.</td>
<td>6 0</td>
<td>2,857 —</td>
<td>102 —</td>
<td>17 —</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carthusian</td>
<td>5 0</td>
<td>2,112 —</td>
<td>130 —</td>
<td>26 —</td>
<td>5.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bridgite</td>
<td>0 1</td>
<td>— 1,731 —</td>
<td>25 —</td>
<td>25 —</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominican</td>
<td>0 1</td>
<td>— 380 —</td>
<td>12 —</td>
<td>12 —</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gilbertine</td>
<td>1 202</td>
<td>24 —</td>
<td>24 —</td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trinitarian</td>
<td>1 0</td>
<td>61 —</td>
<td>1 —</td>
<td>1 —</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Franciscan</td>
<td>0 1</td>
<td>— 56 —</td>
<td>(2s.) —</td>
<td>(2s.) —</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hospitals</td>
<td>49 —</td>
<td>4,336 980</td>
<td>20 —</td>
<td>18.4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Proportion of net income before reprisal of alms to one decimal point.

provision. His principal outlay was for the poor boys accommodated in the almonry on whom £38 14s. 3½d. was spent in the year before the Dissolution. He also accounted for the keeping of nine paupers in the dependent hospital of St Mary Magdalene in the town (£6 10s. 9d.). Other expenses included buying shrouds for the burial of paupers from the town (£1 4s. 0d.) and various distributions of money in the almonry precinct.57

However, the outdoor relief seems mainly to have been carried out by the sub-almoner, John Eswolde, and the sacrist, who between them accounted for £39 12s. 4d. in poor relief, most of which was distributed as alms on various anniversaries and at various places in the form of money, bread and fish.58 The location of these distributions is not always specified, although the abbey was evidently providing relief for several proprietor manors and appropriated rectories beyond Glastonbury: Bristol (£5 10s. 0d.), East Brent (10s.), Bradleigh (10s.), Westpenmead (10s.) and East Monkton (£1) were all recipients of the charity of the sacrist and the first prior.59 This spread of charitable responsibility between the obedientiaries extended to the pittancer who was responsible for the maintenance of Abbot Bere’s Almshouse which had been refounded on the site of St
John’s Hospital in 1512 for seven infirm women, and for which £6 13s. 4d. was allowed, while one of the three priors of the abbey, Robert Clerk, funded the maintenance of the paupers residing in St Patrick’s almshouses within the abbey to the cost of £15 3s. 4d. per annum. In all a sum of a little over £126 was listed as being expended between 12 obedientiaries on various types of charitable provision which comes close to the £140 16s. 8d. recorded (but not broken down) four years previously in the Valor.

Most other surviving almoners’ account rolls are from Benedictine houses, and while this can be partly attributed to the vagaries of archival survival it would seem that the administration of poor relief by designated officials was better organized at Benedictine houses than elsewhere. The management of greater amounts of alms was both a cause and effect of this organization.

Other orders would have been less likely to have an official whose main duty was to administer charity – there were no almoners at Cistercian houses. Instead, the duty for poor relief fell on the porter. The lack of regularized account-keeping by such porters could also have rendered Cistercian abbeys less able to display to the Valor commissioners the evidence of their charitable activity, thus making them appear less charitable in the record than in reality. The Trinitarian order is certainly not given any credit for its poor relief efforts by the commissioners – only Ingham Priory from among the seven investigated houses of the order is credited with distributing alms. This was despite the fact that by the later Middle Ages one of the main purposes of Trinitarian houses was to act as hospitals for the poor and the sick.

Hospital charity is also difficult to define from the Valor. In London the Savoy and St Katharine’s were caring for 124 sick and poor people between them at the Dissolution and yet the commissioners allowed no alms to be taken into consideration. And the hospital of St Mary outside Bishopsgate, despite housing 180 sick inmates, was allowed only £3 8s. 4d. in reprisals against alms from a net income of £504 12s. 11½d. Elsewhere, a more realistic allowance was recorded: the hospital attached to Newark College in Leicester was allowed in reprisal £206 18s 5d. for keeping 100 aged poor people.

Thus the total hospitals alms recorded in the Valor of £980 can barely constitute even a minimum figure. It actually works out at an average of about £20 per hospital, with an average alms-to-income proportion of 18.4 per cent. The total would be increased if the charitable provision had been taken into account at hospitals where no alms reprisals were given, and if the proportions of charity to income at other hospitals had been assessed on all the genuine poor relief being carried out in Tudor hospitals. At St Paul’s Hospital in Norwich the Valor lists the legitimate
charitable expenses against tax within the entry for the cathedral priory on which it was dependent. The sum of £28 7s. 1d. was for the ‘Power Sisters’ within the hospital and various other expenses which presumably were taken from an account roll similar to the last surviving internal roll of the hospital from 1510, which showed £15 7s. 8d. spent on the sisters and a little over £12 in charitable provision from the miscellaneous section. This figure constituted 71 per cent of the gross income that year, and while it would be misleading to reckon on such a proportion of income being spent on charitable provision at all hospitals, it is reasonable to assume that, even allowing for poorly administered institutions, most hospitals were spending more than 18.4 per cent of their net income before reprisals on various aspects of poor relief.

Variation in the extent of poor relief provision by urban/rural location

At least as important as the type of religious institution, in terms of the ability and the need to provide poor relief, was its location. Table 3 divides religious houses recorded in the Valor into urban/small-town and rural locations.

It is not surprising that urban houses supplied so much of the charitable provision recorded in the Valor. Not only were they the oldest and richest houses but they were an integral part of urban centres, where, whatever the general population trend, there was a rise in the numbers of the poor, most usually as a result of migration. From the beginning of the sixteenth century the secular authorities were increasingly concerned with this growth of the urban poor – not only were parliamentary statutes passed in an attempt to define and deal with the problem but local borough corporations began to tackle urban poverty in a series of new measures suggestive of a genuine upsurge in the numbers of the urban poor at this time. The London Corporation had imported corn to feed the poor in times of dearth since 1391, and from 1520 there was a
permanent store kept in a public granary, although this was only kept to ensure market prices were not made artificially high in times of dearth – the poor were never given corn from the store for free or even at a reduced price.\textsuperscript{75} The Corporation also attempted to control begging in the city by appointing surveyors from among the aldermen to differentiate between ‘Myghty vagabonds’ and the genuinely impotent – the former were to have collars fastened around their necks and to be beaten through the streets, while the latter were to be given tokens of white tin enabling them to beg legally. But these measures were essentially negative – the Corporation was still not taking any active measures to collect and distribute poor relief in the city.\textsuperscript{76}

