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SAMANTHA A. SHAVE, *Pauper Policies: Poor Law Practice in England, 1780-1850*,
Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017. ISBN 978 0 7190 8963 3, £75.00.

Paupers' experiences have rightly been emphasised in recent scholarship on the old and new poor laws, in reaction to the overly administrative focus of what went before. In Samantha Shave's new book, the spotlight is turned back on to local and central government processes. But in contrast to the admin-heavy approaches of the Webbs onwards, the book aims to show that the ways policies were formed and implemented had direct impacts on the relief given to the poor, and so the policy process should not be ignored. It therefore underlines the importance of understanding the mechanisms by which relief practices were shaped.

Shave takes a 'policy process' approach, describing the feedback loop of policy-making and implementation through stages of identifying problems, developing and applying intended solutions, and then in turn evaluating those to identify and remedy problems. This social science approach is worthwhile as it takes in all levels of government. The topics Shave examines cover a wide range of policy expression: Enabling acts of Parliament, in the form of Gilbert's and Sturges Bourne's acts; the local development of knowledge networks by administrators on the ground before and after 1834; and government action arising from two scandals in the early years of the new poor law. The geographic focus is rural southern England, partly because, as Shave points out, that region most worried the Royal Commissioners of 1832. Much of our understanding of relief in the south is based on Kent, so this book's extension into Wessex adds welcome complexity to the regional picture.

Chapters two and three, on Gilbert's and Sturges Bourne's acts respectively, show the remarkable variety of solutions reached by communities to address local problems. Gilbert's act (1782) enabled parishes to form unions and to build workhouses – work being key – for

the able-bodied unemployed. Sturges Bourne's acts (1818 and 1819) provided a framework for parishes to appoint select vestries and assistant overseers, and to enquire into claimants' 'character and conduct'. Parishes could also buy land on which to put paupers to work, build workhouses, and collaborate with neighbouring parishes. Shave's detailed archive work shows that many more parishes than hitherto thought adopted the provisions of one or other of these acts. The policy development cycle is complicated by the large number of what would now be called 'stakeholders': not simply legislators but local ratepayers, directors of the poor, select vestrymen, overseers, contractors and 'farmers' of the poor, medics, clergy, landowners and magistrates who could promote or hinder the will of the vestries. Shave deals with this multiplicity with care and clarity. The voices of the poor do not feature heavily, and the argument is that we must acknowledge the different power loci of claimants and administrators: Though claimants had a role in developing policy, their positions must be contextualised in administrative processes.

Chapter four examines how local actors exchanged knowledge about relief practices and organisation, and thereby developed policy. Channels included correspondence, visits, employment mobility, publications from officials' handbooks to pamphlets, and – from 1834 onwards – the Poor Law Commission's assistant commissioners, circulars and annual reports. The longstanding communication between local officials continued under the new system, as guardians discussed procurement, relief practices, dietaries and wages, to name but a few. The point is to show that 'the implementation of the New Poor Law was not simply a top-down process' (182), as local administrators continued to shape their practices through horizontal as well as vertical communication. The development of the new poor law itself has had plenty of attention from historians, and Shave does not attempt to reassess it, but instead shows how the local and national were intertwined through the policy process.

Chapter five focuses on two adverse events seized upon by opponents of the new poor law. Failures in medical provision led to deaths in Bridgwater union in 1836, but it was nearly two years before a central policy response. In 1844-5, public disgust at abuses in Andover led to bone-crushing by paupers eventually being banned in all unions. The convolutions of the Poor Law Commission in responding to these events are examined closely, and the role of external scrutiny on points of strain in the policy process is vividly illustrated. Shave hints at the siege mentality characterising the Commission – forcefully expressing its will when it could, but simultaneously paralysed with worry about imposing it on unruly unions.

This well-written book will appeal to any with an interest in the poor laws, whether they have a top-down or bottom-up approach. By rehabilitating poor law policy development, dissemination and implementation as worthwhile objects of study, Shave shows the continued importance of the local in shaping the relief environments which paupers experienced.

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