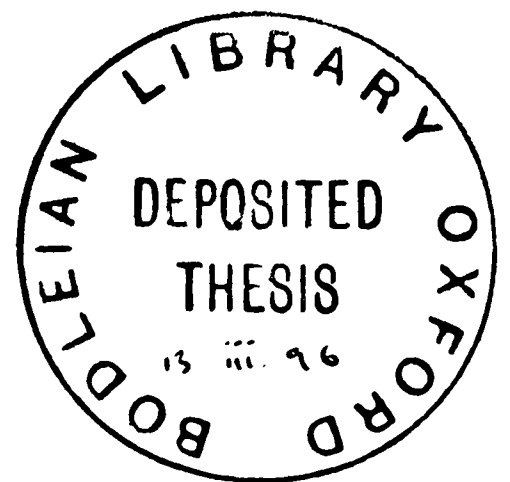


The geography of poor relief expenditure in late eighteenth and early nineteenth century rural Oxfordshire

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Volume I of II

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Abstract

This thesis aims to explore the relationship between the geographies of law, society, economy and the physical environment in late eighteenth and early nineteenth century rural England. It uses as its exploring ground the operation of the Old Poor Law in rural Oxfordshire. This county was chosen because it was both a microcosm of the farming landscape of Southern England and was one of the counties where the problem of poor relief was most acutely felt.

Chapter 1 establishes that the mapping out of spatial diversity, and the consideration of the forces moulding it, is fundamental to an understanding of the functioning of the Old Poor Law. Chapter 2 uses data contained in the parliamentary returns to demonstrate some clear regional differences in the level of poor relief and the chronology of change. Chapters 3 and 4 show that these regional averages and trends do not make intelligible the kaleidoscopic welter of local variations indicated by a closer examination of parish records. Chapters 5 and 6 consider poor relief expenditure in four parishes: Cropredy, Pyrton, Spelsbury and Stoke Lyne. These show that differences in the level of poor relief expenditure cannot automatically be taken to indicate variations in the level of what we might think of as unemployment or poverty. The generosity of disbursements, and therefore the real incomes of the poor, could also vary markedly between parishes.

Thus, the Old Poor Law cannot be detached from the particular places in which it acquired its meaning and saliency. Its impact upon the daily lives of ratepayers, administrators and recipient can be established and the poor treated as individuals rather than as abstract units of labour.

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Abbreviations

Bod.	Bodleian Library
edn.	Edition
ed.	Editor
Fig.	Figure
<i>JOJ</i>	<i>Jackson's Oxford Journal</i>
OA.	Oxfordshire Archives
Oxon.	Oxfordshire
Par.	Parish
PP	Parliamentary Paper
<i>V.C.H.</i>	<i>Victoria County History</i>
£./s./d	Pounds/shillings/pence

Introduction

Geography and law

In recent years, there has been a growing interest in the geography of law and its relationship with other aspects of human behaviour.¹ Emphasis has been placed upon the local enforcement of particular Acts and the creation of legal spaces, the spaces of political, social and economic life, in which they operated. This study uses as an exploring ground the geography of poor relief expenditure in late eighteenth and early nineteenth century rural Oxfordshire. The mapping out of spatial diversity, and a consideration of the forces moulding it, must be fundamental to an understanding of the functioning of the Old Poor Law, which cannot be detached from the particular places in which it acquired its meaning and saliency.

The reform of the Old Poor Law in 1834

The rising national concern regarding the cost of poor relief expenditure during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries is witnessed in the publication of ten parliamentary reports inquiring into the administration of the Poor Laws between 1776 and 1834. These culminated in the passage of the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834 (4 & 5 Wm.IV, c.76) based upon the findings of the Royal Commission established in 1832.² This Act attempted to transform the system of poor relief,

¹ See, for example, N.K.Blomley, *Geographies*; E.Soja, *Post-modern*

² PP 1834 (XXVII-XXXIX)

removing control from the locality and vesting it, instead, in the hands of a centralised board. It was the first great blow in the (still continuing) 'revolution in government' which has brought under central control matters of administration previously organised by regional or local units.³

Under the new system, a bureau of three Poor Law Commissioners, with their deputy assistant commissioners, directed the relief of the poor centrally from London. With few exceptions, relief was only to be granted to able-bodied labourers and their families within the confines of a well-regulated workhouse.⁴ Unions of parishes, under the control of elected Boards of Guardians, were to be created to remove power from parish overseers and local Justices and to derive economies of scale in relief provision. Strict guidelines were laid down from the centre governing all aspects of relief and the grounds on which it should be given. These were imposed upon the Poor Law Unions in order to produce 'less eligibility' to relief than had been defined under the old system.⁵

The reforms of 1834 therefore removed the local discretion in poor relief policy and practice which had existed under the old system (the so-called Old Poor Law as distinct from the New Poor Law instituted by the Act). They were founded upon the belief that the maladministration of the existing system, inherent in one run by neighbours for neighbours, had created the very evils which it sought to cure. The indictment of the Old Poor Law enshrined in the legislation of 1834 rested upon the twin pillars of morality and economics.

³ P.Corrigan & D.Sayer, *Arch*, 120

⁴ The 1834 Poor Law Report declared that 'except for medical attendance and apprenticeship, all relief to the able-bodied and their families otherwise than in well-regulated workhouses is to be declared unlawful and to cease', S.G. & E.O.A.Checkland (eds.), *Report*, 375.

⁵ *ibid.*, 335

The drive to reform

Proposals for the reform of the Old Poor Law were not new in 1834. A series of Select Committees appointed by parliament had shown that the cost of the system was increasing massively during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In the financial year 1775-6, £1,523,163 was spent on the relief of the poor in England and Wales.⁶ The Committee also concluded that ‘the laws relating to the Poor ...are defective and the good purposes intended by them in many respects prevented.’ It also predicted that ‘the money raised for the relief of the poor ...will be an increasing burden upon the public.’⁷ This seems to have come true: annual poor relief expenditure averaged £1,943,649 between 1782-3 and 1784-5⁸ and rose to £4,267,295 in 1802-3.⁹

The rising cost of poor relief, the spectre of famine and fear of revolution in the 1790s, combined with the outbreak of war with France in 1793 to give a sharp sense of urgency to the debate on the Poor Laws. This debate was fuelled by a series of texts which provided a framework for a coherent theoretical opposition to the existing system.¹⁰ For some historians, the publication in 1798 of Malthus’ *An Essay on the Principle of Population* heralded a definitive break in the conceptualisation of poverty,¹¹ though for J.R.Poynter, it was merely ‘an effective piece of pamphleteering claiming originality only in the application of the ideas and not the ideas themselves.’¹² Malthus’ writings did, however, come to shape the discourse on

⁶ House of Commons Papers, vol.31 Geo.III, Poor Relief &c 1775-1780

⁷ *ibid.*, 3

⁸ House of Commons Papers, vol.60 Geo.III, Poor Relief 1787 and 1788

⁹ PP 1803-4 (XIII)

¹⁰ Sir F.M.Eden, *State*; Revd.T.R.Malthus, *Essay*; J.Townsend, *Dissertation*

¹¹ M.Dean, *Constitution*, 89; T.A.Horne, *Property*, 165-9

¹² J.R.Poynter, *Society*, 144

poverty in the early nineteenth century and the term *Malthusian* still evokes great emotion today.