In Norwich in 1531 the city aldermen passed a resolution that allowed certain licensed paupers to beg for alms and for a seal carrying and legend ‘\textsc{the cite of norwiche – impotent persons}’ to be given them for identification.\textsuperscript{77} The 50 persons deemed poor enough to beg were then named and listed by parish.\textsuperscript{78} That only 50 paupers could be found living in the city suggests that the Norwich aldermen were pinpointing only those resident poor who were either too old or too sick to consolidate an income and who had no relatives on whom they could rely. The record for Norwich in the \textit{Valor} demonstrates that there were certainly more than 50 paupers receiving charity from the two listed religious houses: the Cathedral Priory and St Giles’ Hospital.\textsuperscript{79} And the lack of any provision made by the city council even for the 50 people it had named as legitimate beggars shows that the onus of poor relief in Norwich was still very much on the religious houses. According to the \textit{Valor}, the Benedictine Cathedral Priory and St Giles’ Hospital distributed between them £45 7s. 0d. per annum to the poor of Norwich on a daily and weekly basis, as well as spending £103 15s. 10d. to keep paupers under their care and to board poor boys while giving them an education in the almonry.\textsuperscript{80} This sort of provision was considerable, but it had not increased over the previous two centuries, despite the exacerbation of the problem of urban poverty and the marked inflationary pressures of the 1520s and 1530s.\textsuperscript{81} This was a major problem not only in Norwich but for urban religious houses everywhere – they were attempting to stem the tide of urban poverty with very little help from the secular authorities and with an income that had remained virtually static for 200 years.\textsuperscript{82}

The need to cater for substantial numbers of the urban poor is reflected in the large sums some other urban houses reserved for poor relief. The massive annual provision of a little over £379 by Bury St Edmunds Abbey accounted for 18.6 per cent of the annual income before alms were reprised.\textsuperscript{83} This sum was administered at both the abbey itself and at its six dependent hospitals in the town. The abbey and these hospitals
obviously made the town a poor-relief centre for a wider catchment area, but most of the recipients of charity were probably the poor who had either been drawn to the town because of employment prospects or were native Bury poor who lived on intermittent wage labour in the town. They could also, of course, have been full-time beggars from within or without the town, but this is discussed further below. What is clear is that urban religious houses were recorded as reserving for poor relief a greater proportion of their income than their rural counterparts mainly because this was where the problem of poverty was most severe: so severe that by 1535 even the frequently large monastic provision was no longer enough to contain the problem.

The average provision made by rural houses was not as high as that of their urban counterparts. However, to average out the expenditure on poor relief at rural houses is somewhat misleading because there was wide variation in sums spent between houses, more so than in the towns. This could have been because the customs of certain rural houses in regard to alms-giving had been in place since the thirteenth century and had remained set until the sixteenth. The term ‘ex antiqua consuetudine’ is frequently used in the Valor to describe the charitable activities of rural houses but less often for urban houses. Rural monasteries had always been under less pressure to supply poor relief than urban houses and the need for increased charitable provision in certain areas of the countryside was either not felt or was genuinely absent. And yet at some rural houses, such as Whalley Abbey in Lancashire, the provision was very large indeed (£122 15s. 10d.), suggesting that some rural monasteries acted as welfare centres for wide catchment areas when there was an absence of towns and urban monasteries.

Variation in the extent of poor-relief provision by regional location

What, then, of the regional differences in the amount of monastic poor relief? Table 4 shows by county the total charitable provision of every religious house and hospital where the Valor records charitable provision. The table is further split between the southern and northern counties.

Evidently, counties with low numbers of observable houses with recorded charitable provision do not give satisfactorily representative county averages. But one regional difference that is clearly noticeable is the higher proportion of alms to income among the houses of the northern counties. Using the same OLS regression for these northern counties as for the data at national level, the mean percentage of charitable provision to income of all the houses (113 listed as supplying alms; 129 as not supplying alms) comes out at a predicted 9–10.8 per cent. This figure
### Table 4
Regional monastic charitable provision as recorded in the Valor Ecclesiasticus (monetary values to nearest pound)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>No. of houses</th>
<th>Net income (£)</th>
<th>Total alms (£)</th>
<th>Average alms per house (£)</th>
<th>Proportion of alms to income (%)*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>(a) Southern counties</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Somerset</td>
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<td>289</td>
<td>18</td>
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<td>269</td>
<td>17</td>
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</tr>
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<td>213</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7.2</td>
</tr>
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<td>452</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>282</td>
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<tr>
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<td>262</td>
<td>24</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northants.</td>
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<td>112</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3.5</td>
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<td>63</td>
<td>6</td>
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</tr>
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<td>82</td>
<td>10</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>133</td>
<td>19</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Hunts.</td>
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<td>61</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2.6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sussex</td>
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<td>83</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3.9</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bucks.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>661</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>335</td>
<td>6</td>
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</tr>
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<td>87</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>5.5</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>(b) Northern counties</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yorkshire</td>
<td>44</td>
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<td>761</td>
<td>17</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lincolnshire</td>
<td>16</td>
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<td>160</td>
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<td>Durham</td>
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<td>27</td>
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<td>79</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Cumbria</td>
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<td>965</td>
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<tr>
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<td>576</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>8.0</td>
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<td>Wales</td>
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<td>31</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4.8</td>
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<tr>
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<td>1</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3.7</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Proportion of net income before reprisal of alms to one decimal point.
would mean that a little over £3439–4126 was being provided in charitable provision among the 11 northern counties – a not inconsiderable amount considering that the total population of these counties could not have been much above 300,000 in 1535. Robert Aske was certainly keen to extol the poor-relief efforts of the northern monasteries when justifying the actions of those involved in the Pilgrimage of Grace after the suppression of the lesser religious houses in 1536. With such a vital sum of poor relief being expended by the northern religious, his point seems warranted. The southern counties predicted mean proportion of alms to income is 6.1–6.9 per cent (189 listed as supplying alms; 152 as not supplying alms). This still allows for a sum of £6382–7219 in various types of poor relief for a total population of c. 1 ½ million – proportionally not as generous as the northern houses, but still a substantial contribution in support of the poorest section of 1530s society.

Provision of poor relief in kind

Consumables provided by the money sums listed in the Valor must also be taken into consideration. It would seem that these actual cash sums for alms-provision were index-linked, and that the Valor record was listing the provision from the previous Michaelmas-to-Michaelmas accounts, 1533–1534. This would explain how, at Norwich Cathedral Priory, the monks were able to procure one quarter of wheat and 25 quarters of mixed grain for bread-making for the poor for £6 13s. 4d. when they would have had difficulty buying it for less than £10 at the higher 1535 prices. Where the Valor entries do record details of the amount of grain bought for bread-making the price is usually a little below 7s. per quarter for wheat and just under 5s. per quarter for mixed grain. The average price for rye is 9s. 1d. per quarter – a very high price which would agree with the high rye prices recorded in some parts of the country in 1532–1534. This evidence certainly points towards the sums spent on food in the Valor being year-specific when they are recorded as buying foodstuffs for distribution. The almoners’ accounts for Norwich do show fluctuations in the prices paid for grain in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, but also that the amounts of grain remained steady over series of decades. This suggests that monastic houses realized a certain quantifiable obligation of food-provision which was matched by index-spending.

