



OXFORD JOURNALS  
OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

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Source: *The English Historical Review*, OCTOBER 2011, Vol. 126, No. 522 (OCTOBER 2011), pp. 1066-1096

Published by: Oxford University Press

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41238872>

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## *Cathedrals and Charity: Almsgiving at English Secular Cathedrals in the Later Middle Ages\**

THE nine English secular cathedrals, Chichester, Exeter, Hereford, Lichfield, Lincoln, St Paul's, Salisbury, Wells and York, have long been renowned for their architectural and artistic splendour and liturgical sophistication but have rarely been credited with the 'generous almsgiving' enjoined on the chapter of Lincoln cathedral by Bishop Gravesend in 1268.<sup>1</sup> On the contrary, cathedral canons acquired a reputation for laziness and self-indulgence; in Archbishop Cranmer's celebrated phrase, they were 'good vianders' who devoted themselves to 'superfluous belly cheer', extravagance, he implied, at the expense of the poor.<sup>2</sup> Cranmer was echoing familiar late medieval anticlerical complaints. The fifteenth-century poem, *The Dance of Death* mocks 'Sire Chanoun with many grete prebende' whose 'golde & siluer' is no consolation for death.<sup>3</sup> Another poem, *Mum and the Sothsegger*, dating from the early fifteenth century, berates their pluralism and gluttony, complaining that their purses are always full because they give nothing to the poor.<sup>4</sup> Modern historians, though generally less critical, have largely ignored both cathedrals and their canons.<sup>5</sup> This is also true of recent studies of medieval charity, which have focused on monastic houses, hospitals and parishes.<sup>6</sup> This paper will argue that the secular cathedrals were important centres of

\*I am very grateful to Professor Nicholas Orme and the editor and anonymous readers of this journal for suggesting improvements.

1. C.W. Foster and K. Major, eds., *[The] R[egistrum] A[n]tiquissimum of the Cathedral Church of Lincoln* (10 vols., L[incoln] R[ecord] S[ociety]), xxvii–ix, xxxii, xxxiv, xli–ii, xlvi, li, lxi, lxvii, 1931–73), iii. no. 1034.

2. J.E. Cox, ed., *Miscellaneous Writings and Letters of Thomas Cranmer* (Parker Society, Cambridge, 1846), p. 396.

3. F. Warren, ed., *The Daunce of Death*, E[arly] E[nglish] T[ext] S[ociety], old series clxxxii (1931), pp. 40–43.

4. J.M. Dean, ed., *Richard the Redeless and Mum and the Sothsegger* (Kalamazoo, 2000), lines 554–69.

5. J.C. Dickinson, *The Later Middle Ages: From the Norman Conquest to the Eve of the Reformation* (1979), pp. 269–70, is critical. J.A.F. Thomson, *The Early Tudor Church and Society 1485–1529* (1993) is non-judgemental. C. Harper-Bill, *The Pre-Reformation Church in England 1400–1530* (1989) and R.N. Swanson, *Church and Society in Late Medieval England* (Oxford, 1989) ignore cathedrals.

6. M. Mollat, *The Poor in the Middle Ages: An Essay in Social History* (Yale, 1986); M. Rubin, *Charity and Community in Medieval Cambridge* (Cambridge, 1987); B. Harvey, *Living and Dying in England 1100–1540: The Monastic Experience* (Oxford, 1993); P. Cullum and P.J.P. Goldberg, 'Charitable Provision in Late Medieval York: "To the Praise of God and Use of the Poor"', *Northern History*, xxix (1993), pp. 24–39; C. Dyer, *Standards of Living in the Later Middle Ages: Social Change in England c. 1200–1520* (Cambridge, 1989); M. McIntosh, 'Local Responses to the Poor in late Medieval and Tudor England', *Continuity and Change*, iii (1988), pp. 209–45; C. Rawcliffe, *Medicine for the Soul* (Stroud, 1999); and N. Rushton, 'Monastic Charitable Provision in Tudor England: Quantifying and Qualifying Poor Relief in the Early Sixteenth Century', *Continuity and Change*, xvi (2001), pp. 9–44.

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almsgiving and made a significant contribution to medieval poor relief alongside these better known institutions; from an early date their eleemosynary practice reflected the growing trend towards discrimination in medieval charity. It will focus on the practice of almsgiving to the poor from the beginning of the fourteenth century until the early sixteenth and consider both institutional almsgiving and the personal charity of their clergy.

As institutions, secular cathedrals had few formal charitable obligations beyond the Biblical precepts on all Christians and those imposed by canon law on beneficed clergy. Their statutes, unlike the customals of monastic houses, contained few injunctions to give alms. Nor, with the exception of St Paul's, did they have almonies or almoners. There were, however, two specific obligations on cathedral canons. The principal one was the duty of hospitality required of resident canons, which included almsgiving. Twelfth-century canonists sometimes used the term *hospitalitas* to include both receiving guests and giving alms, and in this spirit, the visitations articles drawn up by Archbishop Winchelsey (d. 1313) specifically asked whether secular canons kept proper hospitality and distributed alms to the poor.<sup>7</sup> The statutes of Exeter cathedral are unusually explicit about almsgiving. When Bishop Stapeldon increased the dean and chapter's common fund in 1315 to augment residence payments, he stated that it was to enable residentiaries to dispense hospitality and give alms.<sup>8</sup> Bishop Lacy reinforced this in 1428 in a statute which declared that almsgiving, especially the feeding and clothing of Christ's poor, was part of residentiaries' duty of hospitality, and compared this to the examples of Abraham, known for his generosity to strangers, and Lot, who put his responsibility as a host before his duty as a father.<sup>9</sup> Bishop Repingdon of Lincoln issued a similar injunction in 1410.<sup>10</sup> Chapters acknowledged these obligations; in 1331 the Salisbury chapter complained to the absent dean and treasurer, both French cardinals, that their non-residence reduced the level of almsgiving to the poor.<sup>11</sup>

The second obligation arose from the custom of paying the income of prebends for a year after the death of a canon, a practice adopted at most cathedrals during the twelfth century. At Exeter, Lichfield, Lincoln and York this was intended for 'pious uses', to pay debts and to be used for the benefit of the souls of deceased canons, and at Salisbury a third

7. R. Graham, ed., *Registrum Roberti Winchelsey, Cantuariensis Archiepiscopi, AD 1294–1313* (2 vols., C[anterbury and] Y[ork] S[ociety] li and lii, 1952–6), ii. 1297.

8. D[evon] R[ecord] O[ffice] E[xeter] C[athedral] A[rchives], D[ean] & C[hapter] 2163.

9. G.R. Dunstan, ed., *The Register of Edmund Lacy, Bishop of Exeter, 1420–55. Registrum Commune* (5 vols., CYS lx–lxi, 1963–72), iv. 289–90.

10. M. Archer, ed., *The Register of Bishop Philip Repingdon, 1405–19* (3 vols., LRS, lvii–viii, lxxiv, 1963–82), i. 184.

11. H.M. Chew, ed., *Hemingby's Register* (Wiltshire Record Society, xviii, 1963), pp. 80–84.

was granted for the use of the poor.<sup>12</sup> The Chichester statutes refer to the distribution of alms for the soul of the deceased.<sup>13</sup> Canons' post-mortem distributions at Exeter and St Paul's included their entitlements to bread which was sometimes bequeathed to the poor or prisoners.<sup>14</sup>

The principal formal obligation on cathedrals as institutions was to give alms in the parish churches appropriated to them. Appropriation, which allowed religious houses to keep the surplus income from a benefice after making pastoral provision in the parish, was an important but controversial source of income on which cathedrals relied heavily.<sup>15</sup> Appropriators were frequently accused of neglect despite Archbishop Stratford's Constitutions of 1342 and the Statute of Appropriation in 1391, which required proper provision for almsgiving in appropriated churches.<sup>16</sup> Most appropriations allocated a few shillings in alms; the 60s a year the treasurer of Chichester was required to distribute to the poor of Eastbourne was larger than most.<sup>17</sup>

These obligations imply that the secular cathedrals were engaged in general almsgiving or at least were expected to be. But were they? From the late twelfth century, anecdotal evidence suggests that beggars gathered around cathedrals. Several of the miracles recorded for the canonisation of St Hugh (d. 1200) happened to beggars, among them Simon, a blind man, who lived on the alms given by the canons of Lincoln.<sup>18</sup> At Lichfield in 1293 so great was the crush of paupers at the precentor's house that one of them was trampled to death when the door was opened to admit them.<sup>19</sup> Such accounts suggest that charitable giving to beggars was commonplace at cathedrals at least during the thirteenth century. This seems to have continued into the late medieval

12. B[ritish] L[ibrary] Harleian MS 1027 fos. 4v-5; Lichfield Joint Record Office, D30/2/1/1 fo. 93; H. Bradshaw and C. Wordsworth, eds., *Statutes of Lincoln Cathedral* (3 vols., Cambridge, 1892-7), ii. 107, 140; J. Raine, ed., *Statutes of the Cathedral Church of York* (Leeds, 1900), pp. 15-16; C. Wordsworth and D. Maclean, eds., *Statutes and Customs of the Cathedral Church of Salisbury* (1915), p. 21.

13. C.A. Swainson, ed., *The History and Constitution of a Cathedral of the Old Foundation Illustrated from Documents in the Registry and Muniment Room of the Cathedral of Chichester* (1880), p. 36.

14. BL Harleian MS 1027 fo. 4v-5; W.S. Simpson, ed., *R[egistrum] S[tatutorum et Consuetudinum Ecclesiae Cathedralis] S[ancti] P[auli] Londinensis* (1873), p. 31, 58-9. In 1457 John Morton, an Exeter residentiary, bequeathed his entitlements to the poor in two almshouses there (DRO Chanter MS XII (i) fo. 139).

15. D.N. Lepine, "And Alle Oure Paresshens": Secular Cathedrals and Parish Churches in Late Medieval England', in C. Burgess and E. Duffy, eds., *The Parish in Late Medieval England* (Donnington, 2006), pp. 29-53 at 48-9.

16. G. Bray, ed., *Records of Convocation* (20 vols., Woodbridge, 2005-6), iii. 191; R.A.R. Hartridge, *A History of Vicarages in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1930), pp. 157-9.

17. J. Caley and J. Hunter, ed., *V[alor] E[cclesiasticus]* (6 vols., 1810-34), i. 299. See also the precentor of St Paul's and prebendary of St Pancras (Ibid. 363-4).

18. D.L. Douie and H. Farmer, eds., *Magna Vita Sancti Hugonis: The Life of St Hugh of Lincoln* (Oxford, 1985), pp. 99, 106, 100. For a continental example, see B. Geremek, *The Margins of Society in Late Medieval Paris* (Cambridge, 1987), p. 189.

19. G. Wrottesley, ed., *Extracts from the Plea Rolls, AD 1272 to 1294* (William Salt Archaeological Society, vi, part 1, 1885), p. 272.

period. In 1466 when a destitute Lichfield woman needed alms, it was to the cathedral close that she sent her son to beg.<sup>20</sup> In France, the practice was more formalised. At Bourges cathedral in the fifteenth century, there was a poem soliciting and justifying alms for the poor in the south porch under which beggars gathered.<sup>21</sup> While no example is known, it is likely that beggars also gathered at English secular cathedrals. The busiest, largest and wealthiest churches of their cities, they provided opportunities for soliciting alms and were attractive places for beggars, some of whom established long-term pitches in them.<sup>22</sup> The presence of beggars implies that cathedrals practised charitable giving.