An Essay on the Principle of Population

Malthus argued that although the Poor Laws had been devised with the best of intentions, to mitigate the natural checks on population and relieve the misery of the poor, they had actually resulted in the opposite effect. He concluded that 'though they may have alleviated a little the intensity of individual misfortune, they have spread the general evils over a much larger surface.'¹³ They had depressed the condition of the poor by encouraging them to marry and have children with little or no prospect of support from work. By guaranteeing parish assistance to able-bodied labourers and their dependents, the Poor Laws also served to 'diminish both the power and the will to save among the common people, and thus ...weaken one of the strongest incentives to sobriety and industry, and consequently to happiness.'¹⁴

Malthus concluded that the 'absurd' administration of the Poor Laws had caused distress among the labouring population and had driven poor relief expenditure sky-high. Even when in work, many labourers did not earn sufficient to provide a basic subsistence for themselves and their families. The Statute of Artificers passed in 1562-3¹⁵ had placed responsibility for establishing maximum wages on the magistrates meeting at Quarter Sessions. However, the Justices of the Speenhamland Division of Berkshire made the momentous decision on 6 May 1795 that rather than fix wages at a high enough level for subsistence, they would allow wages to find their natural level according to the supply and demand for labour, and ensure that labourers

¹³ Revd.T.R.Malthus, *Essay*, 94

¹⁴ *ibid.*, 97

and their families would not in consequence starve by instituting scales of relief which would top up whatever wages were paid so that all members of a man's family would receive enough income to provide a certain quantity of bread per week.¹⁶ Although there is evidence that many parishes had actually employed such measures earlier, the system spread widely during the scarcities of 1795-6 and 1800-2.¹⁷

To Malthus, the solution to such evils was obvious: the granting of relief to able-bodied labourers and their dependents had to be abolished. At the root of his argument was the belief that poverty is the spur to labour. Poverty amongst humans is simply the reflection of the deeper, more fundamental, poverty of nature. The individual must be held responsible for ameliorating his own natural condition and that of his family through work. Morality therefore became a matter for each individual confronted with an economic necessity inscribed in his relation to nature. The propertyless must move into a new domain of personal responsibility and self-reliance. At the centre of his analysis was the conception of poverty as a consequence of the moral condition of the individual person.

This analysis of the functioning of the Poor Laws proved very influential in the post-Napoleonic War period, not only in respect of social policy but also in the very conception of the problem. Malthus' work struck a chord at a crucial time. It was a period of acute distress and rapid change, and his *Essay* provided an explanation for what was happening, a prediction of what would happen, and a diagnosis of what should be done about it. Annual poor relief expenditure rose markedly after 1815,

¹⁵ 5 Eliz., c.4

¹⁶ For a discussion of the circumstances surrounding this decision, see, M. Neuman, *Berkshire*.

¹⁷ For examples of earlier scales, see, C.R. Fay, *Corn*, 339; E.M. Hempson, *Treatment*; M. Neuman, *Berkshire*.

from £4.27 million in 1814-15 to £7.87 million in 1817-18, confirming Malthus' predictions.¹⁸

The 1817 Poor Law Report

The Report of the Select Committee of the House of Commons on the Poor Laws, published in 1817 was a milestone in Poor Law history.¹⁹ It is regarded as the climax of the Malthusian criticism of the Poor Laws, placing their radical reorganisation on the parliamentary agenda for the first time.²⁰ It began with the acknowledgement that the original aim of 43 Eliz., c.2 (1601), the founding statute of the Old Poor Law, was the relief of the impotent poor and the suppression of vagrancy and idleness. The unemployed were to be set to work rather than relieved with doles. However, the increase in the number of poor and the amount of expenditure suggested that 'this system is perpetually encouraging and increasing the amount of misery it was designed to alleviate.'²¹

The Report presented evidence that poor relief expenditure had been continuously increasing since 1776, and maintained that this was for the most part 'independent of the pressure of any temporary or accidental circumstances ...the rise in the price of provisions and other necessities of life', and the increase in population.²² The extension of relief to able-bodied labourers and their dependents had injured their morals and sapped their industry by blurring the distinction between wages and relief.

¹⁸ PP 1817 (VI), 5; PP 1818 (XIX)

¹⁹ PP 1817 (VI)

²⁰ R.G.Cowherd, *Political*, 54-61; M.Dean, *Constitution*, 95; B.Inglis, *Poverty*, 109; J.Knott, *Popular*, 44

²¹ PP 1817 (VI), 4

²² *ibid.*, 5

Labourers had been 'reduced to the degradation of a dependence upon parish support.'²³

Although the 1817 Poor Law Report clung to a Malthusian condemnation of the Poor Laws, it recognised that immediate prohibition of outdoor relief to able-bodied labourers was impractical at that time. The prevailing economic distress made the application of an effectual remedy very difficult.²⁴ Instead, it urged that in future, 'under favourable circumstances of the country', the system of outdoor relief should be ended.²⁵

The first two decades of the nineteenth century therefore witnessed the rise of Malthusian abolitionism to a central position in the debate over the Poor Laws. The 1817 Report wove the economic, moral and theoretical arguments of the abolitionists into a powerful summary of their case. It was the first sustained official indictment of Poor Law management and anticipated the arguments later developed in the 1834 Poor Law Report. Like the Royal Commissioners seventeen years later, it came to the conclusion that the individual must be held responsible for his own (and family's) subsistence. By removing this responsibility, the provision of poor relief in whatever form to able-bodied labourers and their dependents was a source of moral evil as well as rising expenditure.