This obligation did decrease at Norwich over the long term between the Black Death and the Dissolution as the economic climate produced a contraction in the priory’s land and rent incomes. The estimated figures for Norwich, taken from the account rolls, show that the priory provided
a yearly average of 44 quarters of grain at the end of the fifteenth century but that this had fallen to 24 quarters during the sixteenth century. The purchase figure in the Valor is for 26 quarters, meaning a distribution of about 6500 two-pound loaves of bread in outdoor relief, on top of the £10 worth of bread, fish, drink and money distributed on Maundy Thursday and the uncovenanted gifts and distributions of clothing and refectory food. Despite the reduction of charity since the fourteenth century, this was still urban poor relief on a significant scale.

Provision in kind usually came in five main varieties: bread, fish (usually herrings), beer, unprocessed grain and clothing. The Valor records 241 listed houses as making provision for some amount of food and drink on a regular basis. Daily and weekly distributions were often made in bread and beer, while the Maundy provision would consist of fish so as to conform to the liturgical requirements of Lent. This type of provision meant that monasteries were obliged to maintain storage and baking facilities for corn and malt for poor relief whilst providing an eleemosynary institution – of varying extent – which could form an almost autonomous part of the monastery at larger houses. The almonry complex in the south-west corner of the precinct of Norwich Cathedral Priory consisted of several buildings, a garden, a yard and a large granary which was still standing in 1701. The extra administration involved in providing this food and drink to the poor placed an extra burden on the resources of religious houses which is seldom taken into account when assessing their charitable provision. The maintenance of almonry buildings, salaries of staff and other costs involved in the preparation of food certainly found no place in the Valor but were all intrinsically vital to the efficient management of poor relief, and would not have been incurred had the religious house merely doled out appropriate cash sums to meet their testamentary obligations. Taking some sixteenth-century figures available from internal accounts, the annual cost to the almoner of maintaining an almonry as well as providing poor relief was £106 6s. 2½d. at Glastonbury (1538), £63 13s. 5½d. at Westminster (1529), £66 12s. 6½d. at Durham (1523) and £86 17s. 11½d. at Worcester (1523).

Provision of indoor-relief as shown by government records

The evidence from the Valor can be supplemented by a series of Crown visitation records from 1536. After the royal visitation of 1535–1536 which did so much to condemn the religious houses in the eyes of both contemporaries and later historians, and the ensuing Act of Suppression of the lesser houses, Cromwell instigated county commissions to report on the state of the houses about to be dissolved in terms of income
(correcting, if necessary, the 1535 valuation), repair of the buildings and the ‘good fame’ of the religious occupants.¹⁰⁸ These reports were largely conducted by the same commissioners and auditors who had been responsible for the Valor the previous year, many of whom were now members of the newly formed Court of Augmentations, and who were acting in the interests of Cromwell and the Court.¹⁰¹ Their positive testimonies as to the economic, physical and disciplinary state of the smaller religious houses are therefore important evidence in any interpretation of sixteenth-century monasticism.¹⁰² Fortunately, one of the instructions issued to the commissioners was to enquire into ‘the number of servants, hyndes, or other persones that have their levings in the same howses’, which was to include any child or adult living ‘of alms’ in the monastery.¹⁰³ From these returns 174 adult paupers (usually described as ‘impotent persons’) and poor children are listed as being sheltered between 67 houses.¹⁰⁴ Of the abbeys and priories where people living of alms were noticed by the 1536 commissioners, only three were reported to have had similar maintenance arrangements in the Valor: the Carthusian Charterhouse at Coventry, where 12 poor children were found (and not allowed as a reprisal against tax), Stanley Abbey in Wiltshire and Coford Priory in Norfolk.¹⁰⁵ The remaining 16 houses reported as providing sheltered accommodation for paupers and poor children were not credited as doing so in the Valor.

In Leicestershire, the Augustinian Ulverscroft Priory was described as standing ‘in a wilderness in Charnewood forest and refreshes many poor people and wayfaring people’. It also accommodated 14 poor children and ‘two old impotent persons having their living there by promise’.¹⁰⁶ If (as noted below) a subsistence rate of 1d. per day is assumed, then the canons must have been spending over £24 per annum in providing charitable accommodation, not to mention the cost of educating the children (not as novices but as almonry boys) and the quantities of refectory food which fed the travelling poor mentioned by the 1536 commissioners. The new net income at the time of the later commission was less than £2 more than its value in the Valor and so this £24 would increase the proportion of charitable provision to income at the priory from 1.9 per cent (from the £1 13s. 0d. allowed as alms in 1535) to 23.1 per cent.¹⁰⁷ Likewise, the Augustinian canonesses at Grace Dieu Priory were allowed only £2 as poor relief in reprisal against tax in the Valor and yet the 1536 commissioners reported ‘nine persons found of alms’ within the house – again increasing the potential proportion of alms to income from 2.1 per cent to 14.5 per cent.¹⁰⁸

In the Warwickshire Augustinian house of Arbury there were ‘six impotent persons and children found of alms’ at the suppression and yet
nothing had been said of them by the same commissioners in 1535. The same can be said of the 51 poor people maintained by five Norfolk monasteries which were not allowed to count such charity as tax reprisals in 1535, despite having virtually the same commissioners for both investigations. If we collate the values of poor relief from the Valor with all the monasteries recorded in the 1536 commission – including those which recorded no poor inmates – adding the potential cost of accommodating the poor as 1d. per person per day, then the total average proportionate percentage of charitable provision to income rises from 3.5 per cent to 7.6 per cent. This comes within the range of the figure arrived at via the OLS regression above, and suggests that religious houses of varying levels of income were providing amounts of relief of this order to the local communities of which they were a part.

But more than simply increasing the potential quantity of monastic poor relief these suppression commission reports demonstrate that, even at lesser houses with a net income below £200, there were likely to be significant numbers of poor children and adults receiving charity in the form of sheltered housing from the income of the religious, who would have constituted a noticeable burden on monastic resources. Accommodating and, in the case of the children, teaching these paupers seems to have been an obligation accepted as an effective means of charitable provision at many houses and yet in many cases the Valor does not record their presence.