Cathedral financial records, especially central accounts, amply justify this implication.<sup>23</sup> They reveal three principal forms of charitable giving: on ritualised formal occasions such as the Maundy ceremonies, regular distributions from general income and payments made as part of post-mortem commemorations. Exeter was one of the most generous in its Maundy distributions. From at least 1308 and probably earlier, sixty paupers were fed, each having  $\frac{1}{4}d$  worth of bread,  $\frac{1}{2}d$  worth of drink, relishes and  $1d$  in money.<sup>24</sup> At St Paul's the almoner was responsible for the ceremonies which began with washing the feet of thirty poor after which they were fed with bread, ale and fish and given a small sum in cash.<sup>25</sup> The Lincoln ceremonies seem to have been on a smaller scale, at least in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, when shoes were given to up to ten paupers at a cost of between 2s 6d and 5s.<sup>26</sup> Other cathedrals probably made distributions to the poor as part of their Maundy ceremonies, but the evidence is unclear.<sup>27</sup>

Regular distributions from general income took two forms, gifts in kind, such as clothing and bread, and gifts of money. At Lincoln, the most generous, the chapter's principal almsgiving was concentrated on the third corporal work of mercy: clothing the naked. From at least the end of the thirteenth until the mid-fifteenth century and probably up to the Reformation, they provided an allowance of clothing for the poor each year. Considerable sums were spent on this, £21 12s 7 $\frac{1}{4}d$  in 1291 and £35 2s in 1363–4.<sup>28</sup> The cloth purchased was mainly cheaper, coarse

20. VCH, *Staffordshire*, xiv. 91.

21. Mollat, *Poor in the Middle Ages*, pp. 262–3.

22. One blind man is said to have begged from the canons for many years, a blind woman for a year and a paralysed beggar had a little shelter next to the precentor's gate (*Magna Vita Sancti Hugonis*, p. 99; R.M. Loomis, ed., Gerald of Wales, *Life of St Hugh of Avalon, Bishop of Lincoln 1186–1200* (New York, and London, 1985), pp. 70, 76–7).

23. Central accounts survive in considerable numbers at Exeter, Lincoln, Salisbury, Wells and York. All five together with Hereford and St Paul's also have a good range of subsidiary accounts. Chichester and Lichfield lack both central and subsidiary accounts.

24. N.I. Orme, *Exeter Cathedral, The First Thousand Years* (Exeter, 2009), p. 162; DRO ECA D&C 3777 fos. 12, 17v, 34v.

25. M. Hackett, ed., *Registrum Eleemosynariae D. Pauli Londonensis* (1827), iv.

26. VE, iv. 14; L[incolnshire] A[rchives] O[ffice] D&C Bj/3/2 fo. 10 (1480–1), Bj/3/4 s. a. 1520–21.

27. At York a dole was made (*York Statutes*, p. 3).

28. LAO D&C Bj/5/3/18; Bj/2/6. The *Valor Ecclesiasticus* records £7 5s 10d spent clothing the poor (VE, iv. 8).

woollen cloth, such as russet and blanket, as well as canvas (fabric made from flax or hemp). This was then made up at the chapter's expense into sets of clothing. One of the items given was 'duddes', probably cloaks or mantles, at a cost of 22*d* each. Large quantities of cloth were purchased: 312 ells of blanket and russet, 81½ ells of 'mendipes' (cloth from the Mendips) and 18 ells of canvas and 200 'canvas' in 1304–5.<sup>29</sup> Allowing for 2½ yards of cloth per set of clothes, a basic tunic, 196 paupers were given clothing that year.<sup>30</sup> Four dozen 'duddes' were regularly purchased which suggests provision for a minimum of forty-eight paupers.<sup>31</sup> The recipients are variously described as 'canons' poor', 'poor parishioners of the church of Lincoln' and 'the poor of churches and farms'. Sometimes they are geographically defined as the poor of particular chapter estates. Elsewhere, in 1396 the almoner of Tavistock Abbey, Devon, bought 300 yards of cloth for distribution on All Souls Day at a cost of 101*s* 10*d*.<sup>32</sup>

The *Valor Ecclesiasticus* records that the Wells chapter gave alms to infirm tenants on four of their Somerset estates: annual sums of 72*s* 1*d* at North Curry, 33*s* 4*d* at West Hatch, 44*s* 5*d* at Winscombe and 9*s* 10½*d* at Biddisham.<sup>33</sup> The origins of these distributions are unclear but were said to be long standing in 1535. In addition, there is evidence that the chapter distributed bread to the poor. Between 1400–1 and 1421–2, regular payments of 7*s* 7*d* were made from the 'poor-money', presumably for distributing it.<sup>34</sup> This may be a reference to the regular substantial distributions of bread on obit days but in 1428–9 the chapter made two additional contributions of £4 and 40*s* to the 'bread for the poor' because of a dearth. At Salisbury a special fund, known as 'Our Lady's Chamber', was allocated to almsgiving. In 1297, it had lands to the value of £11 4*s* 8*d* 'for the use of the poor', which were held in the common fund, but nothing more is known of it.<sup>35</sup> Lincoln, Salisbury and Wells all made some provision for the poor from their general expenditure, but Exeter, Hereford and York did not.

Records of how well religious houses fulfilled their obligations to the churches appropriated to them are scarce. It is therefore striking to find positive evidence for some cathedrals. The Lincoln chapter gave alms each year to the poor parishioners of Glentham, Lincolnshire, which was appropriated to their common fund in 1268, though the ordination of the vicarage in 1340 was not specific on the issue.<sup>36</sup> During the first half of the fourteenth century, roughly 11*s* a year was given, but thereafter 7*s*.<sup>37</sup> This

29. LAO D&C Bj/2/4 fo 5.

30. Dyer, *Standards of Living*, pp. 175–7.

31. For example in 1357–8 and 1407–8 (LAO Bj/2/6/1, Bj/2/10).

32. H.P.R. Finberg, *Tavistock Abbey* (Newton Abbot, 1969), p. 152.

33. *VE*, i. 125–7.

34. L. Colchester, ed., *Wells Cathedral Communars' Accounts 1327–1600* (Wells, 1984), pp. 30–77.

35. *Calendar of Close Rolls, 1298–1302*, p. 20.

36. *RA*, iii. nos. 1034, 1077.

37. LAO D&C Bj/2/4, Bj/2/6/1; *VE*, iv. 9.



seems to have been given out in cash on a single day, usually between Advent and Christmas.<sup>38</sup> The Salisbury chapter were also assiduous in their responsibility to the church of St Thomas, Salisbury, appropriated to them in 1399, to distribute a 'proper sum' to the poor. In the late fifteenth century, about £2 was distributed annually, about 5 per cent of their receipts from tithes and other oblations.<sup>39</sup>

The third type of institutional almsgiving practiced by secular cathedrals was their distribution of the alms specified in post-mortem commemorations, what Barbara Harvey has called almsgiving from special funds. The overwhelming majority of these were part of obits or anniversaries, annual commemorations for the soul of the deceased. The number of obits held in cathedrals rose steadily between the thirteenth and mid-sixteenth centuries. From the late thirteenth century, between fifty and a hundred anniversaries were held each year in most cathedrals and sometimes more.<sup>40</sup> Most did not entail any almsgiving but a significant minority did, between a fifth and a quarter of the 108 obits held at St Paul's in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth century.<sup>41</sup> Although the economic foundations of some obits and chantries were insecure and some failed, in general the replacement rate matched and occasionally outstripped the failure rate.

Obit almsgiving at Exeter, St Paul's and Wells is comparatively well documented. At Wells in the mid-1340s, £15s 1s 8d was distributed each year from ten obits. By 1394–5, this had risen to £16 5s from twelve obits and in 1535 stood at £23 6s 8d though the number of obits is not recorded.<sup>42</sup> Although relatively few of these made alms distributions, those that did allocated substantial sums of between 20s and 40s. Almost all of this was distributed as bread and only a small proportion in cash. At St Paul's in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries (1276 × 1321), £19 11s 10d was given in alms from twenty-five obits.<sup>43</sup> The *Valor Ecclesiasticus* suggests that this had doubled by 1535 when £40 2s 2d was distributed by the almoner though this probably included some non-obit almsgiving.<sup>44</sup> Unlike Wells obits, those at St Paul's tended to allocate small cash sums of between 2s and half a mark and rarely gave food. At Exeter in the mid-fifteenth century, alms were given much more frequently: at seventy-five obits in 1450–51 (about three-quarters of the total), and on a smaller scale, usually 4d, in penny doles to four paupers.<sup>45</sup> The standard distribution of 4d seems to have been a chapter

38. LAO D&C Bj/2/4.

39. A.D. Brown, *Popular Piety in Late Medieval England: The Diocese of Salisbury 1250–1550* (Oxford, 1995), p. 196.

40. There were 107 at Exeter in the 1420s (D.N. Lepine and N.I. Orme, eds., *Death and Memory in Medieval Exeter* (Devon and Cornwall Record Society, new series, xlvii, 2003), pp. 319–22).

41. G[uildhall] L[ibrary London] MS 25,520.

42. *Wells Communars' Accounts*, *passim*; VE, i. 126–8.

43. GL 25,520, 25,134.

44. VE, i. 361.

45. DRO ECA D&C 3771 s. a. 1450–51.

decision applied retrospectively in the late fourteenth century to most twelfth- and thirteenth-century foundations, several of whose foundation deeds make no mention of almsgiving to the poor.<sup>46</sup> While most obits consisted of the distribution of small sums of a few shillings, some were much larger undertakings. One well-documented example illustrates the scale of their generosity.<sup>47</sup> In 1256, Bishop Aigueblanche of Hereford granted the poor 240 seams of corn to be distributed as bread from the episcopal palace in Hereford during the two months of June and July. Each pauper was to have enough to feed himself for a day and the distributions were to continue for the two months or as long as the corn lasted.<sup>48</sup> By the 1460s, this responsibility had been devolved to the canons' bakehouse; seven quarters and four bushels of mixed wheat and rye and four quarters of wheat were distributed in 1463–4.<sup>49</sup> In 1535, four quarters of wheat and eight quarters rye were distributed in 4 lb loaves on a single occasion.<sup>50</sup> The scale of cathedral obit almsgiving led to chapter officials undertaking some of the duties of a monastic almoner. Though formal responsibility usually lay with the canons who held the chief financial offices, in practice much of the actual distribution was carried out by members of the minor clergy. These clerks often had extensive discretion over just which paupers received alms. Chapters were held to account for their post-mortem almsgiving at episcopal visitations and sometimes fault was found, as at Lincoln in 1348 and Salisbury in 1418.<sup>51</sup>

The surviving evidence does not fully reveal the extent this type of almsgiving because temporary obits, those lasting perhaps ten or twenty years, are rarely recorded. The Exeter accounts show that, as with permanent obits, some involved almsgiving. Precentor Hickling (d. 1416) allocated 5s to the poor who could not work in the twenty-six year obit he endowed.<sup>52</sup> In addition, the colleges of vicars choral and chantry priests that developed in the later middle ages were also small-scale distributors of alms in their own right.<sup>53</sup> At Exeter, St Paul's and Wells, the surviving accounts demonstrate that obit almsgiving was a particularly important part of their institutional charity. The remaining

46. Between 1377 and 1398–9 (DRO ECA D&C 3768–9).

47. See also Canon Thomas Esway's at St Paul's which allocated £8 to the poor, Bishop Neville's at Chichester which distributed 106s 8d, and the Burghersh chantries at Lincoln which assigned £8 6s 8d (GL MS 25,520, *Registrum Eleemosynariae*, xliii–iv; W.D. Peckham, ed., *The Chartulary of the High Church of Chichester* (Sussex Record Society, xlv, 1943), p. 212; C.W. Foster and A.H. Thompson, 'The Chantry Certificates for Lincoln and Lincolnshire', *Associated Architectural and Archaeological Societies' Reports and Papers*, xxxvi (1921–2), pp. 184–294.