The Poor Law Report of 1834

Despite the sustained condemnation of the administration of the Poor Laws, both from inside and outside Parliament, there had been little serious attempt to abolish or reform them before the early 1830s. The sporadic outbreak of disorder in both rural

²³ *ibid.*, 4

²⁴ *ibid.*, 29

and urban areas during 1830-1 suggested to the newly formed Whig ministry that a radical reform of the Poor Laws was necessary. A Royal Commission was therefore appointed in February 1832 to inquire into the operation of the Poor Laws.²⁶ Its agenda was to make a full and diligent inquiry into the practical operation of the laws for the relief of the poor and to examine how the various modes of relief were administered in different parts of the country and the different effects produced.

The Royal Commission began by collecting data on the economic effects of outdoor relief. First, the Commissioners prepared two sets of questionnaires, known as the *Rural and Town Queries*, which were posted to parishes during the spring of 1832. Second, 26 assistant commissioners were appointed and sent out to collect evidence throughout England and Wales. Their task was to determine the effects of outdoor relief 'on the industry, habits, and character of the labourer, the increase of population, the rate of wages, the profits of farming, the increase or diminution of farming capital, and the rent and improvement of land.'²⁷ They were also instructed to determine whether relief payments to the able-bodied had encouraged early marriage and population growth.

The authors heralded their Report, presented to the House of Commons on 21 February 1834, as the first scientific investigation of social conditions.²⁸ It filled twelve volumes of Parliamentary Papers, containing thousands of pages.²⁹ However, even before they had begun their investigations, the Commissioners had declared their belief that all forms of outdoor relief to the able-bodied produced bad effects,

²⁵ *ibid.*, 18

²⁶ The 1834 Poor Law Report has been extensively discussed by historians. See, for example, A.Brundage, *Making*; R.G.Cowherd, *Political*; P.Dunkley, *Whigs*; N.C.Edsall, *Movement*; D.Fraser (ed.), *Nineteenth*; G.Himmelfarb, *Idea*; B.Inglis, *Poverty*; J.Knott, *Popular*; J.R.Poynter, *Society*; M.E.Rose, *Law*; S. & B.Webb, *Local*

²⁷ S.G. & F.O.A.Checkland (eds.), *Report*, 68., 68

²⁸ See, R.G.Cowherd, *Political*, 197

undermining their independence and rendering them paupers dependent upon the parish for support, and should therefore be abolished.³⁰ Such a condition, the Commissioners maintained, was a contagious social disease which had spread among the lower orders. Its cause was the improper administration of the Poor Laws and its cure lay in their reform.

The Royal Commissioners acknowledged that all extensive, civilised communities made some provision, either compulsory or voluntary, for those who were in extreme need, and to refuse relief 'was repugnant to the common sentiments of mankind.'³¹ Such relief, however, was normally only given to the indigent: that is, persons unable to work. It was not to be given to the poor: that is, persons who in order to obtain the means of subsistence were forced to have recourse to labour. A firm line had to be drawn between the indigent, who were to be helped, and the poor, who could help themselves. Relief should only be given to the former and denied to the latter. The result would be a system of relief which would perform its true function of looking after the genuine casualties of society. The able-bodied would be driven onto the labour market, the pauperising effects of the existing system would be destroyed, and the burden of poor rates would be much reduced.

While the Checklands have labelled the 1834 Poor Law Report 'one of the classic documents of western social history',³² R.H.Tawney maintained that it is a 'wildly unhistorical account.'³³ Edwin Chadwick, with Nassau Senior the principal author of the Report, had made clear his belief that a proper investigation must be guided by the principles of natural liberty, set out in Malthus' *Essay*, which provided the basis for a

²⁹ PP 1834 (XXVII-XXXIX)

³⁰ S.G. & E.O.A.Checkland (eds.), *Report*, 9-46

³¹ *ibid.*, 334

³² *ibid.*, 9

³³ R.H.Tawney, *Religion*, 272

theory of individual behaviour.³⁴ These principles served as connecting links, joining together the vast body of factual material which was collected, illuminating some aspects and throwing others into its shadow. The Report's analysis of the system of outdoor relief was therefore full of detailed examples of its bad effects upon labourers, farmers and tradesmen. It ignored contradictory evidence contained in the assistant commissioners' reports and the *Rural and Town Queries*.³⁵ While acknowledging that 'the differences in the modes of administration of the law in different districts have produced habits and conditions of the population equally different', the Report also maintained that the system of outdoor relief, in all its forms, had produced the same effect wherever it operated: the pauperisation of the labouring poor.³⁶

The Report concluded with what its authors had anticipated: that the reform of the Poor Laws was essential if the poor were to be rescued from the fate of pauperism. It recommended that outdoor relief to able-bodied labourers and their dependents be replaced by the provision of relief within the confines of a well-regulated workhouse institution. The aim was to make the condition of dependent labourers worse ('less-eligible') than that of the lowest paid independent labourer. This would serve to separate the pauper and poor in practice, just as they were separated by definition. To quote the Report:

'The order of relief on the principle suggested ...would be a self-acting test of the claim of the applicant ...By the means which we propose the line between those who do and who do not need relief is drawn and drawn perfectly. If the claimant does not comply with the terms on which relief is given to the destitute, he gets nothing; and if he does comply, the compliance proves the truth of the claim - namely his destitution.'³⁷

³⁴ R.G.Cowherd, *Political*, 217-9

³⁵ PP 1834 (XXVII); PP 1834 (XXX-XXXIV); PP 1834 (XXXV-XXXVI)

³⁶ S.G. & E.O.A.Checkland (eds.), *Report*, 415

³⁷ *ibid.*, 378

The abolition of outdoor relief to able-bodied labourers would not only cure their pauperism, it would also cause labourers to become 'more steady and diligent',³⁸ thereby raising productivity. This would 'make the return to the farmers' capital larger', and 'the consequent increase of the fund for the employment of labour enables and induces the capitalist to give better wages.'³⁹

Karl Polanyi: the great transformation

Karl Polanyi, in *Origins of our time: the great transformation*, published in 1944, maintained that the adoption of the Speenhamland system of granting relief in aid of wages according to published scales was the last-ditch effort of a doomed rural paternalism to maintain a protected organisation of labour under pressure from the extension of market relations to labour.⁴⁰ It was at the centre of the transition from a politico-moral conception of society to one founded on the belief that society is regulated by the natural laws of the economy.