This type of housing for the impotent poor was disbanded at the Dissolution. The earliest receivers’ accounts from the Court of Augmentations will sometimes reveal information about persons accommodated of alms at a monastery and also how they were dealt with by the Crown. At Wombridge Priory, Shropshire, the receiver’s account for 1536–1537 records a one-off payment of £6 8s. 4d. made to William Coventre and ‘four decrepid people’. The Valor commissioners did not mention any poor residents at Wombridge; they only recorded a Maundy payment of £2 13s. 4d. Presumably the sum paid by the receiver to William and the four poor residents was the minimum annual cost of their upkeep – it does work out at a penny per day allowing for an interim between the suppression and the new Augmentation account. So at this priory the probable pre-Dissolution charitable provision can be increased from £2 13s. 4d. to £9 1s. 8d. (as a proportion of alms to income: 3.9 per cent to 12.2 per cent). But it was a provision that ceased upon its dissolution in 1536. However, the paupers at Wombridge seem to have been lucky to receive their annual allowance in full. At Conishead Priory, Lancashire, the seven paupers accommodated at the house, and costing the canons £6 13s. 4d. 1535, were sent on their way with only 16s. 8d. between them by
the Augmentation receiver in 1536. At Newminster Abbey, Northumberland, the five resident poor boys were dispatched with a shilling each, which made them slightly better off than the two paupers at the small Cistercian nunnery at Sewardshley who were dispersed, along with ten servants, with the sum of 8s, 6d. between them. At Bury St Edmunds one of the resident paupers, Thomas Atkinson, was singled out for special treatment and included under a special section in the receiver’s account called ‘elemosina Domini Regis’, but was still only given a final payment of £1.

The poor who received rent concessions from Letheringham Priory, Suffolk, were more fortunate in that the receiver of the house continued the custom (costing £3 per annum), and at the Buckfast Abbey, Devon (where no alms were recorded in the Valor), there was an ongoing payment of £10. 8s. 0d. made to certain ‘charities’. But these were the exceptions – usually the Crown’s agents followed the advice of John Onley, attorney of the Court of Augmentations, when they had to deal with paupers residing in religious houses. They were to ‘give unto such persons some honest reward in money and some small stuff of household’, and that ‘if they see any great or urgent cause of pity or charity in any such persons that in such cases they should deal with them more largely by their discretions, but no yearly living to be allowed’. The government was taking over the religious houses and estates, but it was not taking over their social responsibilities. Servants discharged from monastic service could perhaps find alternative employment, but those who were too old, young, infirm or poor to look after themselves were suddenly faced with a world in which no substitute provision had been made at a time when unemployment, inflation and vagrancy were beginning to increase the poverty problem.

**Qualifying the Effectiveness of Monastic Poor Relief**

So were the religious houses providing a genuine social service to the poor, elderly and infirm, or were they merely propagating poverty by supplying indiscriminate charity? Were the religious, in their distributions, serving ‘the habits of indolence’ and ‘increasing tenfold the evils which they were designed to cure’? If we can assume that considerably more monastic income than has previously been allowed was being spent on poor relief, it is necessary to ask whether it was being effectively administered so as to provide provision for those members of society who were genuinely in most need of such aid. Only then can any constructive assessment be made as to the social welfare activities of the religious houses in the sixteenth century.
In order to make such an assessment it is necessary for the *Valor* to be supplemented with additional evidence which may allow for insights into the effectiveness or otherwise of monastic poor relief. These indices include discussions of the spatial elements of monastic almonries and the importance of restricted physical access to their interiors, the use of charity tokens to verify just claimants of relief, the timetabling of distributions, the attempts made to ensure that recipients of relief were indeed the deserving poor, and a further analysis of indoor relief at monasteries and hospitals. The quality of the upgraded quantity of monastic charitable provision can then be assessed.

Some anniversary doles at the larger monasteries could be very large-scale affairs—Sir Thomas More’s remark that he often had to ‘ryde another waye’ because of the vast press of poor people at the almonry outside the gates of Westminster Abbey gives some idea of crowd numbers at some anniversary distributions. The largest distribution here in the sixteenth century was for the anniversary of Queen Eleanor of Castile, when £20 was given to the poor at the almonry. This could have produced a crowd of some 3000 poor people in search of alms, and it is this sort of scene that has brought most criticism from historians who have seen the ‘casual doles’ inevitably given out at such occasions as contributing to inefficient poor relief and even the perpetuation of poverty. Such relief could not, it is argued, have discriminated between the genuine needy and the sturdy beggars who had mastered the timing of the anniversary calendars. But the spatial elements of almonry courtyards and the part they would have played in the manipulation of distribution claimants have seldom (if ever) been mentioned in this context. Such spaces could be inside or outside the monastery gate but, either way, entrance to the area where alms were distributed was controlled by restricting the number of claimants at any one time.

At Ely Cathedral Priory entrance to the enclosed almonry courtyard was via a single gate, the *Porta Monachorum*, where access could be tightly controlled to ensure that alms were only distributed to those indigents selected, as well as reducing the possibility of multiple applications. At Glastonbury Abbey an agreement between the abbot and the convent as early as 1335 had outlined the new arrangements for charitable provision at the abbey and the realignment of the almonry complex inside the west gate. This arrangement survived until the Dissolution and demonstrates the monks’ concern to ensure that the three main buildings of the almonry (main hall, granary and oven/stable block) were adequately sectioned off from the main west-gate entranceway. Any claimants of alms would have first to make their way through the west gate and then through a single gateway into the almonry-hall yard in order to claim poor relief.
At Westminster Abbey, St Augustine’s Abbey, Canterbury, and Canterbury Cathedral Priory the almonry complexes were external to the main precincts but the potentially large numbers of the poor would still have had to be cordoned off into access-controlled areas before receiving any distribution – their behaviour also being controlled by *virgatores* employed by the monks.\(^1\) That alms-seekers at Westminster were dealt with *within* the almonry precinct is demonstrated by the explicit instructions in an agreement between Henry VII and the abbot, which ordered a weekly dole in his own remembrance, where indigents were to be relieved within the precinct.\(^2\) They would also have had to seek access to the almonry through the narrow gateway called St Ann’s Stile, where a ‘turnstile system’ could have been in operation.\(^3\) Very few almonry sites from lesser monasteries allow for any spatial reconstruction, but where excavation has been carried out, as at Thornholme Priory in Lincolnshire, the same priorities of access-control to an enclosed courtyard area can be noticed.\(^4\)

Claimants were also almost certainly carrying tokens of some kind, such as those mentioned at Norwich. Such tokens were used on the Continent where they were distributed by confraternities in Italy to the deserving poor as tickets for charity when it was distributed. And in the Low Countries there are examples of charity tokens which came to be used as monetary tokens.\(^5\) In England the royal almoner seems to have distributed tokens of tin to legitimate paupers at least as early as 1240, a necessary action considering the large numbers of the poor liable to be relieved by the royal household.\(^6\) To what extent token coinage was used by English monasteries as a ticket system is impossible to say but the *plumbeos Anglia* \(^7\) mentioned by Erasmus, and found in relatively large quantities in the south of England, were as likely to have been charity tokens, similar to those on the Continent, as trading tokens which were usually specifically marked as such.\(^8\) There is also evidence in the *Valor* for the use of some kind of signifying badge or token for the poor expecting alms. At Aconbury Priory in Herefordshire 5s. 6d. was given to 11 paupers with *sigulla*, implying that whatever these were they had been handed out to the 11 paupers before the collection of alms to identify them as deserving recipients.\(^9\)