48. R.G. Griffiths, ed., *Registrum Thome de Cantilupo, Episcopi Herefordensis AD MCCLXXV–MCCLXXXII* (2 vols., CYS, ii, 1907), i. 129.

49. H[ereford] C[athedral] A[rchives] R637a.

50. VE, iii. 6.

51. LAO Reg. IX fo. 30v; S[alisbury] C[athedral] A[rchives], Reg. Pountney fo. 51.

52. DRO ECA D&C 3770.

53. N.J. Tringham, ed., *Charters of the Vicars Choral of York Minster* (Yorkshire Archaeological Society, Record Series, cxlviii, 1993), no. 429.



six cathedrals also held many obits some of which included almsgiving but the absence of surviving accounts makes it difficult to measure the scale and importance of this type of charity there.<sup>54</sup>

Cathedral chapters also engaged in other eleemosynary functions through their patronage and supervision of hospitals and administration of loan chests. The bakehouses at Chichester, Exeter, Hereford and St Paul's, though their primary purpose was to supply the loaves allocated to canons in residence, gradually acquired some eleemosynary responsibilities, supplying bread for distribution to the poor. At Hereford the canons' bakehouse baked bread on a large scale for distribution to the poor at four obits, using as much as thirty-five quarters of grain in 1463–4.<sup>55</sup> Two cathedrals helped the poor with loan chests. At St Paul's Bishop Northburgh (d. 1361) bequeathed the huge sum of 1,000 marks for this purpose with elaborate conditions on how it was to be used.<sup>56</sup> Nothing is known of how it operated or whether it was ever established; Northburgh's will is the only surviving record. More is known about Our Lady's Alms Chest at Lichfield established by two resident canons. Originally founded by John Harwood (d. 1389), it was re-established by George Radcliffe in 1457 with a bequest of £20. The chest made loans of up to 20s but required a pledge of greater value than the loan which put it beyond the reach of the poor. After running into further difficulties through negligence, it was re-endowed for a second time in 1486 by Dean Heywood.<sup>57</sup>

St Paul's was unique among the secular cathedrals in having an almonry and almoner. The precise origins of the office are obscure. It may have developed from an unsuccessful attempt by Canon Henry of Northampton to found a hospital attached to the cathedral. Henry granted property and an income from two churches for a hospital for the poor between 1180 and 1192 but nothing more is heard of it. Perhaps the almonry was established instead since the first reference to an almoner dates from a second, probably slightly later grant between 1181 and 1192, in which Henry assigned houses to him for the use of the poor.<sup>58</sup> By 1220–21, there was a clear presumption that the cathedral engaged in almsgiving when a charter refers to the 'almsgiving of the church'.<sup>59</sup> The almoner was a member of the minor clergy and had responsibility for the maintenance and education of eight boy choristers, as well as the distribution of alms and the burial of beggars and the

54. There was regular obit almsgiving at Lichfield in the fourteenth century (*VCH, Staffordshire*, xiv. 185–6).

55. HCA R637a.

56. R.R. Sharpe, ed., *Calendar of Wills Proved and Enroled in the Court of Husting* (2 vols., 1890), ii. 61–2.

57. F.J. Furnivall, ed., *The Gild of St Mary Lichfield* (EETS, extra series civ, 1920), pp. 18–24.

58. M. Gibbs, ed., *Early Charters of St Paul's* (C[amden] S[ociety], third series, lviii, 1939), nos. 308, 132, 131.

59. D.P. Johnson, ed., *English Episcopal Acta, London 1189–1228* (Oxford, 2003), p. 147.

poor.<sup>60</sup> His income in the late thirteenth century was £17 8s 4d and in 1383–4 he distributed £14 8s 4d to the poor from obits.<sup>61</sup> At other cathedrals, almonry duties were undertaken by members of the minor clergy on a largely *ad hoc* basis.

Although eight of the nine secular chapters had links with hospitals, there was no equivalent in England of the *hotels-dieu* found adjacent to most cathedrals in France. French *hotels-dieu* had their origins in late antiquity when bishops inherited responsibility for the care of the sick and poor of their cities from Roman prefects which they later devolved to their cathedral chapters, whereas hospitals were largely a post-Conquest development in England.<sup>62</sup> Norman bishops did not subsequently introduce *hotels-dieu* to English secular cathedrals and as a result English chapters were never given formal responsibility for a hospital attached to the cathedral. Instead most gradually acquired responsibility for other hospitals in a rather *ad hoc* fashion. Those founders who entrusted hospitals to their supervision usually had a prior link to the chapter either as bishop or canon. St Mary's Hospital Chichester and St Ethelbert's Hereford, both founded by canons in the early thirteenth century, were the closest to French *hotels-dieu*.<sup>63</sup> They retained close links with their chapters and made important contributions to poor relief in their cities. The Hereford chapter was also responsible for St Katherine's, Ledbury.<sup>64</sup> The remainder were mainly later developments of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Exeter and Lincoln were patrons of hospitals that benefited the cathedral community, an almshouse at Exeter founded by Canon John Stevens for chapter servants in 1453–9 and St Giles Hospital, Lincoln, founded by Bishop Sutton c.1280 for old and sick vicars choral. Both chapters were also patrons of another hospital, the former for Bishop Stapeldon's for poor priests at Clyst Gabriel and latter for St Edmund's, Spital-on-the-Street, founded in 1397 by Thomas Aston, archdeacon of Stow.<sup>65</sup> At Wells, the chapter shared the management of Bubwith's Almshouses (1436) with the city corporation but at Lichfield the ties were looser.<sup>66</sup> St John's Hospital Lichfield, a twelfth-century episcopal foundation did

60. D. Keene, 'From Conquest to Capital: St Paul's c.1100–1300', in D. Keene, A. Burns and A. Saint, eds., *St Paul's the Cathedral Church of London 604–2004* (New Haven and London, 2004), pp. 17–32 at 23.

61. GL MS 25,520 fo. 56, 25,161/6. His income in 1526 was £57 11s 9d (GL MS 25,173).

62. A. Erlande-Brandenburg, *The Cathedral* (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 61, 73–4, 154–5, 341–53; S. Watson, 'The Origins of the English Hospital', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, sixth series, xvi, (2006), pp. 75–94.

63. *VCH, Sussex*, ii, 100–2; D. Whitehead, 'St Ethelbert's Hospital, Hereford', in G. Aylmer and J. Tiller, ed., *Hereford Cathedral: A History* (2000), pp. 599–609.

64. J. Hillaby, 'St Katherine's Hospital, Ledbury', in *Hereford Cathedral History*, pp. 610–27.

65. N.I. Orme and M. Webster, *The English Hospital 1070–1570* (Yale, 1995), pp. 217–22, 244–6; *VCH, Lincolnshire*, ii, 233, 235; D. Marcombe, 'Thomas de Aston: the Chantries and Charities of a Fourteenth Century Archdeacon', in N. Bennett and D. Marcombe, *Thomas de Aston and the Diocese of Lincoln* (Lincoln, 1998), pp. 32–55.

66. G. Shaw, *The Creation of a Community* (Oxford, 1993), pp. 231–2, 241–2.

not come under direct chapter supervision, but Milley's Hospital, a fifteenth-century episcopal foundation re-founded by Canon Milley in 1502–4 was administered by the sacrist and overseen by the dean.<sup>67</sup> York is something of an exception to this pattern and closer to the continental model. The city's largest and most prestigious hospital, St Leonard's, probably developed from the Minster's Saxon and immediately post-Conquest charitable activities, before becoming independent in the early twelfth century.<sup>68</sup> St Paul's and Salisbury had no responsibilities for a hospital.

As patrons chapters appointed the master or warden and sometimes nominated inmates; the Lincoln chapter regularly made presentations to St Giles' Hospital in the 1520s.<sup>69</sup> An assessment of chapters' stewardship of their hospitals yields mixed results. The Chichester chapter was diligent in its supervision of St Mary's: two deans, Thomas Lichfield (d. 1240) and William Fleshmonger in 1528, provided new statutes and many canons were benefactors.<sup>70</sup> In contrast, the Hereford chapter was less assiduous in its patronage of St Ethelbert's Hospital.<sup>71</sup> In 1252, Bishop Aigueblanche accused them of not fulfilling the founder's requirement to feed 100 paupers each day, which suggests the hospital had a major role in poor relief in the city at this time.<sup>72</sup> By the late fourteenth century, it was in financial difficulties but still managed to distribute 3s 6d per week to the poor each year.<sup>73</sup> Its income continued to decline over the next century and a half and in 1525 the mastership was combined with the treasurership to augment the latter's decayed income. The chapter's stewardship of St Katherine's Hospital, Ledbury, for much of the fourteenth century was worse bringing papal interventions in 1322 and 1386 and episcopal ones in 1353 and 1397. The latter revealed wholesale neglect by the warden who neither fed the twelve inmates nor made the twice weekly distributions to the poor outside prescribed by the statutes.<sup>74</sup>

Sufficient evidence survives to demonstrate beyond doubt that the nine secular cathedrals distributed alms regularly. Measuring the scale of their institutional almsgiving is a formidable task and quantification, always difficult for medieval historians, becomes almost intractable.

67. VCH, *Staffordshire*, iii. 287, 275–8.

68. P.H. Cullum, *Cremmetts and Corrodies: Care of the Poor and Sick at St Leonard's Hospital, York in the Middle Ages* (Borthwick Papers lxxix, 1991), pp. 5–6.

69. R.E.G. Cole, *The Chapter Acts of the Cathedral Church of Lincoln* (3 vols., LRS, xii–iii, xv, 1915–20), i. 14–15, 20, 27, 79–80, 179.

70. C.A. Swainson, 'The Hospital of St Mary in Chichester', *Sussex Archaeological Collections*, xxiv (1872), pp. 41–62.

71. Whitehead, 'St Ethelbert's Hospital', pp. 599–609.

72. W. Capes, ed., *Charters and Records of Hereford Cathedral* (Hereford, 1908), p. 97.

73. HCA 5743, R666–7, 669. In all four years (1375–6, 1377–9, 1380–1) expenditure exceeded income.

74. Hillaby, 'St Katherine's Hospital, Ledbury', pp. 610–27; A.T. Bannister, 'Visitation Returns in the Diocese of Hereford in 1397', *ante*, xlv (1930), pp. 92–101.

Given the problems of the limited surviving evidence, it is legitimate to ask whether it is possible in any meaningful sense. Although there are no long runs of discrete almonry accounts on which to base an authoritative quantitative analysis, at some cathedrals there are sufficient accounts containing charitable expenditure from which, despite the complexities of medieval accounting procedures, valid figures can be derived for some aspects. At Lincoln almsgiving from general expenditure varied from between £20–30 a year in the first half of the fourteenth century and around £30 in the 1360s to between £10 and £20 from the 1390s to the 1430s. Annual obit almsgiving at St Paul's c.1300 was £19 and in 1383–4 was £14. A similar sum was distributed at Wells, £16 from the 1390s rising to £23 by 1535; at Exeter it was £6–7 in the first half of the fifteenth century.<sup>75</sup> Deriving overall totals from these figures is far more difficult given that there are no clear figures for all three main types of institutional almsgiving (ritual, general expenditure and obit) for any one cathedral. Rough totals can nonetheless be hazarded for two better documented cathedrals. Both are only snapshots of one particular period: at Lincoln in the 1360s, the total was something over £40;<sup>76</sup> and at Exeter in the first half of the fifteenth century about £8.<sup>77</sup>

In addition, there is another important but problematic source of quantitative data, the *Valor Ecclesiasticus* of 1535, which records almsgiving by religious houses including secular cathedrals. The raw figures for secular cathedrals derived from it are set out in Table 1; no figures survive for York.<sup>78</sup> Both Alexander Savine and more recently Neil Rushton have shown that, despite instructions to list alms given to the poor, the commissioners recorded it unevenly, resulting in an underestimation of total almsgiving.<sup>79</sup> Allowing for some general underestimation and omissions, the *Valor* broadly confirms the pattern of institutional almsgiving suggested by other surviving evidence at St Paul's, Exeter and Lincoln, and, at Wells, increases it. For St Paul's the 1535 figure of £40 distributed in alms by the almoner is broadly consistent with the gross income of £57 recorded in 1526, the difference being mostly accounted for by the almoner's responsibility for maintaining the choristers. The Lincoln *Valor* total of £18, though well below the pre-Black Death peak, is probably a fairly accurate account of almsgiving in 1535. It records figures confirmed by cathedral accounts, sometimes

75. £7 9s ¼d in 1429–30 and £6 17s 2d in 1450–51 (DRO ECA D&C 3771).