According to Polanyi, the Speenhamland system established a 'right to live' and was therefore incompatible with the emerging wage system. It was at the centre of the opposition between a pre-capitalist world founded upon localism and the right to subsistence, and the capitalist laissez-faire world of centralised administration and the market. This was reaffirmed by E.P.Thompson, who maintained that the Speenhamland decision of 1795 emerged out of a background of desperate attempts to re-impose what he termed 'the older moral economy against the economy of the free-market' during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.⁴¹

³⁸ *ibid.*, 375

³⁹ *ibid.*, 346

⁴⁰ K.Polanyi, *Transformation*. 92

⁴¹ E.P Thompson, *Making*, 73

The Poor Law reforms of 1834 were seen by Polanyi to be crucial to the institutionalisation of a generalised regime of wage-labour among the propertyless and therefore the formation of a national labour market. Although parliamentary enclosure had created a propertyless plebeian mass, it was not necessary for such a mass to become wage labourers even given the existence of a class of owners of the means of production. The granting of allowances-in-aid-of-wages to able-bodied labourers and their dependents gave them an alternative source of income to wage-labour. The proletarianisation of labour could not be completed until after 1834.

However, the major focus of condemnation contained in the 1834 Poor Law Report was not the generalisation of the Speenhamland system of granting relief according to published scales, but rather all forms of relief, however administered and calculated, to able-bodied males for the support of themselves and their families. The Commissioners identified five types of outdoor relief to able-bodied labourers and their families: relief without labour, the allowance (Speenhamland) system, the roundsman system, parish employment and the labour rate system.⁴² All had the same pauperising effect by divorcing earnings from the productivity of labour.

Karel Williams used official statistics to show that during the last thirty years of the Old Poor Law, able-bodied men were consistently included among those obtaining relief.⁴³ In 1834, however, 'a line of exclusion' was drawn against relief to able-bodied men and those construed as their natural economic dependents. According to his calculations from the 1803-4 *Abstract of Returns*, 11.4% of the population of England and Wales received some form of poor relief during the financial year 1802-

⁴² S.G. & E.O.A. Checkland (eds.), *Report*, 88

⁴³ K. Williams, *Pauperism*, 51

3, 80% of them being able-bodied adults and their children.⁴⁴ He used the returns of the 1824 Select Committee on Labourers' Wages and the replies to the *Rural Queries* to show that child allowances to the low paid were almost universal in 1824 and common place in 1832, while the payment of wages-out-of-the-rates, which had been found in 50% of agricultural counties in 1824, had declined to insignificance by 1832.⁴⁵ Paupers were typically relieved outdoors; only 8% of the pauper host in 1802-3 received permanent indoor relief in a workhouse or House of Industry.⁴⁶

According to Williams' calculations, this situation was transformed after 1834. There was a massive shift away from the practice of granting relief to the unemployed and underemployed and their dependents. He calculated that 'at no time between 1839 and 1845 did the number of able-bodied men in want of work receiving outdoor relief rise above 3.3% of the total number of paupers ...and only once after 1850 did it rise above 1%.'⁴⁷ After 1834, instead of able-bodied men and their children, 'the Poor Laws now consistently relieved the aged and chronically sick (40% of the pauper population); widows and their dependent children on outdoor relief (20%); children in the workhouse (33%) and the insane (rising from 1% to 12%).'⁴⁸

Williams maintained that these snapshots were justified because 'statistics were collected occasionally and any analysis must adapt itself to the particularity of the information which is available in the three major ad hoc returns' of 1802-3, 1824 and 1832.⁴⁹ This conclusion ignores the fact that the aggregate figures which he calculated from the 1802-3 and 1832 returns are formed from parish-level data, while many of the returns made in 1824 were based upon the hundred divisions of the counties. It

⁴⁴ *ibid.*, 41

⁴⁵ *ibid.*, 44-8

⁴⁶ *ibid.*, 38

⁴⁷ *ibid.*, 41

⁴⁸ *ibid.*, 41

also ignores the vast, virtually untapped, store of information concerning the continuous nature and extent of poor relief expenditure which is readily available in County Record Offices throughout England and Wales. Overseers' accounts, vestry minutes and other Poor Law papers contain details of the day-to-day administration of the system of relief at the parish level.

Geographical variation in the pre-1834 system of poor relief

However, the very use of the word *system*, or any other homogenising term, with reference to the Old Poor Law disguises one of its most fundamental characteristics: that is, massive geographical variations, both in its practice and in its economic, social and ethical implications. The practice of responding on a local parochial basis to the needs of any parishioner, as diagnosed by the overseers of the poor of a parish, township or liberty (i.e. sub-divisions of a parish which were separately administered for the purpose of poor relief), or by Justices of the Peace resident within or near to it, from money collected through levying a rate on all property holders in the parish, had been established by two Acts passed in 1597 (39 Eliz., c.3) and 1601 (43 Eliz., c.2).⁵⁰ Combined with the Settlement Act of 1662 (13 & 14 Ch.II, c.12) they established the essential legislative framework for the relief of the poor until the reform of 1834.⁵¹

The money raised through levying the poor rate was to be used in accordance with three fundamental aims:-

⁴⁹ *ibid.*, 13

⁵⁰ The Act of 1601 involved a more complete elaboration of the provisions laid down in 1597, including several additional provisions with respect to the levying and application of the rates.

⁵¹ See, for example, M.Dean, *Constitution*, 21; Sir F.M.Eden, *State*; T.A.Horne, *Property*; E.M.Hempson, *Treatment*; R.Lachmann, *Manor*; C.Lis & H.Soly, *Capitalism*, 88; D.Marshall, *Eighteenth*, 17; J.D.Marshall, *Old*; Sir G.Nichols, *History*, Vol. I; G.W.Oxley, *England*; W.F.Tate, *Chest*, 188-90; S. & B.Webb, *Local*, 30-1.

1. 'For the necessary relief of the lame, impotent, old, blind, and such others among them being poor, and not able to work.'
2. 'For setting to work the children of all such whose parents shall not be thought able to keep and maintain them.'
3. 'For setting to work all such persons married and unmarried, having no means to maintain them, and who use no ordinary and daily trade of life to get their living by.'

The Settlement Act of 1662 confirmed the parochial basis of relief by giving power to overseers, on application to the Justices, to return to their parish of settlement any newcomer to the parish who had no legal settlement within it. The right of settlement could be derived through birth, the payment of a £10 annual rent, or forty days' residence within a parish.⁵² The Settlement Laws therefore established the circumstances under which units of administration became liable to provide poor relief to an individual, and the legal means of deporting, under certain conditions, the individual who had no legal right to relief from the parish in which he or she dwelled.⁵³

The Crown played an active role in the administration of the Poor Laws between 1601 and 1640.⁵⁴ Although the parish was established as the responsible unit for the relief of the poor, it was placed under the central supervision of the Privy Council,

⁵² The mode of acquiring a settlement was extended in 1691 by 3 & 4 Wm. & M., c.30. A settlement could now be earned through paying parish rates, completing an apprenticeship, serving as a parish officer, or the completion of an annual hiring.

