9 Evolving boundaries

The support systems and cycles of gifts that are the focus of this book were for the most part maintained outside the purview of state institutions, legal developments or the marketplace. They involved the exchange of goods and the offering of donations and handouts – considered freely given or exchanged – that were beyond the scope of the poor laws and the compulsory rates. Acts of giving were reinforced by practices and norms rather than by formal regulations and rules, engaging individuals and groups in interactions that did not require the interference of state agents, banks or insurance agencies. They typically involved non-market transactions, whereby the participants became involved in reciprocities and durable interactions in which a host of social and cultural assets became enmeshed over and above money and material goods. Despite varied perils, informal support remained vigorous, with many practices of giving – in parishes, associations or amidst social networks – mutating and expanding over time.

This viability of varied support systems, in a period that witnessed vast transformations relating to state formation, expanding markets and growing urban populations, suggests that for all their personal, voluntary (or semi-voluntary), non-market features, the support systems and gift offerings we are here studying were not wholly inimical to market transactions or state governance and institutions, nor did they necessarily retreat under their impact. In previous chapters we observed the flourishing of support systems amidst growing urban populations, as well as the ubiquity of kinship and personal exchange amidst long-distance trade and business enterprises. Noted as well were the varied uses of money as forms of gifts rather than straight-forward market transactions, as well as the continued and increased force of some forms of charitable giving – endowments and bequests, voluntary collections at church – even while the public system of relief was being gradually implemented. Some ratepayers may have withheld casual almsgiving under the pretext that they would not 'give anything to such poor people as had monthly reliefe of the parishe', as it was explained by

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1693.[1] But as all the evidence adduced in earlier chapters indicate, many parishioners continued to offer alms and charitable gifts alongside the compulsory rates, engaging themselves in the cycles of gifts and the rich cultural resources and benefits that the economy of giving entailed.

In the remaining chapters we investigate some of the interconnections and impacts of the state and market transactions on varied forms of informal support. We begin in this chapter by looking into the ways in which a growing state apparatus and a market economy underlined the boundaries that were inherent to informal support and to the gift economy on which it was based. We then proceed in the ensuing chapter to show how within these boundaries, many forms of informal support were still revitalized and expanded through the impact and incentives offered by a growing state apparatus and a market economy. While conceding that the state and the market reinforced some of the boundaries of gift giving, the discussion proceeds to show that all in all the transformations entailed in state formation and expanding markets for the most part served as powerful catalysts for many forms of informal help, invariably promoting their diffusion, proliferation and increase throughout.

Exclusionary practices and state control of mobility

Practices that restricted gift offering and help to some people while denying their benefits to others were inherent to all forms of informal support. Reciprocal exchange within these networks was bounded by the social horizons of personal interactions, with priority given to those with whom reciprocity was dense, that is, those with whom the exchange was durable, binding and involved a wide range of material and non-material assets. Those with whom reciprocity was weak or expendable might be denied access occasionally, while others would remain wholly excluded from the benefits of gift offering and help. The densities of reciprocal exchanges do not lend themselves to capture or precise measure, for they were linked not only to the duration and range of the resources offered and received, but also to the perceptions of the participants and the political, social and cultural values that they attached to the given and exchanged assets. 'Density' in this respect was not an objective, quantifiable quality. Still, the intangibility of varying levels of the density notwithstanding, all forms of informal support were

[1] Hindle, *On the Parish?* 144. For the claims of London's aldermen, in 1578, that if plague rates advocated by the privy council were imposed the incomes from voluntary contributions would dry up, see Archer, *The Pursuit of Stability*, 198.

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bounded by the social horizons of the exchange and by the loose, if discernible, hierarchies of obligations created within them.

Binding reciprocity that benefited dense ties while excluding all others was most plainly conveyed in patterns of charitable giving at death, which exhibited testators' tendencies to focus on kin and friends and an overall lack of sustained giving to more distant beneficiaries and strangers. In this respect it is indeed noteworthy that in a period that witnessed the continued and even increased significance of charitable offering at death, the proportions of those who left no such bequests to the poor nonetheless remained high. As early as medieval times, over two-thirds of testators left no funeral doles or other donations to the poor. Similar proportions of those who devoted their gift giving on the eve of death entirely to family and friends rather than to charitable giving remained constant in the rural countryside and towns by the late sixteenth century and through the seventeenth.[2] Even among the wealthier urban strata, where the observed levels of charitable bequests were high, about half of the testators nonetheless restricted their entire inheritance and belongings to close kin and friends, leaving no portion or gift to more remote and unknown beneficiaries. Among Londoners who made wills in the late seventeenth century, about a third failed to bequeath anything to the poor. Even here, the evidence indicates that at least some of the most lavish benefactors were childless, that is, their willingness to offer and divulge charitable gifts was not constricted by the priority normally given to dense networks of kin and familial obligations.[3] As noted earlier, among all those who left charitable bequests, the tendency to focus on one's local networks of close and intimate acquaintances – within parishes or guilds – remained strong.[4]

Within corporate groups and associations, limited reciprocities and exclusionary practices were no less paramount. Group membership here was demarcated not only by the density of exchange among members, but also by rights and privileges obtained in royal charters. The latter invested associations such as the guilds with powers of self-regulation and mechanisms for the safeguarding of their interests, first and foremost through the strict supervision of the urban labour force. In London, access to the guilds was restricted almost entirely to male citizens; that is, it excluded all foreigners ('aliens') and practically barred women from becoming company members. In all towns, while no formal legal

[2] See Chapter 4, 117, Table 4.1.
[3] Thomson, 'Piety and charity', 183; Hadwin 'Deflating philanthropy', 113; Archer, *History of the Haberdashers*, 74; Earle, *The Making of the English Middle Class*, 318–19.
[4] See Chapter 5, 181–2.