76. Made up of £30 in cloth, £8 from the Burghersh obits and a few shillings each from ritual almsgiving, other obits and at appropriated churches (LAO D&C B/2/6/3–11; Foster and Thompson, *Lincoln Chantry Certificates*, 210–13; and footnote 26 above).

77. Made up of obit and ritual almsgiving (see footnotes 24, 45 and 75 above).

78. These are made up of institutional almsgiving from general funds and obits and obligations on individual prebends and dignitaries. The latter rarely exceeded 20s–30s at each cathedral.

79. A. Savine, *English Monasteries on the Eve of the Dissolution*, Oxford Studies in Social and Legal History 1, ed. P. Vinogradoff (Oxford, 1909), pp. 228–35; Rushton, 'Monastic Charitable Provision', pp. 9–44.

**Table 1.** Annual institutional almsgiving by secular cathedrals in 1535.

Cathedral	Total almsgiving
Chichester	£15 9s 4d
Exeter	£9 16s 2d
Hereford	£8 12s 6½d
Lichfield	£6 5s 8d
Lincoln	£18 2s 8d
St Paul's	£43 18s 10d
Salisbury	£10 5s 3d
Wells	£39 15s 10½d
Total of eight cathedrals	£152 6s 4d

Sources: *Valor Ecclesiasticus*, i. 125–8, 297–9, 361–7, ii. 78–90, 294–8, iii. 6–13, 135–9, iv. 8–24.

exactly as in the case of the 7s in alms given at Glenthams and the 3s 6d spent on shoes for poor on Maundy Thursday, or very closely; the *Valor* figure for the Burghersh obits is £8 9s 8d, whereas the cathedral accounts show £8 6s 8d for 1482–3.<sup>80</sup> In 1535, clothing was still being given to the poor but at the reduced level of £7, which probably reflects the continuation of a gradual decline that began in the late fourteenth century.<sup>81</sup> The position at Exeter is more complex. Both the *Valor* and the mid-fifteenth century cathedral accounts agree that Exeter's charity was almost entirely made up of obit almsgiving, but the *Valor* records a rise in the sum given from £6-7 to £9 in 1535, despite the reluctance of the Devon commissioners to list charitable provisions. This was probably the result of a revival in obit incomes enabling more to be distributed, though the chapter may have exaggerated its obligations to reduce its taxable income.<sup>82</sup> At Wells the *Valor*, far from under-recording almsgiving, provides a more complete picture. It lists £26 worth of obit almsgiving, whereas the cathedral central accounts record only £16 in 1534–5 and reveals substantial almsgiving on chapter estates not recorded in other accounts. The lack of sufficient comparative data for the remaining four cathedrals makes it harder to judge how accurate its figures for them are. But as other sources generally corroborate the values of the *Valor*, it is reasonable to suppose that its figures for cathedrals for which we lack corroborative evidence are likely to be reliable too. There is little evidence that the commissioners underestimated the almsgiving of secular cathedrals, unlike monastic houses. Perhaps the commissioners

80. *VE*, iv. 14; LAO D&C Bj/3/2.

81. The remaining £1 6s 8d is made up of obit distributions.

82. Several new obits founded after 1450 which included almsgiving such as those of Roger Keyes (d. 1477) and Alnetheus Arscott (d. 1537) are not listed (DRO ECA D&C 2367, 2432).

were more sympathetic to them than monasteries; secular cathedrals survived the dissolution and actually increased in number. Overall, the *Valor* appears to provide a tolerably reliable picture of almsgiving by secular cathedrals in the 1530s.

The significance of cathedral almsgiving becomes clearer when it is compared with other religious houses. Some direct comparisons can be made despite the limited surviving evidence for monastic houses.<sup>83</sup> Bolton Priory distributed between £3 and £11 in cash and thirty quarters of grain annually in the period 1303–14, Winchester Cathedral Priory £28 in the early fourteenth century, Worcester Cathedral Priory £33 in 1521–2 and Glastonbury Abbey £126 in 1538.<sup>84</sup> The more generous secular cathedrals, especially Lincoln, compare favourably with Bolton and Winchester around 1300 but fall a long way short of some of the great Benedictine houses in the sixteenth century. The *Valor Ecclesiasticus* enables a more systematic comparison to be made for the pre-Reformation period, with the important caveat that it under-recorded monastic charity. In 1535, even the most generous secular cathedrals were no match in their almsgiving for the larger, wealthier monasteries such as Gloucester whose charity amounted to £124.<sup>85</sup> St Paul's and Wells were broadly similar to middle ranking rural houses such as Ixworth, Suffolk, which distributed £30 and Kenilworth, Warwickshire, £23.<sup>86</sup> The least generous cathedrals gave alms on a broadly comparable scale to small rural houses like Stoneleigh Abbey, Warwickshire, where alms totalled £9 13s.<sup>87</sup> There is a similar pattern when cathedrals are compared with hospitals and almshouses. The large well-established hospitals distributed far more, Newarke Hospital, Leicester, £206 and St Leonard's, York, £105.<sup>88</sup> Lichfield cathedral's almsgiving of £6 5s 8d almost equals the annual expenditure of a small almshouse; St Mary Magdalene's at Glastonbury supported nine paupers at a cost of £6 10s 9d.<sup>89</sup> Among other sources of charity, fraternity almsgiving, while an important source of mutual support, had a limited impact on the poor because it was principally confined to wealthier fraternities and distributed primarily to their members.<sup>90</sup> Although the parish did not

83. Almsgiving is scattered across a range of subsidiary accounts as well as the almoner's, some of which are missing. When the value of almsgiving in kind is not given rough totals have been calculated based on Thorold Rogers' grain prices for the relevant years.

84. I. Kershaw, *Bolton Priory: the Economy of a Northern Monastery, 1286–1325* (Oxford, 1973), pp. 141–4; *Comptus Rolls of the Obedientiaries of St Swithun's Priory Winchester*, ed. G.W. Kitchin (Hampshire Record Society, 1892), pp. 138–41, 232, 237; *Accounts of the Priory of Worcester for the Year 13–14 Henry VIII, AD 1521–2*, ed. J.M. Wilson (Worcestershire Historical Society, 1907), pp. 3–18; Rushton, 'Monastic Charitable Provision', pp. 18–19.

85. *VE*, ii. 409–18. See also Rushton's figure for Bury St Edmunds which includes £63 for anniversaries. It is unclear how much of this was alms (Rushton, 'Monastic Charitable Provision', p. 15).

86. *VE*, iii. 482, 66.

87. *Ibid.* 68.

88. *VE*, iv. 169–71, v. 17–18 (the latter figure includes obit distributions).

89. Rushton, 'Monastic Charitable Provision', pp. 18–19.

90. V. Bainbridge, *Gilds in the Medieval Countryside* (Woodbridge, 1996), p. 105, 114–15.



become the principal focus of poor relief until the sixteenth century, some wealthier, mainly urban parishes, distributed obit alms, but on a smaller scale than cathedrals. The sums varied widely: in the late fifteenth century the London parish of St Mary-at-Hill supported three poor men at a cost of 52s a year and from 1485 to 1486 All Saints Bristol distributed bread worth 9s 8d a year.<sup>91</sup> On the basis of the *Valor* secular cathedrals' institutional contribution to poor relief was on a significantly smaller scale than larger and wealthier monastic houses and hospitals but comparable with middle ranking and small ones. Such a judgement, however, underestimates their overall contribution as this also included regular almsgiving by their clergy who in addition gave part of their substantial wealth to the poor after their deaths.

The *Valor* figures can be used to calculate the proportion of their income that cathedrals devoted to charity in 1535. The figures set out in Table 2 show the percentage devoted to almsgiving of the net income of cathedral common funds, that is to say the income assigned to the chapter collectively, and a range of comparative figures from other monastic houses.<sup>92</sup> Making comparisons between secular cathedrals and other religious houses raises problems of interpretation. Savine calculated that 2.5 per cent of monastic income (about £2,700) was spent on charity, but Rushton has argued for a minimum of 4.9 per cent (£7,403) and a preferred total of 6.9–7.9 per cent (£10,216–£11,696). Savine's calculation was based on gross income and excludes hospitals whereas Rushton uses net income, includes hospitals and has deployed a mathematical formula to compensate for the underestimation by the *Valor* and Savine.<sup>93</sup> The rate of charitable giving by secular cathedrals compares favourably with Savine's average figure of 2.5 per cent for monastic houses as a whole. If Rushton's revised figures are used, then the rate of charitable giving by secular cathedrals does not generally reach the proportion given by urban houses, but the more generous of the secular cathedrals were similar to Cluniac and Benedictine houses.<sup>94</sup> Cathedrals fell a long way short of the percentage for hospitals. The *Valor* figures also shed interesting light on the relative generosity of cathedrals. As might be expected the smaller and poorer cathedrals, Exeter, Hereford and Lichfield, gave least, the exception being Chichester. Among the wealthiest and most prestigious Salisbury's

91. H. Littlehayles, ed., *The Medieval Records of a London City Church, St Mary at Hill 1420–1559* (EETS, original series, cxv, cxviii, 1904–5), pp. 17, 89 *passim*; C. Burgess, ed., *The Pre-Reformation Records of All Saints' Church Bristol* (3 vols., Bristol Record Society, xlvi, liii, lvi, 1995–2004), i. 135–6, ii. 109–10 *passim*, iii. 165 *passim*.

92. It does not include either the incomes assigned to individual prebends and dignities and corporations of minor clergy or any charitable distributions by them. Both Lehmborg and Rushton have calculated net income with only slight variations (Rushton, 'Monastic Charitable Provision', p. 37).