⁵³ An Act of 1697 (8 & 9 Wm. and M., c.30) made it illegal to remove immigrants until they actually became chargeable to the poor rate providing the immigrant brought a certificate signed by two magistrates acknowledging that his parish of settlement would take him back if he did not find work. An Act of 1795 (35 Geo.III, c.101) made it illegal to remove an immigrant until he became chargeable, even if he did not possess a certificate.

⁵⁴ E.M.Hempson, *Treatment*, 16; D.Marshall, *Eighteenth*; G.W.Oxley, *England*, 18; S. & B.Webb, *Local*, vi

whose control became increasingly comprehensive and continuous in its application; it issued directives and expected reports from each of the parishes.⁵⁵

However, the outbreak of the Civil War and the breakdown of the personal rule of Charles I ended the government's efforts to secure the enforcement of the laws from the centre. After the Restoration, the parish became fully responsible for its own poor. The period between the late seventeenth and early nineteenth centuries was therefore a unique period in the government of England. The national government abstained from intervening in local affairs, leaving local government to carry out administration as it chose. According to Dorothy Marshall, the Restoration marked the beginning of a period characterised by 'parochial laissez-faire'.⁵⁶ Local government was responsible for the maintenance of the church, keeping of the peace, repression of vagrancy, mending of the roads, as well as the relief of the destitute.

The role of the magistracy

While the parish became the fundamental unit of administration for the relief of the poor, local government extended beyond the parish boundary. Although in principle each parish was independent and empowered within the considerable latitude allowed by the Statutes to operate its own system of poor relief, allocating what its officers thought appropriate according to its own criteria, the increasingly greater power and involvement of the Justices of the Peace brought some degree of common policy over

⁵⁵ In 1598, the Privy Council sent a circular communication to Sheriffs and Justices of all the Counties and corporate towns requiring them to see that the new legislation was put into operation. In 1629, following a particularly bad harvest, which coincided with a crisis in the cloth industry, the Privy Council sent directives to the Counties particularly hard hit, followed by a general proclamation commanding the due execution of 'the lawes made for setting the poore on worke.' Both examples are cited by E.M.Hempson, *Treatment*, 20.

⁵⁶ D.Marshall, *Eighteenth*, 9

groups of parishes. According to J.R.Poynter, they were 'the principal check on the autonomy of local units.'⁵⁷

The ability of the magistrates to interfere in the administration of the Poor Laws at the parish level was confirmed by the passage of 36 Geo.III, c.23 in 1796. According to the 1834 Poor Law Report, this Act involved a 'fatal deviation from previous policy.'⁵⁸ It enabled magistrates, at their just and proper discretion, to order outdoor relief to able-bodied labourers and their dependants, against the wishes of parish overseers if necessary. The poor had the right to appeal to the magistrates if their application for relief was refused. Such appeals could involve great expenditure of time and money by the overseers, who would also have to experience the humiliation of defeat at the hands of the magistrates.

The Justices of the Peace were members of county magistrates' benches. The whole County Bench was sometimes instructed to act consistently throughout the Shire, especially in those aspects of the Poor Laws such as settlement examinations, removal policies and bastardy disputes, where divergence from place to place could cause particularly acute problems to the Justices who had to administer them. Increasingly, however, the power and influence of the magistracy came to be felt at a smaller spatial scale, within hundred divisions and particular groups of parishes.

Regular local gatherings of Justices dated back to Tudor and early Stuart days when Privy Council pressure had been constantly exerted to compel the holding of monthly divisional meetings for the control of local affairs. During the course of the eighteenth century, however, these monthly meetings lost something of their regularity and Justices in smaller divisions assumed greater legislative functions. Local meetings of

⁵⁷ J.R.Poynter, *Society*, 10

⁵⁸ S.G. & E.O.A.Checkland (eds.), *Report*, 208

two or more magistrates, termed 'petty sessions', were held in district after district with only very general directives from the Bench. They were, according to E.M.Hempson, responsible for 'formulating extra-legal and often illegal practices for the treatment of such vital matters as unemployment and poverty.'⁵⁹ Individually, any one Justice could issue a summons requiring a person to appear at the next Sessions, and they were also responsible for the supervision of parish officers in their locality.

Economic change and the Old Poor Law

Although the founding Acts of the Old Poor Law remained in operation until the reforms of 1834, by the late eighteenth century structural changes in rural economy and society had created a reserve army of farm labourers who were unable to subsist on their wages, but were discouraged from migration by the possession of entitlement to relief in their parish of settlement. Farming for the market was greatly encouraged by urban and industrial growth and by the development of transport infrastructure, notably turnpike roads and canals. The economic and social consequences of these developments were profound. They were also associated with a shift in the role of poor relief.

According to the Hammonds, the collapse of the economic position of the agricultural labourer during the second half of the eighteenth century was a stimulus to the adoption of the Speenhamland system.⁶⁰ Parliamentary enclosure undermined the economic foundation of the agricultural labourer's independence. It removed the commons and therefore common rights. In the words of the Hammonds:

'...in an unenclosed village ...the normal labourer did not depend on his wages alone. His livelihood was made up from various sources. His firing he took from the waste,

⁵⁹ E.M.Hempson, *Treatment*, 228

⁶⁰ J.L. & B.Hammond, *Village*, 82

he had a cow or a pig wandering on the common pasture, perhaps he raised a little crop on a strip in the common fields. He was not merely a wage earner ...he received wages as a labourer, but in part he maintained himself as a producer ...In an enclosed village at the end of the eighteenth century the position of the agricultural labourer was very different. All his auxiliary resources had been taken from him, and he was now a wage labourer and nothing more. Enclosure robbed him of the strip that he tilled, of the cow that he kept on the village pasture, of the fuel that he picked up in the woods, and of the turf that he tore from the common.'⁶¹

The collapse in the economic position of the agricultural labourer, associated with the effects of parliamentary enclosure, began in the 1760s, but was brought to a head by the 'exceptional scarcity of 1795.'⁶²