Maundy Thursday was the traditional day in the Christian calendar for dispersing charity to the poor in recognition of their position as representatives of Christ’s poverty.\(^10\) The *Valor* commissioners for Warwickshire also recorded the ritual feet-washing on this day, something which almost certainly happened country-wide.\(^11\) This symbolic act by the religious gives another insight into the actuality of alms-giving days such as the Maundy: the idea of a free-for-all attended by anyone willing
to feign illness or poverty for a loaf of bread or a penny needs to be
tempered by the serious religious intent of an occasion when defilement of
the principles of Christian charity by undeserving recipients was to be
avoided if possible. 138

Other distributions were often carried out on the anniversaries of
benefactors. The Valor records that the benefactors’ grants of deed
frequently stipulated that it was only to be the local poor who were to
receive relief. At Evesham Abbey, for example, it was a confirming charter
that allowed £5 17s. 4d. specifically for the ‘poor and infirm of the town
of Evesham’, while at Coventry Charterhouse £14 10s. 0d. was set aside
for paupers living in or near the city. At Milton Abbey, Dorset, as much
as £42 8s. 8d. out of a total provision of £51 16s. 0d. was set aside for
‘pauperibus ville de Myddelton’. 139 In all, some 26 entries in the Valor
mention specific concern for the local poor, while a further 47 houses are
credited with responsibilities specifically in owned manors or the parishes
of appropriated rectories. 140 The most complete provision with regard to
the latter was at Athelney Abbey, Somerset, where all the charitable
provision of £31 7s. 4d. was dispersed amongst seven of its manors rather
than at the monastery. 141

This regard for the local poor was following the precepts laid down in
the monastic constitutions of Lanfranc, where monastic almoners and
their staff were expected to be familiar with the numbers of the poor and
sick in the vicinity of each house, and to visit them if they were unable to
make it to the almonry. 142 Later Benedictine customaries mirrored
Lanfranc’s words – at Westminster Abbey, the local poor and sick were to
be sought out and to receive appropriate charity, 143 implying the
importance placed on a system which identified and catered for the
resident poor in much the same way that borough corporations were to do
later in the sixteenth century. 144 This attitude is mirrored by the survival
of a series of post-Dissolution paper lists from the New Foundation which
survive for the period 1551–1555, and which list 39 people eligible for the
distribution of poor relief on a weekly basis. 145 This is evidently the same
distribution as that set up by 1503, for the same number of poor people,
as part of the endowment of Henry VII’s anniversary and which is
recorded in the wardens’ accounts until the last surviving accompt in
1533. 146

These lists are of particular interest, first, because they state explicitly
that the distributions were still taking place in the ‘Almery’, and secondly,
because there is a small but constant turnover of names on the lists – of
the order of about 15 per cent each week. This suggests the continuation
of a pre-Dissolution procedure under the administration of the New
Foundation at Westminster, which also suggests that the provision of
relief to the local poor was being adequately managed from the almonry so as to provide allowances which were reviewed each week. It insinuates that first the almoner, then a collegiate prebend, were adapting their resources to meet the seasonal-cycles of poverty experienced by the poorest sections of the Westminster town community – a section who were evidently known to the almoner/prebend or his officials. It is the type of link between pre- and post-Reformation methods of poor relief that has already been noticed by J. J. Scarisbrick, and suggests a continuation of the methods of ecclesiastically funded relief where religious houses were allowed to continue as reformed corporations.\textsuperscript{147} It also implies that there was perhaps a minimal difference between the methods of ecclesiastical and secular poor relief, or between Catholic and Protestant approaches to charitable provision.\textsuperscript{148}

The most common form of outdoor relief recorded in the \textit{Valor} also took place on a daily or weekly basis, when smaller amounts were given to more limited numbers of the poor. This type of provision had the potential to be a more effective agent of poor relief where the resident poor could be helped by amounts which were small enough not to make them reliant on charity but adequate to help them survive either illness or temporary life-cycle poverty.\textsuperscript{149} The Warwickshire entries demonstrate this continual charitable supplement made available to the poor. In Coventry, St John’s Hospital and the Charterhouse provided daily and weekly, as well as annual, distributions. The Carthusians accounted for £14 10s. 0d. per annum to be distributed on a weekly basis – that is about 4s. 8d. per week.\textsuperscript{150} As mentioned, this sum was specifically set aside for the poor of Coventry and so it would have been possible for 56 claimants to receive 1d. each or enough bread for themselves for several days. At Nuneaton Priory, the Benedictine nuns specified the number of paupers to be relieved each week as 7, who would receive either 1d. or 2d. each.\textsuperscript{151} The weekly distributions at rural monasteries in the county probably provided each indigent with a similar amount, and so whereas a larger monastery such as the Augustinian abbey at Kenilworth may have provided weekly relief for up to 50 paupers from its annual provision of £10 8s. 0d., smaller houses like the Cistercian Stoneleigh Priory, with an annual provision of £5 7s. 8d., would have been dealing with half these numbers.\textsuperscript{152} And at Polesworth Abbey no more than 6 claimants could have received the weekly charity from the nuns.\textsuperscript{153}

However, as discussed above, monastic charitable provision also consisted of indoor relief – that is, caring for the poor, aged and infirm within their almonries or lay hospitals. The 49 hospitals listed in the \textit{Valor} as providing poor relief are the most obvious religious establishments catering for vulnerable members of the community within their walls.
Some were evidently more efficient than others, so while the mayor and aldermen of London petitioned the king in 1538 to save from Dissolution the hospitals of St Mary’s without Bishopsgate, St Thomas’ and St Bartholomew’s because of their good works, the author of The Complaynt of Roderyck Mors summed up the situation at some less well administered hospitals: ‘I heare that the masters of your hospytals be so fatt that the poore be kept leane and bare enough.’ But in towns where hospitals were doomed to suppression because of their integral monastic financing, such as Bury St Edmunds, the cessation of their provision without replacement at the Dissolution clearly caused a dramatic poverty problem. The townspeople, who had not always had such a good relationship with the abbey, were soon made aware of the severity of the problem and felt the need to petition the king in 1545. Apparently there was not any hospytall or other lyke foundacion for the conforte or relieffe of the pouer of whiche there is an excedinge greate nombre wythin the seide towne. Other there arre after afoymentionid of whiche the seid Incumbente [the receiver] doo nowe take the hoole yearly returns and profitte and distribute no parte thereof to the ayde, conforte or relieffe of the seid pouer people. In consideracyon wherof yt maye please the kinges seid moste excellent maiestie of his moste charytable benygnitie moved wyth myrsie in that behalf to converte the returnes and profyttes of the sume of the seid promocions in to sume godly foundacyon whearby the seide pouer inhabitantes dayly theare moultiplyeng maye be releved.