93. Savine, p. 238; Rushton, pp. 15–16.

94. Rushton, 'Monastic Charitable Provision', pp. 18, 20.

**Table 2.** Percentage of annual income devoted to almsgiving in 1535.

Institution	Percentage
Chichester	4.0
Exeter	0.7
Hereford	1.6
Lichfield	0.8
Lincoln	3.4
St Paul's	5.9
Salisbury	1.6
Wells	5.4
Average of eight secular cathedrals	2.9
Savine: monastic houses	2.5
Rushton: urban houses	5.5
Rushton: Benedictine houses	4.7
Rushton: Cluniac houses	3.2
Rushton: hospitals	18.2

Sources: Lehmborg, *Reformation of Cathedrals*, p. 27; *Valor Ecclesiasticus*; Rushton, 'Monastic Charitable Provision', pp. 11, 18.

parsimony stands out. St Paul's and Wells, neither in the front rank in status or wealth, were the most generous. The variations in both total almsgiving and the proportion of income given reflect the different eleemosynary traditions of each cathedral: at St Paul's the presence of an almonry and a very strong tradition of obit almsgiving; at Wells and Lincoln the distribution of alms on chapter estates and at appropriated churches. Bishops played a central role in establishing these traditions in the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Episcopal obits of this period, such as those at Chichester and Hereford, were often generous in their provision for the poor.<sup>95</sup>

Canons often gave alms as individuals, especially post-mortem. Such charity should be seen as very much part of the charity of secular cathedrals in general since the money canons gave very largely came from the incomes and revenues they received from the cathedral: their prebends, dignities and the financial rewards of residence. Much of it was distributed at cathedrals, in cathedral cities and on cathedral estates and in the case of post-mortem almsgiving was administered by the chapter as well. The personal almsgiving of their clergy was a major part of the charity of secular cathedrals, matching and probably exceeding

95. *VE* i. 297–7, iii. 6, 8.

the annual sums distributed by chapters corporately. Individual charity can be divided into two stages: lifetime and post-mortem almsgiving. The first consisted of regular distributions and for a few exceptional individuals a major eleemosynary foundation. Post-mortem charity, which is much more visible, comprised the dispersal of estates and long-term commemorations of souls. Personal almsgiving is difficult to study because it was intended to be discreet and private as well as spontaneous and habitual.<sup>96</sup> Furthermore its motives and intentions were considered self-evident and did not need to be articulated. Medieval charity was inseparable from piety. It stemmed from the precepts of the Sermon on the Mount and was popularised in the seven corporal works of mercy: to feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, shelter travellers, visit the sick, minister to prisoners and bury the dead. Theological developments, the sacrament of penance and the doctrine of purgatory, reinforced its importance which can be summarised as 'Alms extinguish sin just as water extinguishes fire', a phrase that can be traced back to the twelfth century in Bartholomew of Exeter's *Penitential*.<sup>97</sup> William Duffield, a fifteenth-century York canon, summed up the general approach of the higher clergy in his instruction that the residue of his estate should be used for 'works of mercy and piety among the infirm and needy poor for the salvation of my soul and to please Almighty God'.<sup>98</sup> A more personal response can be found in the preamble of Dean Heywood's re-foundation of the loan chest at Lichfield in 1486. 'Moved of veray charite' and 'coueting spirituall giftes' the dean acted 'for the helth of ovr soule and for the wele and profit of the pore people of Lichfield'.<sup>99</sup>

Almsgiving by individual clergy during their lifetimes has left almost no trace. This scarcity of evidence, in particular the rarity of clerical household accounts below the rank of bishop, makes it very difficult to quantify. Furthermore, the handful that survive do not always record almsgiving, or the lack of it, clearly.<sup>100</sup> One of the very few survivals, and one of the most interesting, is that of Bogo de Clare (d. 1294), a younger son of Gilbert de Clare, earl of Gloucester. In the course of accumulating nearly thirty benefices he was accused by Archbishop Pecham of neglecting his obligations to the poor and condemned in a well-known pun as the 'ravisher not rector' of his parishes.<sup>101</sup> Even such an allegedly egregious pluralist as Bogo gave alms regularly. His household accounts, which are substantially complete for a ten-week

96. Mollat, *Poor in the Middle Ages*, pp. 153–4.

97. A. Morey, *Bartholomew of Exeter, Bishop and Canonist* (Cambridge, 1937), p. 179.

98. J. Raine, ed., *T[estementa] E[boracensis]* (6 vols., Surtees Society, iv, xxx, xlv, liii, lxxix, cvi, 1836–1906), iii, 129.

99. *Gild of St Mary Lichfield*, p. 22.

100. The complexities of household accounts are discussed in C. Woolgar, ed., *Household Accounts from Medieval England* (2 vols., Oxford, 1992–3), i, 3–65.

101. 'nec rector ... sed raptor' (C. Trice Martin, ed., *Registrum Epistolarum Fratris Johannis Peckham, Archiepiscopi Cantuariensis* (3 vols., Rolls Series, 1882–5), i, 371–2).

period from 1 May to 13 July 1285, record expenditure of 10s 11d on alms, an average of roughly 1s a week.<sup>102</sup> It was distributed almost daily, often four or more times a week, in small sums of between 1d and 3d a day in cash payments of 1d or ½d; sometimes a few pence was spent on bread. There seems to have been little premeditation involved. Alms were given to those who came to Bogo's house in Aldgate, London, or who were encountered in the course of the day, such as the 2d given to those met on the road from Aldgate to Westminster. The distribution was often made by servants. Extrapolating from these accounts Bogo gave between £2–3 in alms to the poor each year. The handful of other surviving household accounts of the higher clergy suggests that Bogo was fairly typical. William Smith, archdeacon of Winchester and bishop elect of Lichfield, also gave alms in cash. His accounts for the three months from December 1491 to March 1492 record two allocations, 3s 4d on 22 December 1491 and 16d on 12 March 1492, but not the details of how they were distributed.<sup>103</sup> Other evidence backs up these accounts. In his will, Richard Chesterfield (d. 1405), a Lincoln residentiary, arranged for the weekly almsgiving to widows and the poor that he made during his lifetime to be continued for a year after his death.<sup>104</sup> Some early sixteenth-century Exeter canons had a reputation for being charitable. Writing a generation later and from a Protestant perspective, John Hooker, an Exeter historian, nonetheless commended Robert Weston (d. 1539) as 'a greater keeper of hospitality both to rich and poor' and John Ryse (d. 1531) for being 'good to the poor'.<sup>105</sup>

Regular almsgiving by the higher clergy can be compared with episcopal and aristocratic charity. Though on a smaller scale, Bogo de Clare's was broadly comparable to that of his contemporary Bishop Swinfield of Hereford. Swinfield was more generous as befitted his episcopal rank and obligations and greater income. His accounts for 1289–90 show a clear pattern of almsgiving.<sup>106</sup> During the bishop's travels, a few pence were dispensed in alms most days, 3¼d a day being the standard rate, but no cash payments were made when he was staying at one of his episcopal manors. Swinfield also made *ad hoc* gifts and probably distributed food when resident at his episcopal manors, as Archbishop Bourghier did at Lambeth Palace where in 1459 daily provisions of two loaves and a gallon of ale were made for the poor.<sup>107</sup> Almsgiving by the peerage was significantly more generous than that of the higher clergy if the Mortimer earls of March are typical of their

102. T[he] N[ational] A[rchives], P[ublic] R[ecord] O[ffice], E101/91/1–2. There is a gap between 3 and 14 June.

103. Westminster Abbey Muniments 5474 fos. 20v, 27v.

104. LAO D&C A2/29 fos. 13–14v.

105. T. Gray, ed., *The Chronicle of Exeter 1205–1722* (Exeter, 2005), pp. 87, 80.

106. J. Webb, ed., *A Roll of the Household Expenses of Richard de Swinfield, Bishop of Hereford, during part of the years 1289 and 1290* (2 vols., CS, old series, lix, lxii), i, *passim*.

107. Lambeth Palace Library, Estate Document 1973.

class. Whereas Bogo de Clare made regular distributions of a few pence, they gave several shillings, rarely less than 3s 4d and often half a mark or more.<sup>108</sup> The almsgiving of the lesser aristocracy and the less prominent peerage tended to be slightly less generous than that of the higher clergy: Dame Katherine Norwich kept thirteen poor in her household in 1336–7; the household of Gilbert, Lord Talbot, at Blakemere, Shropshire, provided 419 loaves for the poor in 1417–18; but Robert Waterton, esquire, of Methley, Yorkshire, only made occasional gifts of a few pence and herrings in 1416–17.<sup>109</sup>

The regular almsgiving to the poor by the higher clergy was broadly commensurate with their status and income. It was on a larger scale than the lesser aristocracy, but not as extensive as the episcopate and peerage. At all levels of the social hierarchy, however, including the higher clergy, the proportion of income given was very small. The wealthiest higher clergy enjoyed an income of £300 or more.<sup>110</sup> Their almsgiving, assuming they gave on a similar level to Bogo de Clare of £2–3 a year, was about 1 per cent of their income. The Mortimer earls of March gave a slightly larger proportion; in a two-week period in 1378 and an eight-month period in 1413–14 about 2 per cent of expenditure. In 1417–18, Lord Talbot gave substantially less; assuming the 419 loaves were 1d loaves, that amounted to just 0.5 per cent of his income that year. Robert Waterton was even less generous, giving a mere 0.3 per cent of his expenditure in 1416–17.

Alongside regular almsgiving, a handful of individuals undertook a major eleemosynary project. For most this was the foundation of an obit or chantry that included almsgiving. This was often established well before their deaths; the distinction between lifetime and post-mortem almsgiving is more blurred than some historians have allowed for. Sometimes it was a much larger undertaking such as the foundation of a hospital or almshouse.<sup>111</sup> John Forest, a fifteenth-century dean of Wells, founded an almshouse at Banbury, his birthplace, an attachment strengthened by his possession of the prebend of Banbury in Lincoln cathedral from 1401 to 1446.<sup>112</sup> In his will, written in 1443, which is the only evidence linking him to it, he gave 100 marks to four poor people

108. *Household Accounts*, i. 247–54, ii. 593–603.

109. *Household Accounts*, i. 179–227; B. Ross, ed., *Accounts of the Stewards of the Talbot Household at Blakemere 1392–1425* (Shropshire Record Series, vii, 2003), pp. 105–34; *Household Accounts*, ii. 504–22.

110. Dean Worsley of St Paul's (d. 1499) had an income of over £300 (H. Kleinecke and S. Hovland, *The Estate and Household Accounts of William Worsley, Dean of St Paul's Cathedral, 1479–97*, London Record Society, xl (2004), p. 31); at Exeter Dean Cobethorn and Canon William Browning received £200–250 (*VE*, ii, 295, 325, 373, 339; DRO, ECA 2820).

111. Richard Ravenser, archdeacon of Lincoln (d. 1386), was a notable founder and benefactor (D.N. Lepine, 'The Noiseless Tenor of their Way?': The Lives of the Late Medieval Higher Clergy', in J. Boffey and V. Davis, ed., *Recording Lives in England in the Later Middle Ages* (Donington, 2009), pp. 25–41 at 37–40).

112. LAO Reg. XII fo. 209v.

'in my almshouse' next to the churchyard in Banbury who were to be paid 4d each a week for twenty years.<sup>113</sup> It continued as part of a guild and chantry and survived the Reformation.<sup>114</sup>

It was after their deaths that most cathedral clergy made their greatest contribution to charity. Their post-mortem almsgiving can be divided into three stages: first an immediate disbursement around the funeral, which often lasted until the month's mind (the thirtieth day after their death); secondly, the dispersal of the estate, a process which might take several years; and thirdly, long-term disbursements for many years after their deaths, mainly in obits and chantries both temporary and permanent. Though post-mortem charity is comparatively well documented in testamentary sources, these can be unreliable. Wills can give the impression of a deathbed scramble to give alms and testators' intentions were not always realised. They are also difficult to relate to almsgiving during the testator's lifetime. Although testamentary evidence has been widely used in studies of medieval charity, it needs to be used in conjunction with other sources, particularly probate accounts, if it is to provide more than a record of deathbed intentions and preferences.<sup>115</sup> Probate evidence, the inventories and accounts drawn up by executors, as well as avoiding reliance on testators' intentions, details how an estate was actually dispersed, including the residue. Clerical estates often had substantial residues because celibate priests could have no legally recognised wives nor legitimate children each entitled to a third of the estate. Wills are particularly opaque about residues, usually disposing of them in formulaic phrases that they should be used for the benefit of the testator's soul, an injunction that frequently involved almsgiving. The drawback for the historian of medieval probate records is their scarcity, especially in complete form. Here we can draw on just ten cases, mostly from the records of York.