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barriers barred women's entry into the guilds, in reality only a minority, widows for the most part, became members and continued to practise the art of their deceased husbands. Well into the late seventeenth century and beyond, access to apprenticeships – in provincial towns this was the major route to guild membership – was highly restrictive. In the more lucrative trades, almost no woman took a formal apprenticeship, thus being deprived access to the distinctive reciprocities, binding commitments and material gains that marked an apprenticeship arrangement in these trades.[5] As wives of guild members, women could occasionally partake in guild activities and feasts, as well as benefit from the extensive relief programs of the guilds; many 'poor widows', 'poor men and women' and 'almswomen' appeared, as we have seen, on their charitable lists as recipients of their gifts. But participation in the guild's round of festivities was carefully monitored and hierarchically ordered, and in times of hardship even wives of assistants and liverymen were prohibited from attending feasts.[6] Overall, the distinctive and dense form of reciprocal exchange typical of the guilds, which offered a host of economic and political benefits and opened the way to a career in trade, was almost exclusively male. Other types of associations and clubs that emerged by the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, while allowing women some minimal participation, nevertheless remained almost wholly a masculine preserve.[7]

Reciprocities that benefited group members while excluding outsiders were also quite pronounced in the parishes, where attitudes towards strangers and the transient poor hardened appreciably over the course of the period. Already in the late fifteenth and throughout the sixteenth centuries, population pressures and the growing numbers of poor people generated public concern and increased regulation of migrants who drifted into communities across the country. At the local level, jury presentments in the lesser courts (urban as well as borough, manor and hundred courts) targeted a host of social transgressions and public disorders, including those associated with poverty and the impoverished. Resident transgressors and beggars were brought before the court, but vagrants and those drifting between parishes with no regular employment were prosecuted with growing intensity and zeal. These vagrants were

[5] Rappaport, *Worlds within Worlds*, 36–47; McIntosh, *Working Women*, 133–5; Froide, *Never Married*, 25–6, 90–4.

[6] GL, MS 7353/2, fol. 4.

[7] Clark, *British Clubs*, 84, 122, 130–1, 198–204. For an argument that underlines the exclusion that was an essential and deliberate component of early modern networks and associations ('social capital'), see Sheilagh Ogilvie, 'How does social capital affect women? Guilds and communities in early modern Germany', *American Historical Review*, 109 (2004), 325–59.

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perceived as disorderly, transmitting disease and potent hedge breakers and thieves. Young people and migrants who came to the parish with their families squatting in cottages or subletting rooms were particularly feared; the taking of inmates and subtenants became a common offence brought to court. By the 1590s, fears of trespassing and stealing were widespread, and anxieties about the damage caused by the influx of migrants mounted, as well as accusations of landlords for their greed and disregard of the communal good. By then, the problem of vagrancy had already been addressed by higher-level courts of quarter sessions and the assize, whose jurisdiction covered felonies and capital crime.[8]

All this local activity that aimed to keep strangers outside of the community was reinforced and directly instigated by state policies expressed in Parliamentary statutes as well as a series of proclamations and orders regarding mobility, settlement and the vagrant poor. From 1383, a series of laws authorized local officials to examine vagrants and take measures to ensure their good behaviour. Migrant servants and beggars on the road were ordered to obtain testimonials specifying the grounds for their absence from their parish, and those without such testimonials risked a gaol sentence. During the sixteenth century a series of laws made vagrancy punishable through a severe penal code, and by 1589 a statute that placed restrictions on taking in 'inmates' and lodgers empowered local officers to evict undesirable subtenants. The vagrancy laws were subsequently incorporated into the poor law legislation of 1601, which, while imposing compulsory rates to cater for the needs of the poor, was emphatically based on the assumption that the impotent would be first and foremost the 'settled', that is, those belonging to the parish. Those outside parochial boundaries were to be strictly regulated through the provision of begging licences, or else punished or sent away, preferably to their parish of birth.[9] Subsequent decades witnessed the implementation of this legislation invariably through the punishment and expulsion of unlicenced beggars and inmates, the prosecution of landlords who took them in as subtenants and the imposition of restrictions on new buildings or the subdivision of tenements. The local labour market was to be secured against 'strangers and unknown persons', as the vestrymen of Paddington insisted in 1623. By 1662, the settlement laws had formalized these policies of exclusion by authorizing two justices of the peace to examine and remove newcomers, upon complaint regarding their presence within 40 days of their arrival at the parish.[10]

[8] McIntosh, *Controlling Misbehaviour*, 24–34, 81–96; Hindle, *On the Parish?* 300–25.
[9] McIntosh, *Controlling Misbehaviour*, 89, n. 106; Hindle, *On the Parish?* 300–6.
[10] A. L. Beier, *Masterless Men: The Vagrancy Problem in England, 1560–1640* (London, 1985); Archer, *Pursuit of Stability*, 184–5; Hindle, *On the Parish?* 313–60 (quotation on 318); Norma Landau, 'The laws of settlement and the surveillance of immigration in

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State policies and its administrative machinery thus fed on but also reinforced exclusionary practices that aimed at controlling the movements of the poor and regulating the labour market. These policies effectively curbed informal support practices, especially the offering of alms or hospitality to vagrants and beggars. Local officers and parishioners themselves sometimes interpreted the legislation as implying that hospitality need be extended solely within the parish. Already in 1530, following an early vagrancy statute that required beggars to acquire a licence, some local courts issued orders that no hospitality was to be offered to those travelling without a licence.[11] In the wake of the statute which prohibited the taking of inmates (1589), some landlords evicted tenants if they were newcomers, while migrants were evicted by local authorities, sometimes expelled from the house of kin who took them in. Thus, in Norfolk in 1631, a woman and her four children were evicted from her brother's house, forcing her to camp out on the church porch. Poor parishioners were compelled to remove their married children who came to stay with them; sureties were required from those who stayed a short while.[12]

Some ratepayers were warned against taking in lodgers and inmates, as was the case in Berkshire in 1655, when the vicar of Wasing was warned that he would be forced to pay an extra sum to cover any potential costs to the parish upon taking in a new lodger. The vagrancy legislation and policies aimed at regulating mobility and settlement also inhibited the charitable offerings of endowments held by parishes and hampered the administration of charitable bequests, especially those designed to aid young maidens who might be a potential burden on the parish. Pregnant women were particularly vulnerable to the draconian measure of outright expulsion, as contests between parishes over where such women would be relieved became widespread. Following the passage of the settlement laws in 1662, some parishes could force pregnant women into marriage with 'strangers', with the view of passing the burden of the child far from her parish of birth.[13]

Over the course of the period the boundaries of parochial reciprocities were thus reinforced and more strictly drawn through state legislation and increased intervention of the expanding state machinery and its courts at the local level. Worthy of emphasis is the fact that these

eighteenth-century Kent', *Continuity and Change*, 3 (1990), 541–72; Paul Slack, *The English Poor Law 1531–1782* (Basingstoke, 1990), 35–9.

[11] McIntosh, *Controlling Misbehaviour*, 91.

[12] Archer, *The Pursuit of Stability*, 185; Hindle, *On the Parish?* 301, 320; Heal, *Hospitality in Early Modern England*, 129–35.

[13] Hindle, *On the Parish?* 321, 343–52.