Jeanette Neeson's recent study of common rights in Northamptonshire during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries attempted to measure both the extent and value of common rights.⁶³ Like the Hammonds, she maintained that the possession of common rights was fundamental to the independence of commoners, who she termed, 'the last of the English peasants.'⁶⁴ This independence was destroyed by enclosure and 'when independence went, wages and poor relief took its place.'⁶⁵

Several historians have argued, however, that although enclosure, in its variety of forms, destroyed the system of open-fields and common rights, it did not cause the death of the English peasantry.⁶⁶ Mick Reed suggested that the key defining characteristic of peasant production is the family as the unit of production and consumption.⁶⁷ According to the 1831 census, 40% of 'agricultural occupiers' did not employ labour, suggesting that a 'peasantry', as defined by Reed, still existed at that

⁶¹ *ibid.*, 82

⁶² *ibid.*, 137

⁶³ J.Neeson, *Commoners*

⁶⁴ *ibid.*, 12

⁶⁵ *ibid.*, 45

⁶⁶ D.R.Mills, *Peasant*; M.Reed, *Rural*

⁶⁷ *ibid.*

time. His definition of a peasantry differs fundamentally from Neeson's, which rested upon peasant cultures and traditions, in addition to the social relations of production.⁶⁸

The decline in the economic position of the agricultural labourer was also tied up with the demise of the practice of labourers living in the farmers' household, employed as servants-in-husbandry on annual contracts.⁶⁹ It was replaced by a system in which labourers living in their own cottages were hired by the day or week. Labourers who had previously been fed at the farmers' table and slept in his barn for the entire year were now forced to depend upon the hiring practices of farmers, driven by the commercial spirit of capitalist farmers to hire labourers only when they were needed and at wages which were as low as the market could bear.

The result of these changes was that incomes were no longer sufficient to provide even a bare and comfortless subsistence. The decline of rural industry in the wake of rising competition from the industrial north and falling demand in the agrarian south also undermined labourers' incomes. In 1795, Revd. David Davies, writing about poverty in his own parish of Barkham in Berkshire, concluded that 'the price of day labour has not ...kept pace with the price of the necessaries of life.'⁷⁰ The Hammonds also concluded that 'real wage rates had declined during the second half of the eighteenth century.'⁷¹ W.Hasbach cited Arthur Young who had calculated that between 1760 and 1805, prices rose by 50-100% while wages rose by less than 60%.⁷² The crisis of 1795, when the bread price doubled, 'had merely sharpened the edge of misery caused by the changes in the rural economy.'⁷³

⁶⁸ For a wider discussion of the term *peasant*, see, J.V.Beckett, *Confusion*; J.Ennew, *Peasantry*; J.C.Scott, *Moral*; T.Shanin, *Defining*.

⁶⁹ See, A.Kussmaul, *Servants*; K.D.M.Snell, *Annals*, 67-103

⁷⁰ Revd. D.Davies, *Husbandry*, 25

⁷¹ J.I.. & B.Hammond, *Village*, 99

⁷² W.Hasbach, *Labourer*, 118-19

⁷³ J.I.. & B.Hammond, *Village*, 96

However, the Hammonds also maintained that up to the end of the Napoleonic Wars, while 'the wolf was at the door ...he was chained, and the chain was the Speenhamland system.'⁷⁴ The condition of the agricultural labourer was masked by the general prosperity in farming caused by high wartime prices, which meant that farmers were able and willing to give aid from the rates according to the Speenhamland scale. The collapse in prices which began in 1813-14, meant that 'the facts of the labourers' condition were disclosed.'⁷⁵ Rioting in parts of the rural south and east during 1816 indicated strain and the question of Poor Law reform became more urgent.

In arable farming areas, labour demands were subject to acute seasonal peaking at harvest time, and to a lesser extent at times of seed bed preparation and threshing. This situation was illustrated by C. Peter Timmer who produced an input-output table of a 500 acre farm under two different crop rotations.⁷⁶ He showed that under the Norfolk four-course rotation, which integrated turnips and artificial grasses, overall labour demand was both higher and less unevenly distributed through the year than under the old three-field rotation which included an annual fallow.⁷⁷ However, he also showed that labour demand under both rotations peaked massively during the harvest month.⁷⁸ This meant that there was both a shortage of work for most day labourers for much of the year, and a desperate need by the farmers to keep that labour locally available so that their harvest could be gathered in.

According to the Old Poor Law, relief to the able-bodied had to be provided in exchange for work for which wages were paid. This work could be in spinning,

⁷⁴ *ibid.*, 150

⁷⁵ *ibid.*, 150

⁷⁶ C.Peter Timmer, *Turnip*

⁷⁷ *ibid.*, 392

⁷⁸ *ibid.*, 393

weaving or whatever, on materials provided by the parish and done either in the pauper's own home or in a workhouse built for the purpose. Work might also be provided and paid for by the overseers on the parish roads, stoneclearing or roadmending. Labourers could also be sent round the parish farms to do whatever work was available. The work done by such roundsmen, as they were termed, could either be paid by the farmer or by the overseer.

Theoretical history and the Old Poor Law

Several historians have borrowed tools from the social sciences, and from economics in particular, to test empirically hypotheses concerning the role of the Poor Laws.⁷⁹ Statistical analysis of data sets has been used to provide descriptions and also to establish causal relationships between structural economic change and the provision of outdoor relief payments to able-bodied labourers and their dependents.

Statistics have been used to generate theories which are altered if they do not fit the facts. Thus, Mark Blaug theoretically constructed the effects of allowances-in-aid-of-wages using marginalist and development economics. He demonstrated that in the early nineteenth century, allowances-in-aid-of-wages correlated very strongly with low wages.⁸⁰ He wanted to refute arguments suggesting that allowances caused low wages and used theoretical ingenuity to obtain a relationship whereby low wages caused the adoption of allowances while remaining loyal to a marginal productivity theory of wage determination which pointed the other way.⁸¹ He solved this problem by supposing that the usual relationship between productivity and wages was reversed in the one special case of an underdeveloped economy in whose backward agricultural

⁷⁹ See, M.Blaug, *Myth, Re-examined*; D.A.Blaug, *Cost*; G.R.Boyer, *Economic, Empirical, English*; A.Digby, *Continuity*; D.N.McCloskey, *New*; K.D.M.Snell, *Annals*

sector wages are below the biological minimum and food intake of labourers is too low to allow maximum effort per unit of time.⁸² Allowances-in-aid-of-wages, by repairing nutritional deficiencies, increased productivity and wages among underemployed surplus labourers in the agricultural sector.⁸³

Blaug tried to fit the evidence into a theoretical box, found that the lid would not close, and therefore enlarged the box. He never specified the biological minimum and without such specifics he can, as Karel Williams rightly concluded, 'label anything he likes as a special case and therefore does not really have a theoretical box at all.'⁸⁴ Even if these theoretical criticisms are put to one side it is still apparent that such an approach, based solely upon the calculus of economic rationality, is not the only way to study an institution such as the Poor Laws.