The ten comprise seven canons and three minor clergy: Andrew Kilkenny, dean of Exeter (d. 1302), Roger Nassington, chancellor of Lichfield (d. 1364), Thomas Dalby, archdeacon of Richmond (d. 1400), William Kexby, precentor of York (d. 1410), William Duffield, archdeacon of Cleveland (d. 1453), Martin Colyns, treasurer of York (d. 1509) and William Melton, chancellor of York (d. 1528);<sup>116</sup> together with three York minor clergy: Thomas Cuthbert (d. 1508), a chantry priest, and Henry Thorlthorpe

113. F. Weaver, ed., *Somerset Medieval Wills 1383–1500* (Somerset Record Society, xvi, 1901), pp. 152–5.

114. *VCH, Oxfordshire*, x. 124.

115. The limitations of wills are discussed in C. Burgess, 'Late Medieval Wills and Pious Convention: Testamentary Evidence Reconsidered', in M.A. Hicks, ed., *Profit, Piety and the Professions in Late Medieval England* (Gloucester, 1990), pp. 14–33.

116. D.N. Lepine, 'Getting and Spending': the Accumulation and Dispersal of a Clerical Fortune', *Report and Transactions of the Devonshire Association*, cxxxvi (2004), pp. 37–70; A.B. Emden, *A Biographical Register of the University of Oxford to 1500* (Oxford, 1957–9), ii. 1338; A.B. Emden, *[A Biographical Register of the University of Cambridge to 1500]* (Cambridge, 1963), p. 174; *BRUO*, ii. 1044–5; *Ibid.* i. 601–2; *BRUC*, pp. 152, 400–1.



(d. 1426) and William Welwyk (d. 1454) vicars choral. The seven canons are broadly typical of the higher clergy in terms of careers and wealth. University educated, they accumulated substantial wealth in the course of ecclesiastical and royal service for which they were rewarded with lucrative benefices. The minor clergy are harder to place because less prosopographical work has been done on them. Much less wealthy than canons, they had narrower horizons, often being local and less well-educated men, with duties requiring continuous residence. Visitation records suggest that cathedral minor clergy could be a truculent and disruptive presence, but some were competent men of business carrying out much of the day-to-day administration of their cathedrals, not least its almsgiving.

The dispersal of their estates usually involved the largest single act of almsgiving undertaken by most cathedral clergy and could amount to a major redistribution of wealth. Its first stage, the funeral, was usually grand and lavish; even those who rejected funeral pomp usually included almsgiving. In return for alms, the poor were expected to intercede for the soul of the deceased. The intercession of the poor was considered especially efficacious because they were thought to be close to Christ. Their prayers were often sought on a large scale and the sums distributed could be substantial; the executors of Martin Colyns gave £20.<sup>117</sup> Distributions were mainly in cash, but sometimes bread was given as well and clothing, a livery, was provided for mourners. In 1302, the executors of Andrew Kilkenny spent the huge sum of £12 15s 11d on bread for the poor.<sup>118</sup> The distribution of such large sums are likely to have posed logistical problems and sometimes attracted disorderly crowds.<sup>119</sup> All in all almsgiving formed a significant proportion of higher clergy funeral costs, between a fifth and a third.<sup>120</sup>

The executors of the seven canons gave significant and sometimes exceptional sums to the poor as the following totals show: Duffield £300 14s 9d,<sup>121</sup> Kilkenny £87 1s 5½d,<sup>122</sup> Collins £64 9s 8d,<sup>123</sup> Dalby £33 7s,<sup>124</sup> Nassington £29 13s 7d,<sup>125</sup> Kexby £10 5s 4d,<sup>126</sup> and Melton £8 4s

117. *TE*, iv. 302. The sums distributed at the other funerals were: Dalby £13 9s 4d, Duffield £10, Kexby £6 11s 8d, Kilkenny £12 15s 11d, and Nassington £9 8s 8d (*TE*, iii. 18–19, 143–4, 46–7; Lepine and Orme, *Death and Memory*, pp. 186–7; J.C. Cox, ed., *Catalogue of Muniments and Manuscript Books of the Dean and Chapter of Lichfield and of the Lichfield Vicars* (William Salt Archaeological Society, vi part 2, 1886), pp. 226–7).

118. Lepine and Orme, *Death and Memory*, p. 186.

119. E. Clark, 'Institutional and legal responses to begging in late medieval England', *Social Science History*, xxvi (2002), pp. 447–73; Lepine, 'Getting and Spending', pp. 63–5.

120. D.N. Lepine, 'High Solemn Ceremonies: the Funerary Practice of the Late Medieval Higher Clergy', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, lxi (2010), pp. 18–39.

121. *TE*, iii. 125–52. The totals include distributions to the poor and hospitals at the funeral, in bequests and in the dispersal of the residue of the estate.

122. Lepine and Orme, *Death and Memory*, pp. 171–202. Kilkenny's executors gave a further £35 to his 'kin' which may refer to his poor tenants.

123. *TE*, iv. 279–307.

124. *TE*, iii. 9–22.

125. *Catalogue of Lichfield Muniments*, pp. 225–30.

126. *TE*, iii. 44–7.

8*d*.<sup>127</sup> These figures are broadly in proportion to the value of the deceased's estate; the larger the estate the greater the almsgiving. Dalby, Colyns, Duffield and Kilkenny were extremely wealthy with gross estates of £900–1,500, whereas Kexby and Melton had significantly smaller ones, £150 and £263, respectively. Though substantial, these sums were, however, a relatively small proportion of the total estate, generally between 5 and 10 per cent.<sup>128</sup> These distributions frequently took several years, Colyns' executors were distributing alms thirteen years after his death.<sup>129</sup> The amount given reflected individual preferences. Although Dalby and Duffield had similarly sized estates, Duffield's executors gave ten times more to the poor; Dalby instead chose to endow the choristers of York Minster.<sup>130</sup> The minor clergy gave much less in alms, as might be expected, because they had less wealth. The two vicars choral, Thorlthorpe and Welwyk, both of whom had estates of about £11, gave a few shillings, 9*s* 4*d* and 6*s* 1*d*, respectively, but no almsgiving is recorded in Cuthbert's accounts, a slightly smaller estate of £9.<sup>131</sup> For some their post-mortem charity continued long after the dispersal of their estates through regular almsgiving of a few pence or shillings in obits and chantries, which, as we have seen, were often administered by the cathedral.

The probate evidence suggests that cathedral canons and the higher clergy as a whole were more generous to the poor in the dispersal of their estates than most other groups of equivalent social status and wealth. The greater wealth of the episcopate enabled them to give more. The executors of Bishop Bitton of Exeter (d. 1307) distributed £362 9*s* to the poor, a sum nearly matched by William Duffield.<sup>132</sup> The generosity of the peerage is harder to assess in the absence of much probate evidence.<sup>133</sup> The estate of Thomas Beaufort (d. 1426), duke of Exeter, gave £114 in alms together with an unspecified part of the £391 spent of transporting his body from Greenwich to Bury St Edmunds.<sup>134</sup> Among the lesser aristocracy Elizabeth Sywardby (d. 1468), the widow

127. C. Cross, ed., *York Clergy Wills 1520–1600: I Minster Clergy* (Borthwick Texts and Calendars, Records of the Northern Province, x, 1984), pp. 22–5.

128. Duffield 27%, Kilkenny 11.5%, Kexby 10%, Colyns 8.5%, Melton 6% and Dalby 2.5%. These percentages are based on the net value of estates, deducting debts owed by the testator and bad debts.

129. *TE*, iv. 307.

130. *TE*, ii. 262.

131. *P[robate] I[n]ventories of the Y[ork] D[iocese] 1300–1500*, ed. P.M. Stell (York, 2006), pp. 546–9, 609; *TE*, iv. 267–8.

132. W.H. Hale and H.T. Ellacombe, eds., *Accounts of the Executors of Richard Bishop of London 1303, and of the Executors of Thomas Bishop of Exeter 1310* (CS, new series, x 1874), pp. 22–45. The executors of Bishop Gravesend of London disbursed £140 5*s* and those of Bishop Merton of Rochester over 400 marks (*Ibid.* pp. 53, 83, 99–100; J.R.L. Highfield, ed., *The Early Rolls of Merton College Oxford* (Oxford Historical Society, new series xviii, 1964), pp. 108, 155, 161).

133. For a testamentary study, see J.T. Rosenthal, *The Purchase of Paradise* (1972), pp. 102–16.

134. TNA, PRO, E101/514/22.

of a Yorkshire esquire, left an estate of £110, of which £4 17s 5d was given to the poor.<sup>135</sup> Thomas Crake of Beverley (d. 1488), gentleman, had a smaller estate of £75 but was more generous, though less discriminating, giving £10 to 1,000 poor men and 6s 8d to the leper houses in Beverley.<sup>136</sup> The urban elite of fifteenth-century York, in general, gave less to the poor than the lesser aristocracy, ranging from a few shillings to £2–4 despite some having estates of £100–200.<sup>137</sup> Wider testamentary studies tend to support the conclusions drawn from these probate accounts. A study of the Yorkshire gentry between 1370 and 1480 found that a third of testators made specific gifts to the poor.<sup>138</sup> It was a higher priority, however, for the citizens of Hull and London, more of whom made bequests, albeit of small sums.<sup>139</sup> The total post-mortem charity by cathedral canons was similar to the annual almsgiving by some hospitals and smaller monastic houses; in 1535 Evesham Abbey, Worcestershire, distributed £55 3s 8d and St John's Hospital, Lichfield £19 15s 5d.<sup>140</sup> This post-mortem generosity to the poor was certainly made possible by the canons' considerable wealth and by the absence of widows and children, but its scale and the care with which specific provisions were made suggests that it reflected their religious vocation and the seriousness with which they took their charitable obligations.

Not only were cathedral chapters and canons generous by contemporary standards in their charitable giving, they also practised discrimination from an early date. Discussion of this issue is still overshadowed by the Tudor Poor Laws of 1598 and 1601, with their clear distinction between the deserving and undeserving poor. Medieval almsgiving is often seen as a gradual evolution from the supposed indiscriminate and wasteful giving of the high middle ages to a more discriminating and purposeful approach in the late medieval period, especially after the Black Death, a trend which reached its apogee in the Elizabethan legislation. This account has been significantly challenged. Barbara Harvey has convincingly demonstrated that the larger Benedictine monasteries practised a form of discriminating almsgiving from as early as the beginning of the twelfth century.<sup>141</sup> Miri Rubin dates the shift to the thirteenth century when a combination of rising population, greater hardship and scarcity of resources compelled

135. *PIYD*, pp. 625–30.

136. *Ibid.*, p. 663. Thomas Vicars, a wealthy husbandman, was much less generous (*Ibid.*, pp. 587–8).

137. *Ibid.*, pp. 495, 519–20, 632–3.

138. M.G.A. Vale, *Piety, Charity and Literacy among the Yorkshire Gentry, 1370–1480* (Borthwick Papers, 1, 1976), pp. 24–8.

139. P. Heath, 'Urban Piety in the Later Middle Ages: the Evidence of Hull Wills', in R.B. Dobson, ed., *The Church, Politics and Patronage in the Fifteenth Century* (Gloucester, 1984), pp. 209–34 at 224–5; J.A.F. Thomson, 'Piety and Charity in Late Medieval London', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, xvi (1965), pp. 178–95.

140. *VE*, iii. 141, 254.

141. Harvey, *Living and Dying*, pp. 19–21.

greater discrimination.<sup>142</sup> Other historians have identified the Black Death as the watershed, after which, though there were fewer paupers, there was great concern over the idle poor who would not work.