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exclusionary practices at no time implied the cessation of migratory movements nor the total withdrawal and isolation of communities within their parochial bounds. One of the most striking aspects of the vagrancy legislation was that despite its unceasing attempts to curb mobility, great numbers of migrants continued to roam the countryside and move into towns throughout the entire period.[14] The reason for this phenomenon had partly to do with the fact that for all the restrictions and the alarm at the influx of newcomers, the policy against migrants was not always coherent and its implementation remained haphazard at best. At both the national and local levels there was the recognition that migrants coming into parishes were not necessarily a liability, but rather had the ability to enhance parochial needs and labour resources. Taking them in might help to meet the needs of at least some of the residents who wished to replace a servant who had left, take in a subtenant who would supplement earnings, or offer hospitality to relatives and friends coming from afar. The legislation itself always left room for a trickle of incomers who might be granted a begging licence, provided with housing, or, following the settlement laws of 1662, granted certificates that guaranteed a roof and work within the confines of the parish. Policies of exclusion had to be carefully weighed against parochial needs and interests, often resulting in inconsistent policies that involved the incorporation of the migrant poor rather than their exclusion. Rates were sometimes paid to the undeserving and unemployed, including migrants; accommodation was found for people who had already been expelled, and some flexibility was shown regarding issues of entitlement to relief within the parish.[15] All this not only implied haphazard and even unpredictable measures, but also a steady rise in the rates as well as continuous waves of migrants who moved between parishes and into towns, where kin and other support ties could be found to accommodate their needs well into the late seventeenth century and the early decades of the eighteenth century.

Dearth, plague and informal support

The state and its administrative apparatus became more visible in times of crisis, when all networks of support, including those involving dense ties and reciprocities, were placed under particular hardship and strain.

[14] Slack, *The English Poor Law*, 37; Peter Clark and David Souden (eds.), *Migration and Society in Early Modern England* (Totowa, NJ, 1988).

[15] Hindle, *On the Parish?* 300–25; Slack, *The English Poor Law*, 37–9; Kussmaul, *Servants in Husbandry*, 148–9; Landau, 'The laws of settlement', 399–409.

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Epidemic crises and bad harvests were common experiences encountered in many communities throughout the period. Until 1666, plague regularly struck many towns, while years of dearth and rising costs of wheat persisted nearly every decade well into the eighteenth century.[16] It is not always possible to fathom the experiences and precise social ramifications of these events, but glimpses of the devastation and horror they brought on the lives and social habits of individuals are occasionally conveyed in personal records and diaries. Thus, in his diary John Evelyn recorded the major outbreaks of plague he had experienced since early on in his life. First he mentioned the events during the epidemic in London in 1625, when as a child of four years he was sent to Sussex, where his grandfather lived. Evelyn also took note of the plague of 1636, when 'the pestilence increased in Lond, and diverse parts of England', but especially of the horrid events in the aftermath of the plague and the great fire that ravaged the city in 1665 and 1666. By then, Evelyn was a public official with a family of his own, whom he dispatched to his brother in Wotton, Surrey, as soon as the plague broke out in August 1665. He travelled to visit and stay with the family for several weeks, but then returned to London in December 1665, only to observe with dismay the sight of the 'multitudes of poore pestiferous creatures, begging almes; the shops universally shut up, a dreadful prospect'. His description of the devastation caused by the fire that broke out several months later was more gruesome still: 'The Conflagration was so universal, and the people so astonish'd, that from the beginning ... they hardly stirr'd to quench it, so as there was nothing heard or seene but crying out and lamentation ... nor horse nor man was able to tread on [the pavements], and the demolitions had stopped all passages, so as no help could be applied; ... Nothing but the almighty power of God was able to stop [the winds] for vaine was the help of man'.[17]

As Evelyn's account suggests, not all networks were 'vain' nor did they instantly succumb to the pressures created by crises such as epidemics and plagues. As a child, Evelyn was protected from the plague when he was sent to his grandfather, while in later years his own family found haven in the countryside among his kin. Following his wife's return to London in January 1666, Evelyn once again sent them to the countryside, 'I not as yet willing to adventure her, the Contagion, though exceedingly abated, not as yet wholly extinguish'd amongst

[16] Paul Slack, *The Impact of Plague in Tudor and Stuart England* (London, 1985), esp. 51–145; R. B. Outhwaite, *Dearth, Public Policy and Social Disturbance in England, 1550–1800* (Basingstoke, 1991), 9–21.

[17] John Bowle (ed.), *The Diary of John Evelyn* (Oxford, 1985), 4, 8, 204–5, 210–12.

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us'. The course taken by Evelyn was common among people of his rank, but lower down on the social scale servants also left towns to be offered relief (or die) in the house of their parents or kin. In the towns, as well, parents, relatives and occasionally neighbours and friends gave succour in times of plague, offering money to look after the sick in the household and consolation even at the risk of becoming infected themselves.[18] Associations such as the guilds were sometimes especially well placed to take measures to allay the needs of the escalating numbers of their members who needed support. During years of plague, companies normally suspended their annual feasts and the money that was saved was diverted to cover the needs of 'the poor of our company'.[19] The wealthiest companies could amass resources more abundantly, while in the parishes, as already noted, special fasts, communion collections and rising private contributions in years of plague and dearth can be observed.[20]

Yet, it is also clear that in times of plague and failed harvests, networks of support as well as voluntary contributions were placed under extreme duress and were liable to collapse. 'Stick to me now for I am very sick and my wife also is more sick and I know and am persuaded myself that not any of my friends or kindred or of hers will venture to come and visit us this time of infection', was how one Londoner appealed to his aunt, making an explicit promise of a legacy if she came to their aid.[21] Kin as well as neighbours might themselves be in dire need of help, and epidemic disease was always a threat to all those in the vicinity of the infected. At times, people were forced to smuggle corpses out of back doors or bury them in secret, in private lots and gardens, to avoid the company of others. Servants were sometimes evicted into the street if unable to return home to their parents, or they died in temporary lodgings far from any types of supporting ties. The flight of substantial sections of the wealthier classes – in London in 1625 and then in 1665 a large exodus of the 'chief inhabitants' of central parishes was evident – implied emptied houses and slumps in the raising of rates as well as in the amounts normally raised through voluntary collections at the church.[22] For all their significance in supplementing parochial resources and enhancing their capability to aid the poor, voluntary collections remained precarious undertakings, even in

[18] Slack, *The Impact of Plague*, 152, 288–9, 290.
[19] GL MS 5445/16, no fols. See also Chapter 5, 174
[20] See Chapters 3–4, 87–8, 123–4. [21] Slack, *The Impact of Plague*, 289.
[22] *Ibid.*, 167–8, 288, 297.