But, as discussed in quantifiable terms above, it is also apparent from the Valor and visitation reports that monasteries, apart from the hospitals, were fulfilling the housing needs of the impotent poor. The Valor listed 35 houses providing full-time charitable provision in the form of sheltered accommodation for varying numbers of poor people. Often the number would be an apostolic 12 or 13 paupers listed as residing in a monastery, as at Canterbury Cathedral Priory, Wilton Abbey and Coxford Priory. At Barlings Abbey in Lincolnshire the 13 paupers were even listed by name, disclosing that there were four married couples amongst them. This suggests that they were local landless pensioners who had no-one else to look after them and so were allocated bed and board in the almonry. The average provision for these poor inmates allowed for a penny each per day, always calculated over a year. At Wilton Abbey the nuns evidently reckoned on this as their provision of £19 10s. 0d. meant an allocation of almost exactly a penny per day to keep 13 paupers. The 3 named paupers kept in the almonry at Thornholme were somewhat better off, being allowed 1½d. per day, while the single pauper kept by the upper-class nuns at Lacock Abbey had the elaborate allowance of 2¼d. per day.

At some other houses the sheltered inmates were not so well provided for and so they must have been able either to share in the regular weekly
and occasional distributions of charity or, more probably, to receive much of the broken meats from the conventual refectory, as was the case at Durham where the poor boys of the almonry were fed from the monks’ mensae. The 7 paupers at Haughmond Abbey, for instance, were only allocated 4½d. between them per day, while the 12 almsmen at Canterbury received 9d. per day between them. These sums were sometimes specified as being only for their subsistence and it is reasonable to assume that this was the case with the values given at the other houses where the poor were recorded as being accommodated.

If it is allowed that the Valor was only partially recording the numbers of old and sick people, as well as those suffering life-cycle poverty, who were housed within monasteries – as suggested by the 1536 visitation reports – then it would seem reasonable to assume that monastic charitable provision in the 1530s constituted a considerable social service of sheltered housing as well as poor relief in the form of distributions in money and in kind.

The cessation of monastic charity at the Dissolution must have had considerable social repercussions. In the rural north, its removal was an intrinsic complaint of the leaders of the Northern Risings in 1536 while the generally anti-monastic author of The Complaynt of Roderyck Mors, writing in 1542, conceded that ‘now that all the abbeyes, with their londes, goodes, and improperd personages, be in temporal mennys handes, I do not heare tell that one halpeny worth of almes or any other profight cometh unto the peple of those parisshes’. And the writer of a petition to the king in c. 1538 warned that:

The time lag between Dissolution and the replacement of monastic poor relief with local provision created a lacuna which was recognized by contemporaries and forced the government to take such drastic measures to curb the problem of vagrancy as introducing slavery for recalcitrant beggars. But it was not until the 1550s that many local authorities introduced compulsory poor rates and not until the legislation of 1572 that the secular authorities were able to begin to introduce a compulsory rate to replace the kind of levels of poor relief attained by the monasteries.

Monastic charitable provision can no longer be characterized exclusively as an inefficient system whereby too little was given in too indiscriminate
a manner. The religious houses were not a single unit offering a centrally controlled structure of poor relief. However, in many localities in England they were the institutions providing the most substantial amount of alms, using the most controlled methods available to them. The evidence from the Valor demonstrates that, in the sixteenth century, many houses were still providing genuinely beneficial outdoor and indoor poor relief which favoured the local resident poor and which was administered in such a way as to limit the amount given to transient vagrants. The additional evidence from both contemporary internal monastic records and from the central-government-generated archives confirms this view and increases the overall amounts of poor relief as well as the proportional amounts expended by the religious. But during the early sixteenth century increasing population and the socio-economic dislocations of the later Middle Ages brought about such an increase in the numbers of landless, and often jobless, men and women that the system of monastic poor relief began to feel the strain of escalating poverty. Static or even diminishing income at a time of increasing inflation meant that a system which had been operated by the monasteries for centuries no longer had the resources to provide enough relief. Even if the Dissolution had never happened, the religious houses would still have eventually needed help from the secular authorities to deal with the problem, because it had begun to take on a new dimension and required the kind of administrative infrastructure to control it which only government could provide.

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ENDNOTES

1 William Ashley, An introduction to English economic history and theory (London, 1st edn 1893; 4th edn 1925), part 2, 312.


36


18 Savine, _English monasteries_, 239. Those explicitly accepting Savine’s figures include Snape, _English monastic finances_, 115 (with incorrect page reference to Savine); Webb and Webb, _Poor law history_, 17; Baskerville, _English monks_, 31; Mellows and King eds., _Book of William Morton, xxvii_; Jordan, _Philanthropy in England_, 59; Dickens, _English Reformation_, 56; Woodward, _Dissolution of the monasteries_, 21–3; Christopher Haigh, _The last days of the Lancashire monasteries and the Pilgrimage of Grace_ (Manchester, 1969), 53–4; Jones, _Tudor Commonwealth_, 118; Youings, _Sixteenth-century England_, 256; Dyer, _Standards of living_, 240–1.


20 As in notes 16 and 18, above.


22 The _Valor Ecclesiasticus_ is held in the Public Record Office (hereafter PRO) under the class mark PRO E 344/1–E 344/26. The instructions to the commissioners are at E 344/1, fol. 1. The English and Welsh returns are printed in _Valor Ecclesiasticus temp. Henry VIII, auctoritate regia institutis_, ed. J. Caley and J. Hunter, 6 vols. (London, Record Commission, 1810–1834) (hereafter _Valor_).

23 All my calculations of alms as a percentage of income first take off from gross income the rents, stipends and pensions allowed as reprisals by the commissioners. Then, before subtracting the alms, the percentage is obtained. This method allows for a percentage outlay on poor relief from the (at least potentially) real income of the monasteries and hospitals, rather than the crude gross income as calculated by Savine; see below.

24 Knowles, _Religious orders_, III, 244–53 and 264–5, contains perceptive comments on the uses of the _Valor_ as evidence of both the economic condition of the monasteries in 1535 and the amounts of charity they were dispersing.

25 _Valor_, I, 147.


27 The commissioners’ returns for Berkshire, Cambridgeshire, Essex, Hertfordshire, Northumberland and Rutland (as well as for parts of Yorkshire) are not extant and so the printed version of the _Valor_ includes their net income only, with no other details, from the surviving condensed Exchequer digest of the survey called _Liber Valorum_ (PRO E 344/26–8); Savine, _English monasteries_, 23–5. These 73 houses are thus not used as data in the regression-analysis prediction discussed below. The Hampshire returns (apart from Winchester Cathedral Priory, _Valor_, VI, vi–x) do not specify
reprisals but do give both gross and net income and have thus been included in the regression; see *Valor*, II, 4–26.


29 However, it should be noted that 51 houses with annual net incomes in the *Valor* of less than £50 were providing at least some provision; 29 were small hospitals providing extremely limited services, but typical of the small monasteries complying with benefactors’ wishes in terms of charitable relief was the Augustinian Beeston Priory in Norfolk where from an annual net income of £43 2s. 4½d., £2 13s. 4d. (5.8 per cent before reprisal of alms) was given to the poor in victuals and clothing (*Valor*, III, 351).