Canonists and theologians made increasingly sophisticated distinctions between recipients of charity to form a hierarchy of need from the mid twelfth century onwards. Three defining principles were applied to the poor: proximity, the known in preference to the stranger; need, the sick, disabled, old and those unable to work; and merit, the just rather than the wicked.<sup>143</sup> The dichotomy between discriminating and indiscriminate almsgiving has patristic roots and to some extent the tension between St John Chrysostom's advocacy of indiscriminate almsgiving and St Ambrose's carefully drawn hierarchy of recipients remained unresolved during the later middle ages. Although the influential canonist Rufinus had justified refusing alms to the able-bodied poor who would not work as early as 1159, the late sixteenth-century distinction between the deserving and the undeserving poor was rarely drawn so starkly in the medieval period, an important exception being the 1388 statute which allowed able bodied beggars to be punished.<sup>144</sup> In post-mortem almsgiving, there was a tension between maximising prayers by giving to as many paupers as possible and discrimination which reduced their numbers and the consequent spiritual benefits. Some canonists, notably Guido de Baysio (d. 1313), tried to resolve the dilemma by suggesting that day-to-day almsgiving was bound to be indiscriminate because it was impossible to inquire into the circumstances of every pauper encountered but advocated discrimination in premeditated almsgiving.<sup>145</sup>

From an early date, by the mid-thirteenth century, discriminating charity is evident at secular cathedrals, particularly in post-mortem almsgiving by individuals. Cathedral canons, as educated members of the higher clergy, might be expected to be aware of the canonists' new thinking and by the mid-thirteenth century there is evidence of growing discrimination in their almsgiving. The earliest surviving evidence, late twelfth-century and early thirteenth-century gifts by cathedral clergy to the almonry of St Paul's, refers to the poor without distinction. But obit almsgiving in this period, as Barbara Harvey has argued, even when it was directed simply to the poor, included elements of discrimination as it favoured the local, settled and therefore known poor who would have been aware of the dates on which alms were given. It was more difficult for the transient poor, vagrants, 'to be in the right place at the right

142. Rubin, *Charity and Community*, p. 291.

143. Ibid., pp. 68–74; B. Tierney, 'The Decretists and the "Deserving Poor"', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, i (1958–9), pp. 360–73, at 363.

144. B. Tierney, *Medieval Poor Law: A Sketch of Canonical Theory and its Application in England* (Berkeley, 1959), pp. 54–62; McIntosh, 'Local Responses to the Poor', p. 217; Tierney, 'Deserving Poor', pp. 363–70.

145. Tierney, *Medieval Poor Law*, pp. 61–2.

time', though bells would have alerted any passing poor.<sup>146</sup> The local, known poor would also be better placed to receive the alms given indiscriminately at funerals. By the mid-thirteenth century, there is clear evidence of discrimination in obit almsgiving. One of the earliest, dating from 1232, is Elias of Dereham's at Salisbury which provided food for 100 poor: a penny's worth of bread, a gallon of ale and a dish of meat or fish to be shared between two paupers.<sup>147</sup> At Chichester in the 1240s, a group of seven obits favoured the institutionalised rather than the casual poor and sick, those in St Mary's Hospital, of which the cathedral was patron, for whom the chapter had a particular responsibility.<sup>148</sup> Canon Richard Bamfield's obit at Wells, founded before 1269, is typical of the more discriminating approach visible from the mid-thirteenth century. He allocated 8s 4d for 200 paupers 'ashamed to beg', that is the respectable local poor rather than casual outsiders.<sup>149</sup> Bishop Bronescombe's foundation at Exeter in 1278 fed fifty feeble paupers with a penny's worth of food and drink.<sup>150</sup> By the beginning of the fourteenth century, discrimination was well established and by the early sixteenth century Dean Colet's proposed statutes for St Paul's in 1518 anticipate the Elizabethan laws in their open hostility to the 'filthy' beggars rudely importuning those at prayer.<sup>151</sup> Even indiscriminate almsgiving at funerals, which continued up to the Reformation, tended to be a small proportion of the total post-mortem almsgiving of cathedral clergy and was challenged by some. Thomas Barton (d. 1415), an Exeter residentiary, made a clear distinction between the deserving and undeserving poor at his funeral, requesting a general distribution of 1d each to beggars and the indigent but providing 4d each for the feeble, blind and helpless who were unable to work.<sup>152</sup>

The two principles of discrimination most consistently applied were proximity and need. Alms were commonly distributed to places with which the cathedral or deceased had connections such as chapter and prebendal estates, benefices and birth places of members of the chapter. The chapters of Lincoln and Wells gave alms to the poor of their estates and appropriated churches. Three-quarters of the £87 given to the poor from the estate of Dean Kilkenny was distributed to his decanal estates and the chapter estates he farmed.<sup>153</sup> Particularly noteworthy is the way

146. Harvey, *Living and Dying*, pp. 29–30.

147. B. R. Kemp, ed., *English Episcopal Acta 36: Salisbury 1229–1262* (Oxford, 2010), no. 87.

148. *Chichester Chartulary*, nos. 257, 288, 548, 562, 566–7, 572, 595.

149. *Calendar of the Manuscripts of the Dean and Chapter of Wells*, ed. W. Bird and W.P. Baildon (2 vols., 1907–14), i. 107, 449, ii. 579 (amended to ½d to 200 paupers and 20d for the sick and ashamed to beg). For another Wells example dating from 1271, see *Ibid.* i. 376.

150. O. F. Robinson, ed., *The Register of Walter Bronescombe, Bishop of Exeter 1258–80* (3 vols., CYS, lxxxii, lxxxvii, xci, 1995–2003), ii. no. 1297.

151. *RSSP*, pp. 224–5.

152. F.C. Hingeston Randolph, ed., *The Register of Edmund Stafford, Bishop of Exeter (AD 1395–1419): An Index and Abstract of its Contents* (Exeter, 1886), p. 412.

153. Lepine, 'Getting and Spending', pp. 57–66.

these poor parishioners are referred to as his 'kin' in recognition of the importance of the principle of proximity. William Duffield asked that some of his silver vessels, symbols of his wealth and luxurious lifestyle, should be sold and the proceeds, which amounted to £37 given to the poor of places he was connected with.<sup>154</sup> Robert Rygge, an Exeter residentiary (d. 1410), expressed this obligation more explicitly still, directing alms to 'the places which sustained me and from which I received an income'.<sup>155</sup> Discrimination by need was equally commonplace and often implied an element of merit. The Wells chapter supported infirm tenants. Both Dalby and Duffield discriminated by need, singling out the 'most needy', the feeble and specifying the 'bedridden'.<sup>156</sup> William Melton's executors had a special concern for prisoners, the sixth corporal work of mercy, and Martin Colyns favoured poor scholars, insistent that only the most needy were chosen.<sup>157</sup> Discrimination according to need is also evident in the way that some cathedrals, notably Lincoln, Hereford and Wells, responded to local hardship. At Lincoln the chapter bought extra cloth for the poor in 1393–4 because the initial allocation was insufficient and at Hereford in 1401–2, a year of bad harvests, an extra 6s in cash was distributed as well as the usual allocation of bread because of the 'multitude of paupers'.<sup>158</sup> The Wells chapter responded to a local dearth of grain in 1428–9, another year of bad harvests, by spending an extra £5 on bread for the poor.<sup>159</sup>

As the discussion of institutional and personal charity has shown, discrimination was also practiced by giving non-monetary alms, most often bread, but also clothing, as a way of distinguishing between the idle poor and those in real need.<sup>160</sup> The dean of York's obligation, which can be dated to the mid-thirteenth century at least, was to feed fifty paupers at three Yorkshire churches each day with 'bread, ale, pottage and flesh or fish' to the value of 1d and to supply them with winter clothing worth 40d and a pair of shoes worth 5d.<sup>161</sup> By the beginning of the fourteenth century, a substantial proportion of institutional giving was in kind: Maundy distributions, some obit alms, especially at Wells, and clothing at Lincoln. Individual post-mortem giving followed a similar pattern. Between 1302 and 1311, Andrew Kilkenny's executors

154. Duffield's alms went to Beverley, Wistow, Cawood, Brayton and Clifton Campville (*TE*, iii, 128).

155. TNA, PRO, PROB 11/2A fo. 161v.

156. *TE*, ii, 262, iii, 128–9.

157. £5 16s 4d was given to prisoners, half the total almsgiving (*York Minster Clergy Wills*, pp. 22–5); *TE*, iv, 278.

158. LAO D&C Bj/2/8 fo. 76; HCA R635.

159. *Wells Communars Accounts*, pp. 82–3.

160. For further discussion of this, see P.H. Cullum, 'For Pore People Harberles', in D.J. Clayton, R.G. Davies, P. McNiven, eds., *Trade, Devotion and Governance: Papers in Later Medieval History* (Stroud, 1994), pp. 36–54.

161. *Calendar of Inquisitions Miscellaneous*, ii, no. 12.



distributed £26 in bread, £5 in clothing and a further £13 in remission of debt. Although they gave significantly more in cash, £61, this also showed discrimination as it was given to poor parishioners.<sup>162</sup> Chancellor Holme of St Paul's (d. 1395), added an element of discrimination in the weekly distribution of 40*d* to forty poor in London established as part of his chantry. It was to be made in different parts of the city each week to ensure it was spread fairly.<sup>163</sup>

Roger Nassington's executors exercised particular discrimination in their generous charity. All but £4 5*s* of the £37 16*s* 10*d* given to the poor, about 90 per cent, was discriminating charity, either in kind, proximity or need.<sup>164</sup> Most alms were given in kind: £8 4*s* in cloth and £7 1*s* 6*d* in food. As well as bread they gave ox carcasses, hams and rye. These were distributed in places Nassington was connected with, Lichfield, his prebend of Alrewas, Staffordshire, and its dependent chapels, Edingale, Kings Bromley and Pipe Ridware. Discrimination by proximity is also evident in the 100*s* given to the poor of Alrewas, and the cloth given to his poor friends whereas the principle of need lay behind the 20 marks given for marriage portions. The level of discrimination undertaken by Nassington's executors and evident in other cathedral almsgiving implies careful thought about the problem of poverty.

The scale and range of secular cathedral almsgiving has very clearly emerged from a variety of sources. But what was its impact on the lives of the sick and poor? Historians have generally been harsh in their overall judgements of medieval almsgiving. Christopher Dyer argues that the quantity of medieval charity was too low to meet the needs of the poor, that the proportion of their incomes devoted to alms by religious houses, their clergy and the lay aristocracy, was mean. Mutual self-help among family and neighbours, he contends, offered more support than institutional alms.<sup>165</sup> Three approaches will be taken to assess the impact of cathedral charity: how well it was sustained over the long term, its effect on cathedral cities and the effect it had on the poor themselves.

Identifying chronological trends in cathedral almsgiving to assess how well it was sustained over the longer term is as difficult as trying to calculate overall totals. With the exception of general expenditure at Lincoln and obit almsgiving at Wells, there are few long runs of accounts in which trends can be observed. Even so, three trends can be identified: an overall decline in general expenditure after the Black Death; unreliability over the long term; and remarkable continuity and stability. The clearest evidence of a decline after the Black Death comes from Lincoln where almsgiving from general expenditure reached a peak of

162. Lepine and Orme, *Death and Memory*, pp. 185–202.

163. GL MS 25,145.

164. *Catalogue of Muniments*, pp. 225–30.

165. Dyer, *Standards of Living*, pp. 252–3.

over £30 in the 1360s then fell to £15–20 from the 1390s to the 1430s and had fallen to £7 by 1535.<sup>166</sup> Chapter almsgiving at Glenthams also fell from 10s to 15s a year before the Black Death to 7s in the 1350s but thereafter remained constant to the Reformation.<sup>167</sup> This decline was probably in response to long-term post-Black Death demographic change, a period when poverty was less severe, wages relatively high and there were fewer paupers.<sup>168</sup> It broadly matched a decline in need. When in 1389–90 the Lincoln chapter reduced its allocation to the poor of Bierton, Buckinghamshire, from 36s to 25s it was because the farmer there said 25s was enough to meet their needs.<sup>169</sup> Lack of evidence makes it difficult to assess how typical of other cathedrals Lincoln was but it matches wider national trends.