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parishes that were periodically quite responsive to such appeals. Thus, St. James Garlickhythe raised an especially impressive collection among its substantial parishioners in 1625; but in subsequent years of severe crises – 1636, 1647–48, 1665–66 – there were several legacies but no organized voluntary collections, and the parish came to rely more heavily on the rates. In Allhallows Lombard Street, intensive collections can be observed in 1636 as well as throughout the harsh decade of the 1640s, but these came to a total collapse in 1665–66, when no collections nor in fact rates were gathered among the parishioners. In Allhallows the Great, a similar picture of numerous collections (totalling near £29) and rates (£42) was evident in 1636–37 as well as during the 1640s and early 1650s. But by 1664 and throughout 1665–66, a total remission came about, when only £2 15s in collections and only a slightly larger sum (£3 4s) in the involuntary rates were amassed. Even in St. Bride Fleet Street, where large sums recurred throughout the entire century, the years from 1666 through the early 1670s stand out with few or no observable record of collections. Of the 10 London parishes studied here, only St. Dunstan in the West sustained a continuous, albeit somewhat fluctuating, level of voluntary collections throughout the seventeenth century and during the early decades of the eighteenth century.[23]

Under these circumstances, state policies and increasing intervention aimed at averting disorder and the spreading of disease became ever more salient. In the early decades of the seventeenth century, the involvement of the central authority in combating the effects of crisis years was anchored in the Books of Orders, initially published in the 1570s to tackle epidemic crises and plague, followed in 1586 by a book that instituted measures to confront dearth. Both books were reprinted in later years of plague (1592–93, 1603, 1625, 1630 and 1636) and during years of hardship (1594–95, 1608, 1622 and 1630), with an additional comprehensive book in 1631 that contained varied directions for the relief and regulation of the poor, supervised by the Privy Council. The measures and remedies instituted for plague years (sometimes supported by parliamentary legislation) included orders to survey infected houses and isolate them – by shutting in family members (whether sick or not) or confining them to pest houses – as well as the imposition of special rates for distribution among the needy and distressed. Measures to combat the effects of dearth included the control of corn exports

[23] GL, MS 4810/1-2; MS 4051/1; MS 818/1; MS 6552/1; MS 2968/1-2. See also Chapter 3, 92.

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when prices were high, as well as searches and market regulation to prevent hoarding and ensure a flow of reasonably priced domestic grain stocks. Justices of the peace supervised the implementation of these measures and issued licences to dealers – brewers, alehouse keepers or bakers – but initiatives for control and regulation also came from the localities. In some places municipal governments purchased grain independently and sold it cheaply to the poor; searches of grain markets, brewing and alehouses were conducted widely by local officeholders when prices spiralled. Inspired initially by the state authority, such local initiatives persisted throughout the decades when Books of Orders were no longer issued – during the crisis years of 1661/2, 1673/4, the late 1690s and in dearth years in the course of the eighteenth century.[24]

The result of all these initiatives was not uniform and depended a great deal on the cooperation and actions taken in the localities, where the magnitude of the threat posed by severe crises such as plagues could seriously challenge the administrative capabilities of towns and parishes. Yet, while implementation remained patchy, state intervention, where it occurred, could be critical in affording a measure of support and in providing some alleviation where all else failed.[25] In London, parochial records are interspersed with rates imposed 'by order' for the relief of the poor visited houses and for redistribution among infected parishes. In Allhallows the Great in 1636, for example, the rates were doubled while in Allhallows Lombard Street two additional 'extraordinary' sums of about £16 each, on top of the regular rates (£34), were paid to the mayor 'by assessment of the parish towards the relief of the visited parishes in city and liberties'.[26] The redistribution of rates from richer city parishes to poorer ones along the Thames and outside the Walls was a regular phenomenon by the early decades of the seventeenth century, but plague years witnessed more aggressive measures and outside intervention. Thus, the poverty-stricken parish of St. Botolph Aldgate, with 44 per cent of householders recorded as requiring relief in 1595, had no regular rates and relied for its relief in the early decades of the seventeenth century on endowments, legacies, contributions from its poor box, as well as aid from city parishes, the livery companies and the city treasury. During the plague of 1625, the parish still received money from the Merchant Adventurers and inner parishes. However, in 1636, when no aid came from either the inner parishes or the livery companies,

[24] Slack, *The Impact of Plague*, 199–226; Outhwaite, *Dearth, Public Policy and Social Disturbance*, 35–44; Braddick, *State Formation*, 118–28.
[25] Slack, *The Impact of Plague*, 255–83; Braddick, *State Formation*, 132; Slack, *From Reformation to Improvement*, 61–8.
[26] GL, MS 818/1, fol. 116; MS 4051/1, fols. 82–5.

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money was amassed in voluntary contributions 'for our visited people of the plague' (£130), the compulsory rates (£54), the support of the city (£34 15s) and an additional large amount from 'the poore's stock of the ward' (£400). During the plague of 1665, the city chamberlain distributed £600 to infected parishes every week during the summer of that year, while the aldermen imposed two additional poor rates in the parishes. In inner parishes such as St. Mary Aldermanbury, for example, the rates rose from an average of between £50 and £60 to £100, with subsequent years still witnessing additional 'rolls for visited houses'.[27]

While offering and supplementing support that would otherwise not be available, state measures and orders to combat plague could at the same time impair some aspects of informal support systems, where these remained viable. Measures aimed at reducing contact with infected people could weaken and demoralize networks of care within families and kin, and they were often met with resentment; restrictions on popular assemblies during epidemics, prohibitions *vis-à-vis* popular games and processions or church attendance met with similar objections. Interference with burial customs – for example, banning the laying of the corpse in church – was considered obtrusive and especially begrudged. Policies of isolation, when unaccompanied by additional support based on the rates, increased the neediness of the families of the infected. 'Your said orator and all his family (being nine persons) were shutt up in his own house by the space of six weeks, and could not be suffered abroad to labour for his and their living and maintenance' – so claimed a Nottingham labourer in a petition against his son's master, a Nottingham butcher, that he presented to the court of Chancery in reference to the consequences of the plague of 1603.[28]

By the mid- and late seventeenth century, state initiatives were curbed and central intervention diminished, especially with the disappearance of the plague after 1666. Measures taken to combat the effects of dearth, particularly the control of grain exports, had always met with strong opposition on the part of farmers with vested interests in the export trade. Such measures generated criticism, resistance and fierce constitutional debates regarding the extent of the royal prerogative to control grain markets. By 1670, efforts to control export via statutes ended, and subsequent steps were for the most part initiated at the local rather than the state level, as was the case in 1661/2, 1673/4, the late 1690s and in

[27] GL, MS 9237, fols. 36–45, 70–1; MS 3556/1, no fols.; Archer, *The Pursuit of Stability*, 188–9; Slack, *The Impact of Plague*, 282. For special briefs in times of plague, see also Chapter 10.

[28] PRO, C3 272/102; Slack, *The Impact of Plague*, 295–303; Braddick, *State Formation*, 124–5.