Over the last three decades, theoretical history erected upon the foundation of *homo economicus* has come to dominate much of the debate on the role of poor relief. G.R.Boyer's study, published in 1990, attempted to construct an economic model, based upon the emergence of arable seasonal unemployment, falling real wages and declining cottage industry, to explain the adoption of outdoor relief in the late eighteenth century.⁸⁵ His research was based upon quantitative sampling of the *Rural Queries* from the 1834 Poor Law Report.⁸⁶ Only about 10% of parishes replied to these questions and no attempt was made to establish the representativeness of the parishes replying. Boyer also tried to use cross-sectional data from 1832 to explain the

⁸⁰ M.Blaug, *Myth*, 158

⁸¹ For a detailed criticism of Blaug's work, see, K.Williams, *Pauperism*, 25.

⁸² M.Blaug, *Re-examined*, 154

⁸³ *ibid.*, 176

⁸⁴ K.Williams, *Pauperism*, 26

⁸⁵ G.R.Boyer, *English*

⁸⁶ PP 1834 (XXX-XXXIV)

rise in relief after c.1770, involving little familiarity with overseers' accounts and vestry minutes and avoiding non-economic dimensions completely.

Such studies have wrenched the life out of the history of the Poor Laws, reducing everyday experience to the cold calculation of profit maximisation and the theory of the firm. They have removed parish data from their local context, aggregated and averaged them, and then related the results to explanatory variables from other places entirely. The sense of people and place has been steam-rolled in the drive to establish general formulae and hypotheses. The recipients of poor relief are treated as mere units of labour, rather than as individual persons, with different circumstances, experiences and attitudes. Theoretical history has produced a very partial view of the past which may be termed *tunnel history*: it emphasises one aspect of human behaviour while in historical reality, all aspects co-existed.

The Old Poor Law and the community

Coupled with these starkly materialist concerns and the free-market libertarian moralising that characterised the debate on the system, a strong residuum of the communalism that had historically inspired the system remained. It was inconceivable that needy members of a community should not be supported by their neighbours at least to the level of basic subsistence. The payment of poor relief was not justified solely upon the calculation of cynical materialist advantage by those who financed it in the late eighteenth century: the force of Malthusian and free market arguments had not yet taken full effect in local communities. They had to be forced into the system by central government through the agency of the New Poor Law.

The triumph of the ideology of the free-market in Parliament did not necessarily reflect the situation within the country. Although economic rationalisation was

nibbling through the bonds of paternalism, these bonds remained stubbornly tight in many instances. E.P.Thompson maintained that the rationalisation associated with the penetration of the market, by offending community norms, actually called into being a moral antagonist.⁸⁷ The very process of its undermining helped to strengthen aspects of this moral economy, or at least make them more visible. Thus, while economic conditions may make some fluctuations in relief expenditure more intelligible, they cannot render wholly intelligible relief practices with regards to who was relieved and in what manner.

The provision of poor relief involved a whole array of decision-making processes. Every decision to grant relief was the outcome of a series of exchanges between individuals at a variety of levels. Parish records provide us with the opportunity to probe into the social basis of poverty, to see who were the poor and those who relieved them, to learn something of their activities, preoccupations and life experiences, and to determine the forces shaping their circumstances and behaviour.

Regional variations in poor relief expenditure

Although the Royal Commissioners of 1834 acknowledged some geographical variations in the administration of poor relief, they concluded that the provision of outdoor relief, in all its forms, had the universal effect of pauperising the labouring population. The social disease of pauperism had therefore spread widely throughout the rural south and east in the wake of the adoption of these forms of relief. The Commissioners assumed that the superior administration of the Poor Laws in the north accounted for the smaller amounts of poor relief paid there, and therefore the (assumed) higher living standards of the industrial labouring classes. They also

⁸⁷ E.P Thompson, *Customs*, 300

presumed that northern towns were free from allowances-in-aid-of-wages and only investigated a few examples. They did not, however, establish the validity of these assumptions.

Industrial parishes, with their particular chronologies of labour demand and without the symmetry that ensured that ratepayers would be doing well when their workers were doing badly, were characterised by low statutory poor relief burdens. This is not the same, however, as a small incidence of poverty. Other forms of relief, such as special collections and the direct provision of food, were organised amongst employers. Furthermore, Arthur Redford remarked upon the practice of sending remittances, whereby thousands of labourers living in industrial parishes were supported by their parishes of settlement in agricultural regions during times of distress.⁸⁸ In this way, agricultural parishes subsidised the costs of industry.

The validity of the distinction between the indolent and underemployed rural south-east and the relatively buoyant industrial north is therefore open to question. It was not simply in agricultural communities that the payment of outdoor relief was extensive and poor relief expenditure high, although the organisation of these payments through the system investigated by its opponents was. It is also implicit in this discussion that it was in commercial arable farming regions, characterised by more widespread parliamentary enclosure, the decline of the commons and rural industry, where the system was most fully evolved. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, farming was still closely geared to the nature of the physical environment. Thus, while it is convenient to use the county summaries provided by the Poor Law Reports to

⁸⁸ A.Redford, *Migration*
See also, J.S.Taylor, *Relief*

indicate the general outlines of geographical variations in the level of poor relief expenditure, most counties contained numerous natural districts.

A second cause of regional variation in poor relief policies and therefore levels of expenditure was inherent in the system itself. The passage of amending Statutes in the 1790s allowed relief to be given to able-bodied persons not in the workhouse and removed power from the parish overseers and gave it to the Justices of the Peace. As I have already shown, they operated at a variety of spatial levels, bringing a degree of common policy to, but variation between, each. It seems likely that by the late eighteenth century, the uniformity achieved at a smaller spatial scale by the activity of the Justices was much greater than over the county as a whole.