The difficulties inherent in sustaining almsgiving over long periods are unusually clear in the dean of York's obligation to feed the poor of Pocklington, Kilham and Pickering. An inquisition in 1308 found that this had been faithfully carried out by successive deans until Robert Scardeburgh (1279–90) who had given it up.<sup>170</sup> It is doubtful whether it was resumed then as the dean was an absentee cardinal. In 1362, Archbishop Thoresby's visitation found that it had fallen into abeyance for a second time, when the dean was again an absentee cardinal.<sup>171</sup> It had been revived by the time of Dean Andrew (1452–77) who made provision for its continuation for three months after his death.<sup>172</sup> Obit almsgiving was particularly prone to fluctuations. Roger Waltham's chantries at St Paul's, founded in 1325–6, required the almoner to distribute 1d for food, drink, clothing and lodging to 1,000 paupers, 100 on ten specified feast days each year, which cost 83s 4d.<sup>173</sup> In the mid-1360s, his instructions were not only being faithfully carried out but exceeded; 105s was distributed in 1363–4 when 1628 paupers were given alms.<sup>174</sup> By 1370–71, however, there had been a dramatic collapse in income and consequent reduction in almsgiving, which fell to 13s that year and none in 1383–4; repairs and the chantry costs used up the entire income.<sup>175</sup> Even so the chantry survived until the Reformation and at some point before then almsgiving was resumed. The chantry certificates record that in 1548 an income of £2 1s 8d was allocated to the poor,

166. LAO D&C Bj/5/3/18; Bj/2/4; Bj/2/6; Bj/2/10–12; Bj/5/10 No 3a, 3c; Bj/2/16; Bj/5/7; Bj/3/1–4. Changes in accounting procedures make it difficult to measure almsgiving between 1450 and 1535.

167. LAO D&C Bj/2/6/1.

168. McIntosh, 'Local Responses to the Poor', pp. 213–14.

169. LAO D&C Bj/2/8.

170. *Calendar of Inquisitions Miscellaneous*, ii. no. 12.

171. York Minster Library D&C H1/3 fo. 51.

172. *TE*, iii. 125.

173. L.F. Sandler, 'The Chantry of Roger Waltham in Old St Paul's', in J. Backhouse, ed., *The Medieval English Cathedral* (Donington, 2003), pp. 168–90.

174. GL MS 25,161/1.

175. GL MS 25,161/2–10.

exactly half the original total.<sup>176</sup> In this respect Waltham's chantry follows the wider trend of declining almsgiving from the later fourteenth century.

The most striking trend in obit almsgiving at Exeter, St Paul's and Wells was its reliability and longevity, continuing to the Reformation. Many of the obits held at St Paul's in the late thirteenth century are recorded in the *Valor* and the chantry certificates of 1548.<sup>177</sup> At Wells all twelve obits listed in 1394–5 continued to 1540 distributing the same sum year in, year out.<sup>178</sup> Some even survived the upheaval of the Edwardian Reformation. Though the obits themselves were no longer held their charitable provisions are recorded in 1550–51.<sup>179</sup> Such a high degree of reliability raises the possibility that the chapter subsidised these endowments to ensure alms were given, a practice adopted at Exeter in the late fourteenth century.<sup>180</sup> Continuity in obit almsgiving was partly the result of the increasing number of obits founded in the late middle ages. At Exeter, and probably elsewhere, the replacement rate generally matched and sometimes outstripped the failure rate.<sup>181</sup> Despite fluctuations and a reduction after the Black Death, institutional almsgiving by secular cathedrals was both remarkably reliable and well sustained over the long term.

The relative impact of the almsgiving of a secular cathedral was partly determined by what can be termed the 'economy of charity' of cathedral cities: their population, the proportion of poor people, general economic conditions and the number and liberality of alternative sources of alms. All towns, with their opportunities for casual employment and soliciting alms, attracted the poor, and those with large and wealthy religious houses, such as cathedral cities, were particularly attractive to the highly mobile vagrant population of medieval England.<sup>182</sup> In London and to a lesser extent York, cathedral almsgiving, although significant, especially at St Paul's, made a relatively small contribution to the total charity available because of the unusually wide range of alternative sources available: important monasteries and hospitals, fraternities and, increasingly, parochial poor relief. At Exeter, Lincoln and Salisbury the cathedral was one of only a handful of substantial institutional almsgivers. But as the cities of Exeter and Salisbury became increasingly

176. C.J. Kitching, ed., *London and Middlesex Chantry Certificate, 1548* (London Record Society, xvi 1980), p. 56.

177. GL MS 25,20, 25,134; *London Chantry Certificate*, pp. 52–9.

178. Twenty-eight account rolls survive from 1394–5 to 1537–8 (*Wells Communars' Accounts*, pp. 24–201).

179. *Wells Communars' Accounts*, pp. 222, 226.

180. See above.

181. D.N. Lepine, "'Their Name Liveth for Evermore?': Obits at Exeter Cathedral in the Later Middle Ages', in C.M. Barron and C. Burgess, eds., *Memory and Commemoration in Medieval England* (Donington, 2010), pp. 58–74.

182. Poverty levels fluctuating between 5 and 20 per cent of the population have been estimated for medieval towns generally (Shaw, *Creation of a Community*, p. 229).

prosperous in the later middle ages, new almshouses, often lay foundations, reduced the importance of the cathedral as a source of alms.<sup>183</sup> There were fewer alternatives to the cathedral at Chichester, Lichfield and Wells, and (to a lesser extent) Hereford.<sup>184</sup> At Chichester and Wells, the cathedral was the major institutional source of charity in the city and had influence over the others; at Lichfield St John's Hospital also made an important contribution.<sup>185</sup> Lincoln and Wells experienced economic decline in the fifteenth century and in the relative absence of alternatives such as new almshouses the cathedral remained an important source of poor relief. Cathedrals also had a significant impact beyond their cities on their estates and churches. Wells is notable for the systematic distribution of alms on some of its estates, a pattern also found in episcopal and monastic charity in the diocese.<sup>186</sup>

The impact of cathedral almsgiving on the lives of the poor themselves, like medieval charity as a whole, was constrained by its religious intention to secure spiritual benefits rather than relieve poverty. Charity was inseparable from piety. Giving to the poor was seen as a very effective way of securing spiritual benefits. Almsgiving was a prime good work that earned the giver merit and shortened the 'pains of purgatory'. Alms were therefore given in ways that maximised the spiritual benefits for donors. As a result the resources devoted to alms were not necessarily given in ways that would have relieved poverty most effectively. Because of this medieval almsgiving did more temporarily to ameliorate the condition of the poor than to eliminate or reduce poverty as such. It was a good work as much as a finely calibrated attempt to relieve the poor.

The most serious shortcoming of medieval almsgiving was its irregularity through the year, resulting in a 'cycle of feast and fast'; at some points in the year distributions were frequent, at others much less so.<sup>187</sup> Frequent regular distributions through the year such as the 4d given on average once or sometimes twice a week at Exeter obits in the fifteenth century and Roger Waltham's chantry at St Paul's, which distributed alms roughly every four to six weeks in the 1360s, were very much the exception.<sup>188</sup> Most alms were given once a year, usually on the date of death of the donor or a religious feast, rather than according to the needs of the poor. The haphazard accumulation of these annual distributions resulted in them occurring at irregular intervals through the year. At St Paul's around 1300 although alms were distributed at twenty-six

183. Brown, *Popular Piety*, pp. 181, 201; Orme and Webster, *English Hospital*, pp. 240–46.

184. D. Knowles and R.N. Hadcock, *Medieval Religious Houses: England and Wales* (1971), pp. 317–18, 322, 325, 336.

185. *VE*, iii. 141.

186. Dyer, *Standards of Living*, p. 241; Rushton, 'Monastic Charitable Provision', p. 18.

187. F. Heal, *Hospitality in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 1990), p. 235.

188. At Exeter obits were spread fairly evenly through the year though there were generally fewer in the Christmas term.

obits they were not fortnightly; there were two eight-week periods, 30 December to 5 March and 14 May to 13 July, when no distributions were made, the impact of which was all the greater as both were times of hardship, midwinter and the late summer dearth before the new harvest. At other times, particularly funerals and the dispersal of estates, there was a glut of alms when very large sums were distributed and it must have been difficult to find enough paupers; in 1478 the executors of Dean Waynflete of Chichester distributed a penny dole at his funeral to 400 poor and managed to find 2,489 on his month's mind.<sup>189</sup> The impact of this irregularity may have been mitigated to some extent for the local poor who knew the patterns of distribution. And the almsgiving of secular cathedrals was no more impractical than that of other religious houses, bishops, the lay aristocracy and successive monarchs.

The general decline in almsgiving after the Black Death probably had less impact on the poor than the annual pattern of charity because it reflected a fall in hardship. Long-term macro-economic trends suggest that poverty was a less pressing social problem than it had been and would later again be. The amount given in alms, typically 1d per pauper, was the standard daily rate for much medieval charity, sufficient to buy bread, meat and ale, and well above the absolute minimum of a ¼d, the price of a 2 lb loaf. The 1d rate remained constant from the mid-thirteenth to the mid-sixteenth century and broadly retained its value until the 1530s when the effects of the Tudor inflation began to be felt. Up until then long-term prices remained broadly stable. At times of bad harvests sharply rising prices could, however, quickly make people dependent on charity. When supply fell and prices rose, one response was to reduce the weight of a standard loaf or to produce bread of inferior quality made from cheaper grains. In these circumstances, the increasingly sophisticated discrimination in almsgiving, including the provision of bread, would have been of real benefit to the poor.

Almsgiving permeated the activities of secular cathedrals. They could be relied on for a steady stream of distributions by chapters collectively and by individual canons in their personal charity. The often generous alms given as part of the elaborate rituals of late medieval funerary practice and post-mortem commemoration were particularly important. Even a conservative final assessment of their total almsgiving, both institutional and individual, suggests that cathedrals gave between £30 and £60 a year in alms for much of the late medieval period: £62 at Lincoln in the first half of the fourteenth century, £33 at Exeter in the mid-fifteenth century and £56 at Wells in the early sixteenth century. These figures are based on the institutional totals established above and a low estimate of

189. Magdalen College Oxford, MC FA9/11F/1. £10 7s 5d was distributed at his month's mind.

£2 annual personal charity for each resident canon.<sup>190</sup> In those years in which a residentiary died, post-mortem bequests would significantly increase these totals, adding £10–30 or more, as much as a third or half of the total. Almsgiving on this scale matches that of many middle-ranking and smaller monastic houses and hospitals. Two features of cathedral charity particularly stand out, the increasingly sophisticated discrimination adopted from as early as the mid-thirteenth century, and the post-mortem generosity of canons, especially compared with the laity. Of course they had no wives or children to support, and consequently had relatively greater resources, yet that they chose to give to the poor suggests a strong religious vocation. The secular cathedrals fully met contemporary expectations. Although this did not eliminate poverty, it made a significant contribution to the alleviation of hardship both in cathedral cities and on cathedral estates. Almsgiving was an integral part of the Christian life practised at secular cathedrals. No less than monastic houses and hospitals, they were an important and vital source of charity and thus came closer to Bishop Gravesend's ideal than is generally reckoned.

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190. Residence figures are taken from D.N. Lepine, *A Brotherhood of Canons Serving God* (Woodbridge, 1995), pp. 95–100.