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dearth years during the eighteenth century. Resistance and constitutional debate in Parliament persisted, evident still in the winter months and the wet summer that afflicted the harvest in 1766. Even initiatives that stemmed from sporadic measures undertaken by local officeholders were on the retreat under the impact of market forces, as sellers overwhelmingly favoured the uncontrolled over controlled markets.[29]

Labour markets and migration to towns

Uncontrolled markets also affected the labour force, invariably infringing on the reciprocities and support ties implicit in the exchanges between employers and employees, and especially between masters and their servants or apprentices. Throughout this study we have emphasized that the bonds between masters and their servants were sustained by the live-in arrangement and by the dependencies and reciprocal commitments created within it. To this extent, master–servant interactions resembled other support systems – families and kin, networks and associations – whereby exchange and obligations were cultivated and sustained in personal and durable interactions. What must be emphasized here, however, is that the bonds forged between masters and their servants were distinctive in that unlike many other support networks, the exchange and benefits accrued over the years of service were welded within a contractual agreement more akin to a market transaction and hence more constrained by market, barter-like, considerations. Formal (oral as well as written) contracts bound masters and servants only for a specific time span, normally a year in the case of servants and seven years in that of apprentices. During this period, masters were to provide their servants with food, lodging, training or wages, while servants were to offer their labour, services and obedience. Contracts normally tended to be short and 'incomplete', that is, they covered only certain aspects of the live-in arrangements and left out specific details regarding the working conditions.[30] But the basic contractual stipulations were formally spelt out and signed, along lines formulated and legitimized in the Statute of Artificers (1563), the comprehensive legislation that regulated labour relations in urban crafts and in the countryside. A host of conduct books and manuals published over the course of the era conveyed the understanding that while masters and servants were bound by reciprocities and certain norms of

[29] Outhwaite, *Dearth, Public Policy and Social Disturbance*, 35–44; Braddick, *State Formation*, 118–28.
[30] See also Chapter 2, 59.

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behaviour – masters were likened to parents (*in loco parentis*) – nevertheless, the interactions between them were based on contractual agreement rather than on purely personal obligations and binding commitments of the kind that bound parents and their offspring.[31] It was this dual aspect of service arrangements – the dynamics of reciprocal exchanges welded into a contractual agreement – that gave the master–servant bond its distinctive form.

To the extent that service contracts formally articulated the obligations and duties of each side, they were designed, as most contracts are, to minimize and constrain the need for personal obligations and understandings, thus signalling the boundaries of personal commitments and exchange. This impersonal, contractual and business-like quality, which signalled the boundaries of personal exchange and commitments between masters and servants, was apparent in practices of arranging service; networks and relatives were often used to find proper placement for apprenticeship or service, but strangers were often ultimately chosen as masters, and were sometimes even preferred to relatives and kin. 'It was better for so near relations to be at a greater distance', stated one youngster when he decided to abandon his kin master in London and search for another to replace him.[32] When disputes and conflicts arose between masters and servants, mediation was sometimes achieved informally – through kin and friends, or, in the case of the livery companies, through their courts of assistants. These provided courts of first instance for the settlement of a wide range of disputes and offences, including absenteeism, unpaid wages and other violations of contracts.[33] The legal system and its courts could also be invoked as formal avenues for settling disputes or terminating contracts. Discontented artisans or apprentices and those on their behalf appeared 'over the heads' of companies, not to mention their masters, in the various courts. They pressed legal suits and demanded punishment (in the case of criminal offences) as well as financial compensation in addition to the formal termination of contracts that would allow them to pursue alternative employment or, in the case of masters, to replace their employees.[34] Masters or those pleading on behalf of apprentices turned to city magistrates and aldermen sitting in mayoral courts, but they also approached justices of the peace and assize judges, who examined their

[31] Kussmaul, *Servants in Husbandry*, 131–4; Capp, *When Gossips Meet*, 129–31; Tadmor, *Family and Friends*, 57–9.
[32] Fretwell, *A Family History*, 205.
[33] Rappaport, *Worlds within Worlds*, 201–14, 240–1; Archer, *The Pursuit of Stability*, 217, 219.
[34] Rappaport, *Worlds within Worlds*, 211–12; Archer, *The Pursuit of Stability*, 140–8.

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case on the basis of petitions and complaints (rather than before a jury) in petty or quarter sessions.[35] Justices of the peace offered mediation, imposed punishment (especially in cases of absenteeism or misbehaviour on the part of the apprentices) and discharged masters and apprentices from their contract by pronouncing it annulled. Sometimes they awarded compensation to the aggrieved party as well. Thus, in quarter sessions held at the town of Bristol between 1620 and 1668, the court heard dozens of cases involving masters and their apprentices. It offered protection to apprentices whose masters had died, left town or abandoned their business. In cases of complaints submitted by masters, the court sometimes ordered a manhunt for absentee apprentices, and sent recalcitrant ones to Bridewell or to be whipped. Overall, in the vast majority (124 out of 144) of these cases, the court announced the contract void, occasionally pending reappearance at the court. In early eighteenth-century Middlesex, disputes between masters and servants were mediated by JPs inside and outside quarter sessions, wherein they recommended or enforced settlements and brought formal charges. In the case of complaints against servants, the latter were frequently sent to the house of correction.[36]

Chancery and the Court of Requests (the latter was established in the early sixteenth century and functioned as a 'poor man's Chancery') also constituted a venue for resolving disputes that might end in the dissolution of apprenticeship contracts. These courts, which offered equitable jurisdiction and the ability to weigh suits on the basis of 'fairness' rather than strict adherence to the letter of the law, provided masters and apprentices with a higher instance where they could proceed with petitions and complaints when all other means, both formal and informal, had failed.[37] The procedure is well attested in the abovementioned Chancery case, in which John Gregorie, a Nottinghamshire labourer, presented a complaint against William Widdowson, a Nottingham butcher who was his son's master. The butcher had allegedly beaten the

[35] According to the Statute of Artificers, masters and apprentices who 'have cause to complain' might turn to the justice of the peace, 'who shall by his wisdom and discretion take such order and direction ... as the equity of the cause shall require'. *An Act Containing Diverse Orders for Artificers, Labourers, Servants of Husbandry and Apprentices*, 5 Elizabeth I, Great Britain, *Statutes at Large* (vol. 2), (London, 1769), 541.

[36] Bristol RO, MS 04445, MS 04446, MS 04447(1)-(2); Shoemaker, *Prosecution and Punishment*, 21–3, 56–9, tables 3.4, 3.5, 174–5. See also Archer, *The Pursuit of Stability*, 218–19, 237; Paul Griffiths, *Youth and Authority: Formative Experiences in England, 1560–1640* (Oxford, 1996), 351–89; Capp, *When Gossips Meet*, 135–9.