30 *Valor*, II, 381–3.


34 *Letters and papers*, IX, no. 383, Bishop of Bath to Cromwell (my italics).

35 For example, the case of Reynold Lytylprow, *Letters and papers*, VIII, nos. 318, 413, 421 and 521. See also Savine, *English monasteries*, 5–14.


38 The Devon entries are at *Valor*, II, 301–84.

39 *Valor*, II, 301 and 315.

40 *Valor*, II, 305.

41 Savine, *English monasteries*, 22–3. These Exchequer amendments are retained in italics in the published *Valor*.


46 The fullest discussion of this aspect of monastic charity is in Harvey, *Living and dying*, 9–16.

47 This is my calculation of total monastic net income from the *Valor* (inclusive of all houses), to which the £5218 in known reprised alms has been added before making the calculation. It should be noted that Savine (*English monasteries*, 98) gives the total monastic income in the *Valor* as £136,362, a figure which excludes most hospitals.

48 The allowance made for the low incomes of houses with net incomes under £50 meant that their inclusion in the regression had minimal effect on the results, but was justified so as to allow for those houses with incomes under £50 which were providing alms according to the *Valor*, of which there were 51. See note 29, above.

6.9–7.9 per cent of \[(\text{Total monastic/hospital income}) \times 142,834 + (\text{recorded alms}) \times 5218\] £148,052.

Beier, *Problem of the poor*, 19–20. Beier’s figures are based on a gross monastic income of £180,000, with the proportion spent on poor relief at 6.25 per cent (this percentage should actually be 6.4 per cent).

The net-income variable is vital to the regression. The generally low levels of reprisals allowed by the commissioners against the gross income of the religious houses and hospitals for indentured rents, stipends, pensions and of course alms means that the total net income is considerably higher than it should be. See above.


PRO SC6 Henry VIII 3118, fols. 14–16.


PRO SC6 Henry VIII 3118, fols. 1–3 (sacrist); fol. 16 (sub-almoner).

PRO SC6 Henry VIII 3118, fols. 3 and 6.

PRO SC6 Henry VIII 3118, fol. 9.

The account roll of the household of Abbot Richard Whiting is not extant, and may have contained extra provision. A general discussion of the rolls can be found in A. Watkin, ‘Glastonbury, 1538–9, as shown by its Account Rolls’, *Downside Review* 67 (1948–1949), 437–50.

For an account of the administration of an almoner’s office see Mellows and King eds., *Book of William Morton*, xvii–xxxix.

The rule for alms to be distributed at the abbey gate by a porter is sanctioned in *Statuta capitularum generalium ordinis Cisterciensis ab anno 1116 ad annum 1786*, ed. J. M. Canivez, 8 vols. (Louvain, 1933–1941), I, 93, no. 13; I, 99, no. 13; II, 31, no. 4. There is no evidence for any Cistercian house having had an almoner official or an almonry building and so it must be presumed that this constitution held until the Dissolution. The thirteenth-century formulary of Pontigny certainly presumed this to be the case; see L. J. Lekai, *The Cistercians: ideal and reality* (Kent (USA), 1977), 383. For a rare account of poor relief by the porter at a Cistercian house (from the late thirteenth century) see *The account book of Beaulieu Abbey*, ed. S. F. Hockey, Camden Society 4th series, 16 (London, 1975), 32–3 and 172–7.

This could of course have been due to a genuine Cistercian parsimoniousness, as was the (far from neutral) opinion of Walter Map, in *De nugis curialium: courtier’s trifles*, ed. and trans. M. R. James, rev. C. N. L. Brooke and R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford, 1983), 98–100.


*Victoria County History: London*, vol. I (London, 1909), 546 and 528; *Valor*, I, 358–9 and 386. However, at the Savoy expenditure on medicines for the sick was reprised.

*Victoria County History: London*, I, 533; *Valor*, I, 400–2.

70 Valor, III, 287.  
71 Norfolk Record Office, Norwich, DCN 2/5/7; Rawcliffe, Hospitals of medieval Norwich, 60–89.  
72 Rawcliffe’s Medicine for the soul, is the definitive study of St Giles’ Hospital, Norwich, which expands into an interpretation of the national situation. Chapter 3 is particularly useful for understanding the management of hospital finances in the face of the socio-economic changes of the later Middle Ages.  
76 Leonard, Early History, 25–6. See also W. J. Courtenay, ‘Token coinage and the administration of poor relief during the later Middle Ages’, Journal of Interdisciplinary History 3 (1972–1973), 275–95, for the suggestion that some tokens given to the poor were used as credit. Also see below.  
78 Records of Norwich, 161–2.  
79 Valor, III, 284–92. Perhaps the figure was already approaching the estimated 22 per cent of the city’s population recorded as living in poverty in a census of the poor in 1570; see The Norwich census of the poor 1570, ed. J. F. Pound, Norfolk Record Society, 40, (London, 1971), 107.  
80 Valor, III, 287 and 292.  
83 Valor, III, 459–65. Charitable provision was assigned to seven monastic officials including the abbot.  
84 For example, three rural houses in Surrey – Newark Priory, Waverley Abbey and Merton Priory – all distribute money ‘ex antiqua consuetudine’ with no other explanation; Valor, II, 34 (Newark); 35 (Waverly); 50 (Merton).  
85 Valor, V, 227–30; Snape (English monastic finances, 115, n. 1) suggested that the Whalley bursar’s rolls for 1527 constituted the entire income and expenditure of the abbey and went on to calculate the proportion of charitable provision at the abbey as 2.25 per cent. But this was not correct, and the Valor entry just eight years later shows 27.64 per cent of the net income, before alms were reprised, being devoted to outdoor and indoor poor relief.  
86 As noticed by Haigh, Last days of the Lancashire monasteries, 53–4; Haigh, Reformation and resistance, 120–1.  
87 The total population of England at the Lay Subsidies of 1525 is estimated as c. 2 million. The northern counties could have accounted for no more than 15 per cent of this; see Julian Cornwell, ‘English population in the early sixteenth century’, Economic History Review 23 (1970), 32–44; and Bruce M. S. Campbell, ‘The population of early Tudor
89 *Valor*, III, 287.
91 Grain is the only commodity from which prices can be calculated from the *Valor*. There is not enough evidence to aggregate prices of clothing, livestock for meat or fish. Besides, these were far less liable to annual price fluctuations. See Rogers, *Agriculture and prices*, IV, 540–4 and 583–8; *Agrarian history of England and Wales*, IV, 628–29, 818, 842 and 848.
96 *Valor*, III, 287; Dyer, *Standards of living*, 57.
98 PRO SC 6 Henry VIII, 3118, fols. 14–16; Westminster Abbey Muniments (hereafter WAM), 19143 (this does not include the expenses of the sub-almoner); *Extracts from the account rolls of the abbey of Durham*, ed. J. Fowler, Surtees Society, 99 (Durham, 1898), 254–7; *Accounts of the priory of Worcester for the Year 13–14 Henry VIII*, ed. J. M. Wilson, Worcestershire Historical Society, 21 (London, 1907), 9–13 (not including the expenses of resolute rents and decayed rents).
102 All the known extant reports have been printed in full or in summary: F. A. Gasquet, ‘Overlooked testimonies to the character of the English monasteries on the eve of the suppression’, *The Dublin Review* 114 (1894), 245–77 (see pp. 260–77) for Norfolk, Hampshire, Wiltshire and Gloucestershire; *Letters and papers*, X, no. 1191 for Leicestershire, Warwickshire, Rutland, Huntingdonshire and Lancashire; *Letters and papers*, XI, Appendix 2 for Sussex.
103 Gasquet, ‘Overlooked testimonies’, 260; Joyce Youings (*The Dissolution of the monasteries* (London, 1971), 160–3) prints a full version of the instructions, as issued to the commissioners in Llandaff, Wales.
104 Discounting the five Lancashire houses where people kept of alms were not differentiated from servants.
105 *Valor*, III, 54; *Letters and papers*, X, no. 1191, 498 (Coventry); *Valor*, III, 370; Gasquet, ‘Overlooked testimonies’, 264 (Coxford); *Valor*, II, 115; Gasquet, ‘Overlooked testimonies’, 273 (Stanley). Although at Coxford the *Valor* reported 12 paupers while
the 1536 commission reported 3 children and 14 ‘almes folk’, and at Stanley the Valor reported only 3 (named) paupers whereas in 1536 7 were reported.