[37] Seaver, 'A social contract? ', 50–2; McIntosh, *Working Women*, 20, 50; Tim Stretton, *Women Waging Law in Elizabethan England* (Cambridge, 1998), 70–98; Finn, *The Character of Credit*, 198–9.

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youth brutally, forcing him to return to his father's house. In attempting to compel Widdowson to take young Gregorie back or else offer him compensation (the latter was probably what he had intended), Gregorie initially appealed to the mayor of Nottingham, who then 'sent upon the master to receive [the apprentice] again ... endeavour to persuade the said master to permit the apprentice to finish his apprenticeship'. When the master refused, Gregorie presented a petition to the assize judges, who referred the matter back to the mayor 'to end and determine it if they could'. When the master remained adamant in his refusal, Gregorie, insistent in his 'having an earnest desire to perform the condition of the said obligation', continued to apply to 'diverse gentlemen and others of his good friends' to appeal to Widdowson and persuade him to settle the matter. When all this was to no avail, Gregorie, so he claimed, was forced to appeal to Chancery where 'matters are only pleadable before your lordship in her highness most honourable court of Chancery'.[38]

The legal system and various courts, both central and local, were thus instrumental in drawing the boundaries of personal obligations between masters and servants, offering alternatives to mediation through family and friends, as well as formalizing breaches and terminating contracts prior to their expiration. Yet, it is also clear that the legal system was not exclusive in enforcing the boundaries of service arrangements, for the number of cases that actually reached the courts remained miniscule throughout the period. Bristol's Justices of the Peace, for example, dealt with two or three cases every year between 1620 and 1668, with the numbers rising to about five cases annually between 1671 and 1681. In Chancery Court between 1591 and 1625, 14 petitions involving masters and apprentices from all over the country (Middlesex, Lincolnshire, Derbyshire, Surrey, Devon, Hereford and York) were submitted. During the same period, the number of cases handled by the Court of Requests was only slightly greater (between 40 and 50).[39] Given the significant number of servants who were discharged by masters and forced to return to their parents' homes without court intervention, as well as the high drop-out rates among urban apprentices and the number of servants who fled their masters with little notice to return to their homes or else loiter about towns and the countryside, it becomes clear that the boundaries of personal commitments between masters and their servants were largely drawn by a host of economic and social

[38] PRO, C3 272/102.
[39] Bristol RO, MS 04445, MS 04446, MS 04447(1)-(2); PRO, C3 ser II, Lists and Indexes, (vol. 2), 1591–1625; Seaver, 'A social contract?', 52.

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considerations and configurations that had little to do with the legal system or the courts.[40]

The intense mobility of servants and apprentices attests to the impersonal, contractual nature of the master–servant bond, and to an overall lack of sustained and long-term personal commitment on the part of both servants and their masters. Moves were subject to, and affected by, the conditions of the service market as well as by an expanding market for wage labour. In the rural countryside, servants tended to move on once they had ended their annual terms, presumably in search of better employment and with the view of establishing their own households and careers. They were thrust into a labour market where conditions had shifted markedly by the final decades of the sixteenth century and in the early seventeenth century; population pressures coupled with an agricultural intensification resulted in increased employment offered on a wage basis. Agricultural tasks such as carting and hedging, sowing and weeding, ploughing, harvesting or haymaking were all offered on the basis of wage rather than annual service. A mass of young and poor adults who competed for employment and annual contracts created a setting within which farmers hired labour on the basis of seasonal wages rather than annual contracts, thus depriving young labourers of the relative security and the types of reciprocal commitments and benefits that might be accrued in a longer term of live-in service.[41] In subsequent decades, when population pressures eased, annual contracts were more abundant but a century on, in the mid-eighteenth century, a second cycle of decline in the incidence of rural service began. The downward spiral in rural service was again set off by a population boom alongside the concomitant rise in the cost of living, which favoured farmers and the hiring of casual labour. This trend continued and signalled the gradual extinction of rural service and its replacement with a full-fledged form of wage labour.[42]

Other forms of service and apprenticeships were sustained well into the late eighteenth century and beyond, but they were subject to shifts in the labour market that underlined the boundaries of mutual dependencies, of the commitments between masters and servants, and the type of 'safety net' afforded by annual and long-term contracts. In domestic service, as early as the sixteenth century there already existed an extensive market for servants that catered to women of varied social

[40] See Chapter 2, 59, n. 40.
[41] Kussmaul, *Servants in Husbandry*, 97–119; Wrightson, *Earthly Necessities*, 194–8.
[42] Kussmaul, *Servants in Husbandry*, 120–34; Keith Snell, *Annals of the Labouring Poor: Social Change and Agrarian England* (Cambridge, 1984), 67–103.

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groups, including daughters of the rural elite. The latter were forced or chose to move from the countryside to towns to reside with, and offer services to, relatives and kin.[43] In the ensuing decades, the market for domestics continued to be fuelled by the rising rural population and the continuous stream of young women moving from the countryside, as well as by a growing demand for domestics in the wealthier parishes of urban centres and smaller towns. The social profile of young female migrants shifted as domestic service catered more exclusively than before to the lower classes, with daughters of the more respectable rural elite shying away from it. Over the course of the seventeenth century, domestic service became the poor young female's employment par excellence.[44] By the final quarter of the century, when population pressures eased, the movement of women into towns persisted and they now comprised higher proportions among all migrants. As the demand for their services grew in expanding prosperous urban sectors, the market for domestics became particularly volatile, with women drifting in and out of service continuously and rarely serving full annual contracts. If in early seventeenth-century London the average duration of service was four years, by its later decades, the vast majority of domestics stayed in one place several months and up to a year. In the rural countryside, settlement examinations indicate women who in the early eighteenth century gained settlement by virtue of serving at one point a full year, but otherwise stayed in a single household no longer than several months or even weeks.[45] With few or no options for developing the types of obligations and benefits that grew out of long-term service – a generous wedding present or inheritance portions would presumably be unthinkable – domestic service under these circumstances was more akin to irregular wage labour than to the long-term, live-in arrangement.

Labour markets also encroached continuously on the varied forms of urban as well as rural apprenticeships. Throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the drop-out rates among urban apprentices remained high, with many young trainees serving only part of their terms – three, four and five years were not unusual – and then moving on. The courses they took following their training were diverse; some established

[43] McIntosh, *Working Women*, 56–61; Brodsky Elliot, 'Single women', 94–5.
[44] Froide, *Never Married*, 90; Ben-Amos, *Adolescence and Youth*, 136–41.
[45] David Souden, 'Migrants and the population structure of later seventeenth-century provincial cities and market towns', in Peter Clark (ed.), *The Transformation of English Provincial Towns 1600–1800* (London, 1984), 99–132; Peter Earle, *A City Full of People: Men and Women of London 1650–1750* (London, 1994), 128–9 and table 4.7; Patty Seleski, 'Women, work and cultural change in eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century London', in Tim Harris (ed.), *Popular Culture in England, c. 1500–1850* (Basingstoke, 1995), 149–52, 256, n. 23.

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themselves independently near the town where they had learnt their trade or elsewhere, while others turned to wage employment. A case in point was the experience of David Jones, an apprentice in Warminster who was bound in the late 1610s for seven years but was forced to leave after five when his master fled his creditors. Jones then returned to his mother's home in Warminster, but subsequently left and wandered between parishes throughout the southern parts of the country for several months, drifting into casual labour. He eventually arrived in Southampton, where he was caught stealing clothes.[46] Others like Jones may have been more fortunate in managing to use the skills they had obtained in the course of three or four years of apprenticeship training, but compared to those who completed full terms, the bonding with their masters and the benefits they might earn – urban freedom, a host of gifts, trading connections of all sorts – were likely to have been far more constrained.

By the early and mid-decades of the eighteenth century, as the guilds began to lose control over the regulation of the labour market, the overall incidence of apprenticeship began to diminish. While apprenticeship training remained pervasive in many small crafts and shops, the growing incidence of large-scale entrepreneurs and of outputting – giving out work to be done cheaply at home – caused a decline in the overall numbers of masters and apprentices who took upon themselves the bonding and commitments entailed in a long apprenticeship course. In mid-eighteenth-century London, many young men had forsaken apprenticeships and set up careers in businesses and crafts, or else preferred wage employment in a host of trades.[47] In the countryside, where the guilds had never exercised controls over the hiring of apprentices, apprenticeship persisted in many crafts and trades, but the ties implicit in the live-in arrangement weakened in those sectors where the growth of 'clubbing out' was apparent. Under these circumstances, apprentices were trained in their masters' shops during the day, but continued to live with their family or board elsewhere, much as journeymen did. No less important were shifts in the sizes of workshops. While most trades and occupational sectors retained small shops – the presence of two or three apprentices and journeymen remained common – in some industrial sectors and crafts, such as silk weaving, watch making or the printing trades, workshops accommodated larger

[46] Anderson (ed.), *The Book of Examinations* (vol. 1), 42. For drop-out rates, see Chapter 2, n. 40; Schwarz, *London in the Age of Industrialisation*, 216–17, 220–1.

[47] Christopher Brooks, 'Apprenticeship, social mobility and the middling sort, 1550–1800', in Barry and Brooks (eds.), *The Middling Sort of People*, 73–4; Schwarz, *London in the Age of Industrialisation*, 209–21.

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groups of apprentices and journeymen. Where outwork was widespread, the master himself was generally an outworker or journeyman who hired employees for short-term training or work rather than a full apprenticeship with all that it entailed. All these varied patterns and arrangements implied fewer opportunities for developing the types of binding and durable commitments that pertained to long-term, live-in service.[48] In some industrial sectors where outwork increased, a harsh disciplinary regime also became more normative. A surge in parliamentary legislation resulted in the criminalization of acts and habits hitherto considered part of the perquisites that might be procured or negotiated by an apprentice in a shop. Thus, the Worsted Act of 1777 set up an inspectorate working under a prosecuting committee of employers, resulting in increased powers of search and arrest upon the smallest suspicion that yarn had been stolen from workshops by servants or apprentices.[49]

Expanding and shifting labour markets into which middle and lower classes were forced placed limits not only on enduring commitments between masters and servants, but also on the support systems within the nuclear migrants' families. This was evident particularly when the search for employment drove migrants to travel long distances from their parish of origin to large towns, especially to London, where already in the sixteenth century the average distances covered were greater than to any other town. In Chapter 2 we discussed the viability of families and a range of networks in supporting such movements; kin offered substantial help in arranging service, protecting newly arrived migrants *vis-à-vis* their masters and supporting them in their pursuit of employment and careers, not only among the prosperous elite. In their daily lives, migrants were supported by kin and friends residing in urban parishes or nearby villages.[50] Nevertheless, it is clear that long-distance movements from the rural countryside to large towns could also have adverse implications for the families of the migrants, circumscribing their ability to sustain familial support, especially if lower-income groups were concerned. In early seventeenth-century London, more than half (59 per cent) of female migrants who applied for marriage licences lived with their relatives or had kin and friends residing in the town. But the remainder of the migrant-servants had fewer connections as many

[48] Snell, *Annals of the Labouring Poor*, 257–9, 260–2.

[49] John Rule, 'Employment and authority: masters and men in eighteenth-century manufacturing', in Griffiths et al. (eds.), *The Experience of Authority*, 291–3; Douglas Hay, 'Patronage, paternalism and welfare: masters, workers and magistrates in eighteenth century England', *International Labor and Working-Class History*, 53 (1998), 27–48.

[50] See Chapter 2, 52–7, 77.

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among them would have come from among the ranks of husbandmen and labourers, whose ability to pull together resources in aid of their daughters was meagre, if it existed at all. Thus, Sybill Powell, the daughter of a Worcestershire husbandman who died when she was 15 years old, arrived in London several years later, in 1603, and became a servant in the house of a gentleman. Like some other migrant domestics, Sybill Powell appears to have had few connections in the metropolis, nor was she able to benefit from the support of parents in the course of her service or thereafter, her widowed mother being described as 'a poor woman and not able to bestow any portion upon her and therefore has left her to her own disposition'. In 1607, Powell married Richard Lackeland, an artisan who allegedly supported her when she moved in with him during the weeks before they married.[51]

Other life stories of migrants who travelled to London or overseas point to ruptures in the parent–child flow of assistance and help. Many of these migrants were unlikely to return to the parental abode whether to obtain their parents' help or offer assistance in their turn. Edward Barlow, a Lancashire labourer's son who migrated to London in 1657 to become a seaman, managed to meet his father once when the latter came to visit him at his uncle's house in London, from where Barlow also sent his mother a few coins as a token of affection. When he was released from his apprenticeship several years on, he managed to dispatch a large sum of money to his parents, and by 1669 he returned to his parents for a visit that lasted a couple of months. Yet overall, Barlow's capacity to sustain continued ties with his parents was circumscribed; when he some time later wrote to his parents requesting financial support, 'I could find none of them able or willing to supply', and more then 10 years had then passed before he was able to return to visit his mother one last time prior to her death.[52] Other migrants who travelled dozens of miles and more from their parental homes to the large metropolis were similarly constrained.[53] Elizabeth Ashbridge, whom we encountered earlier in this book, left her parental abode in Cheshire and travelled to Dublin, from whence she migrated overseas. In New York she became a servant in a gentleman's house, where she

[51] Brodsky Elliott, 'Single women', 93–4, 97.