106 Letters and papers, X, no. 1191, 496.
107 Valor, IV, 175. The Valor has the incorrectly totalled figure of £1 5s. 0d. in alms.
108 Letters and papers, X, no. 1191, p. 497; Valor, IV, 175.
109 Letters and papers, X, no. 1191, p. 497; Valor, III, 56.
110 These Norfolk monasteries were Buckenham Priory (8 children), Thetford Priory (4 children), Pentney cum Wormgay Priory (30 children and poor servants), Bromholme Priory (3 paupers) and Beeston Priory (6 children); see Gasquet, ‘Overlooked testimonies’, 262–7; Valor, III, 312–96.
111 Excluding Lancashire, see note 104, above.
113 Youings, Dissolution of the monasteries, 104–9.
114 PRO E 315/278, fol. 28.
115 Valor, III, 195.
116 PRO DL 29/2313, fol. 11.
117 PRO SC 6 Henry VIII 7371, fol. 4 dorso.
118 PRO E 315/278, fol. 116.
119 PRO SC 6 Henry VIII 7438, fol. 16.
120 PRO SP 5/3, fol. 5.
121 Youings, Dissolution of the monasteries, 218.
122 Youings, Dissolution of the monasteries, 52, from a letter from Olney to the commissioners of the Duchy of Lancaster (my italics).
123 The words are from Nicholls, English poor law, I, 127.
125 Harvey, Living and dying, 28–9.
126 T. D. Atkinson, An architectural history of the Benedictine monastery of St Etheldreda at Ely (Cambridge, 1933), with accompanying portfolio of plans, pp. 149–1 and sheet A.
129 Calendar of Close Rolls, Henry VII, 1500–1509 (London, 1963), 143.
130 See the diagrammatic plan of the almonry site in Rosser, Medieval Westminster, 70. A deed of the immediate post-Dissolution period demonstrates that the entranceway of St Ann’s Stile was less than ten feet wide (WAM, 36420).
133 Courtenay, ‘Token coinage’, 279–80, for the writing of the Dominican friar Richard Fishacre, who used the analogy of royal tokens to the poor to make a theological point on the distinctions between the sacraments of the Old and New Testaments. The royal
almoner would certainly have needed such a token system to distribute the copious amounts of royal alms at this period; see H. Johnstone, ‘Poor relief in the royal households of thirteenth-century England’, *Speculum* 4 (1929), 149–67, and A. Taylor, ‘Royal alms and oblations in the later 13th century’, in Tribute to an antiquary: essays presented to Marc Fitch by some of his friends, ed. F. Emmison and R. Stephens (London, 1976), 93–125.


135 *Valor*, III, 18. The distribution was on Maundy Thursday.


139 *Valor*, III, 254 (Evesham); *Valor*, III, 54 (Coventry); *Valor*, I, 251–2 (Milton).

140 Most of these were recorded at southern houses.


143 Customary of the Benedictine monasteries of Saint Augustine, Canterbury, and Saint Peter, Westminster, ed. Sir E. M. Thompson, Henry Bradshaw Society, 23 and 28, 2 vols. (London, 1902–1904), II, 178. The customary reads: ‘si oportunum est, sibi perquirat, aut per veracem famulum cum multa solicitudine perquiri faciat, ubi egri et debiles circa monasterium jaceant, qui non habeant unde se sustentare valeant’ (‘if there is opportunity, he [the almoner], or reliable members of his household, should search with great diligence the area around the abbey where the old and sick are housed, and who do not have the means with which to sustain themselves’).


145 WAM, 37462–37547. The fact that they were paper lists rather than the parchment used for more formal accounts suggests that they were only meant as rough working copies, and that their survival is merely fortuitous.

146 WAM, 24236–24250. WAM, 5374 is another paper account listed in the Westminster Muniment Room index as temp. Henry VII, but which is in fact shown to be another post-Dissolution list by its designation of the distribution being given on ‘the tenth Sunday after Michaelmas’. A pre-Reformation designation would have certainly specified a saint’s day closer to the second Sunday in December. I am grateful to Barbara Harvey for making me aware of this.

147 Scarisbrick, *Reformation of the English people*, 52.

148 A large subject in itself, and beyond the scope of this paper, but see Brian Pullan, ‘Catholics and the poor in early modern Europe’, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 26 (1976), 15–34, for an insightful introduction to the issues. See also Heal, *Hospitality in early modern England*, 257–69.
150 Valor, III, 54.
151 Valor, III, 77.
152 Valor, III, 66 (Kenilworth); Valor, III, 68 (Stoneleigh).
153 Valor, III, 78. From an annual provision of £1 6s. 0d.
154 Leonard, Early history, 27–8. These three hospitals had between them beds for 260 people.
156 The petition is attached to the chantry certificates 1544–1545 from the town, PRO E 301/45, fol. 8 dorso.
157 Valor, I, 16 (Canterbury); Valor, II, 112 (Wilton); Valor, III, 370 (Coxford).
158 Valor, IV, 131.
159 Valor, II, 112.
162 Valor, III, 193 (Haughmond); Valor, I, 16 (Canterbury).
163 As at Maxstoke Priory (Valor, III, 73).
164 Slack, Poverty and policy, 13; Jones, Tudor Commonwealth, 118–19.
166 Complaynt of Roderyck Mors, 33.
169 Slack, Poverty and policy, 13 and 118–26; Beier, Problem of the poor, 23–9.