[52] Ben-Amos, *Adolescence and Youth*, 223–4; Barlow, *Barlow's Journal* (vol. 1), 174–7, 251; (vol. 2), 310–11.

[53] The average distance travelled to London in the sixteenth century was 115 miles, far above that travelled to other towns. By the late seventeenth century migration contracted, but distances of upwards of 50 and 60 miles to various towns were still common. Peter Clark, 'Migration in England during the late seventeenth- and early eighteenth centuries', *Past and Present* 83 (1979), 56–90; Souden, 'Migrants and the populations structure', 142–9.

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'suffered the most hardships that my body was able to bear'. Yet, when her father desired 'to see mee again ... [and] sent for me home', she decided against it and took employment in needlework. She then married and eventually began a long process of spiritual conversion, which firmly established her attachments within the dense networks of the Society of Friends. Benjamin Bangs left a widowed mother in Norfolk in 1666 and travelled to London, from whence he returned to his mother for a short while when he fell ill. He subsequently went on to pursue a career as a travelling preacher.[54] Several decades on, Newgate confessions mention instances of the complete distancing of female migrant domestics who came to London and lived many years without contact with their parents, then married young men who were total strangers to their kin.[55]

In none of these cases does it appear that distance alone determined the degree to which interactions were sustained and help continued to flow to and from offspring. Elizabeth Ashbridge's relations with her father were already tense when she left home, and her course, like that of Bangs, was shaped to a great extent by her religious yearnings and spiritual inspirations. Newgate confessions also point to the varied economic and familial configurations that might affect the breakdown of the parent–child bond. Still, when resources were limited and prospects for mutual visits minimal, geographical distance constrained the ability to sustain support across the generations, especially when parents reached old age. Thus, the abovementioned Benjamin Bangs, who initially left his widowed mother's home when he was 13 years old to become an apprentice in a parish nearby, decided to migrate to London only two years later, when his master departed from the parish. It was this latter move to the large metropolis that his mother appears to have anticipated with great apprehension; 'and she said to me, child, [I hope] it will not be long before I shall see thee again' – as he recollected and wrote in his autobiography many years later.[56]

Conclusion

Boundaries were inherent to all forms of informal support systems, based as they were on personal and often face-to-face exchanges, with limits being set by the social horizons of the exchange and by the hierarchies of obligations built within them. As far back as medieval times, practices of giving that incorporated the occasional outsider were

[54] Oxford RO, BMM viii/I, *Some Account of the Forepart of the Life*; Bangs, *Memoirs of the Life and Convincement*, 12, 29.
[55] See Chapter 5, 156. [56] Bangs, *Memoirs of the Life and Convincement*, 12.

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constricted by calculations regarding the desirability of the influx of outsiders and by apprehensions *vis-à-vis* the strange poor, and many hospitals already in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries stipulated how long a traveller might stay, the very poor being allowed to sojourn no longer than a single night.[57] All other types of informal support systems were constrained by exclusionary practices that expressed the perceived threats posed by outsiders, as in the case of parishes or guilds; by market-induced considerations that infiltrated some types of exchanges, as between householders and their live-in servants; and by the densities of reciprocities and hierarchies of obligations typical of all types of support systems and exchanges, including the dense and multi-layered ties of kin, neighbours, associates and friends. In times of acute scarcity, the capabilities and safety net offered within these ties were particularly vulnerable and liable to collapse.

These boundaries that were intrinsic to, and had long encroached on, informal support systems were by the late sixteenth and throughout the seventeenth centuries more effectively reinforced by a growing state apparatus that intervened and became more visible in the localities. Already in 1600 the involvement of government at the county and national level was made potently apparent, and in the ensuing decades tighter control in the localities was brought to bear on a host of local engagements and interactions. The state provided backing and legitimized the withdrawal of support where such support was deemed too costly and burdensome, when it was feared, de-legitimized or posed a threat to local authorities and the more substantial ratepayers. State intrusion might interfere with and occasionally disrupt practices of hospitality and help to kin arriving from afar; in times of epidemic crises it curtailed habits of help offered to the sick and the dying, and of consolation and bereavement practised among neighbours and kin. The state and its legal system also offered alternatives, generating options where informal help proved weak and vulnerable, or where the perils of gifts applied and reciprocities collapsed.

A growing market economy encroached on some forms of exchanges and care as well, reinforcing in some contexts non-personal, barter-like considerations and interests. This was especially evident in labour relations and exchanges between masters and their servants, where a shifting labour market increasingly based on wage led to the abandonment of service contracts. In decades when population pressures mounted, the glutted labour market encouraged retreat from commitments to servants, who might be sent away and replaced by others or by irregular

[57] Orme, *The English Hospital*, 62–3.

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work based on casual wage. With unemployment pervasive or volatile, the safety net provided by long-term annual service contracts was jeopardized, even in periods when there were more job opportunities, as was the case in the market for domestics in the later decades of the seventeenth century. An expanding labour market also affected migratory patterns and the safety nets sustained across the generations, in families split apart by the migration of the young, especially where long-distance migration to large towns was entailed. Markets also came to offer alternatives that reduced the need to rely on one's networks of obligations and friends. As the population increased and migration to towns continued, alehouses and inns grew steadily, with the late seventeenth century witnessing the emergence of registry offices and advertisements – all of which offered devices and options that reduced to some extent the need to rely on more personal networks and connections in advancing employment and careers.[58]

Yet, boundaries also shifted and could recede over time. As the seventeenth century wore on, a certain relaxation in the boundaries imposed by the state on informal support systems can be observed, as state intervention in epidemic crises and dearth diminished. Long-distance migration to large towns that was particularly prone to disrupt generational relations also subsided by the late seventeenth century and early eighteenth, and localized migration remained the norm. Over much of the period, moreover, policies of exclusion at the local level were not consistently applied, while the vigorously implemented system of parochial relief based on the rates did not at all times involve encroachment of informal support. As will be observed in the final chapter, the poor relief system could bolster and activate the commitments and reciprocities through which support was maintained within varied ties. As we shall also observe, the state and its legal apparatus reinforced the norms and habits implicit to varied exchanges and gifts. Markets and urban environments, as well, proved pivotal in reinforcing and stimulating – rather than solely limiting – many forms of support. Within the shifting boundaries described in this chapter, informal support could be invigorated and increase through variegated state policies and impacts of expanding markets and towns – matters that will concern us in more detail in the final chapter.

[58] Clark, 'Migrants in the city', 280, 285.

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