Existing work on the Poor Laws therefore emphasises historical analysis: the past is pulled apart and certain aspects are emphasised at the expense of the others. There is a need, however, to step back from this approach and return to the synthetic examination of their operation at the level of everyday experience in the regions and locality. While emphasising that spatial differentiation produced distinctive human environments, it must also be acknowledged that processes of spatial integration were at work, connecting each environment, and affecting what took place in them. Both sides of this equation must be considered in order to come to terms with patterns of poor relief expenditure and the insight which they provide into the relationships between the geographies of law, society, economy and the physical environment.⁸⁹ This necessitates a consideration of the locality (the parish) within a wider, regional, sphere (the county) in which the twin processes of spatial differentiation and integration came together.

⁸⁹ For a wider discussion of these relationships, see, G.Hoppe and J.Langton, *Östergötland*.

Society and economy in rural Oxfordshire

It may appear foolish to base a study of the forces moulding the geography of poor relief expenditure upon the experience of a single county. However, late eighteenth and early nineteenth century Oxfordshire was, in fact, 'a microcosm of the farming landscape of southern England as a whole.'⁹⁰ It was also one of the counties where the problem of poor relief was most acutely felt during this period. According to the county summaries given by the Parliamentary Poor Law Report of 1803-4, the number receiving relief in the financial year 1802-3 represented almost 20% of the population enumerated in the census of 1801.⁹¹ Many counties in the Midlands and North registered values of less than 10% on this statistic and Oxfordshire ranked narrowly behind only Berkshire, Sussex and Wiltshire amongst the 39 English counties.

Although late eighteenth and early nineteenth century Oxfordshire has been described as a 'typical agricultural county',⁹² it was (and still is) anything but a homogeneous entity in terms of physical geography and farming systems. According to William Marshall:

'This County, unusual in regard to its lands, - and inconvenient, with respect to its outlines, may be said to be, - as a subject of rural report, - perversely situated - its awkward limbs extend themselves into THREE NATURAL DEPARTMENTS. - Inverting the map, - the head of the County is of chalk; which forms the north western point of the chalk hills that are the northern boundary of the Southern Department. - Its neck and shoulders, and lower extremities, are formed of vale lands; that accord, in soil and situation, with the Midland Department: - while a broad belt of limestone lands (an extension of the Western Department), begirts its more corporate parts.'⁹³

One should add for completeness, that to the north of the limestone hills, around Banbury, there are distinctive Redlands of the Middle Lias formation which underlies the Great Oolite limestone, exposed through erosion along the line of the Cherwell

⁹⁰ H.L.Gray, *Yeoman*, 293

⁹¹ PP 1803-4 (XIII); PP 1801 (II)

⁹² J.R.Walton, *Aspects*, 5

⁹³ W.Marshall, *Review*, vol.IV, 444

Valley. Moreover, the vale running through the centre of the county is laterally bisected by a discontinuous outcrop of Corallian limestone which forms a series of small hills between the flat and low lying Gault and Oxford Clay Vales to the north and south. The four natural regions of the county (Redlands, Cotswolds, Clay Vales and Chilterns) are shown in Figure. 1.1.

According to Arthur Young, writing in 1813, the county contained ‘fourteen hundreds, one city, twelve market-towns, 207 townships or parishes, and about 450,000 acres.’⁹⁴ While its population increased from 109,620 in 1801 to 152,156 in 1831, only the City of Oxford contained more than 10,000 people.⁹⁵ Table 1.1 shows that the local economy rested firmly on the land.

Table 1.1. Employment of families in Oxfordshire, 1811-31

	1811	1821	1831
Number of Families	25,006	28,841	31,370
Agriculture	13,646 (54.6%)	15,965 (55.4%)	15,304 (48.2%)
Trade, Manufacture and Crafts	7,615 (30.6%)	8,971 (31.1%)	9,454 (29.8%)
Other	3,705 (14.8%)	3,905 (13.5%)	7,012 (22.1%)

Sources: PP 1812 (XI); PP 1822 (XV); PP 1831 (XVIII)

The main commercial and industrial centres, which included Witney, Woodstock, Chipping Norton and Banbury, were all in the north of the county. Banbury, in particular, was at the hub of a local economy extending into adjacent counties. Burford and Chipping Norton also looked out towards Gloucestershire and Warwickshire, as well as east towards Oxfordshire. The south, on the other hand, was the home of the Gentry. It was predominantly agricultural and was characterised by a

⁹⁴ A.Young, *Oxfordshire*, 1

⁹⁵ PP 1801 (II); PP 1831 (XVIII)

Oxford’s population increased from 13,015 to 20,649 in the same period. Of the remaining 225 parishes recorded in the 1801 census, 28 contained between 500 and 1000 persons; 14 between 1000 and 2000, and five between 2000 and 5000, PP 1801 (II).

less dynamic, more conservative rhythm of life. The more outward looking north of the county also possessed a denser and more regular road network and a greater number of market towns.⁹⁶ This greater economic dynamism was founded upon the woollen industry, attracted to the region during medieval times by sheep rearing on the Cotswolds and a plentiful supply of water power.

Transport improvements during the eighteenth century yielded many social and economic benefits. While Ceilia Fiennes never criticised the roads in her frequent journeys across northern Oxfordshire, to and from her home at Broughton Castle, during the 1690s,⁹⁷ Arthur Young maintained that by the late 1760s, they were in an awful condition.⁹⁸ He remarked that there were 'only two poorly repaired turnpikes across the county' at this time.⁹⁹ Young recognised, however, that by the early nineteenth century a 'noble change' had taken place '...by turnpikes, which cross the county in every direction, so that when you are at one town, you have a turnpike to every other town.'¹⁰⁰ He also observed that 'the parish roads are greatly improved, but are still capable of much more.'¹⁰¹ Improvements to the road network reduced both the time and expense incurred in travelling across the county and also integrated Oxfordshire more closely into the national network of communications and interests.

The road network was used primarily for the transport of valuable and perishable goods, as well as of people. The transport of bulky goods, including coal and grain, which had a low value-to-weight ratio relied upon the system of navigable rivers and waterways. Although the River Thames was subject to silting above Oxford, it was

⁹⁶ David Postles, Market, maintained that the greater concentration of towns in the north and centre of the County reflects the relative wealth of these regions during the period of trade expansion during medieval times.

⁹⁷ C.Fiennes, *Saddle*

⁹⁸ A.Young, *Oxfordshire*, 324

⁹⁹ *ibid.*, 324

¹⁰⁰ *ibid.*, 324

navigable below the City and linked it, and the southern part of the county, to the burgeoning London market. Andrew Yarranton's proposal in 1677 that the River Cherwell be rendered navigable between Banbury and Oxford failed and meant that northern Oxfordshire remained isolated from the metropolitan market until the late eighteenth century.¹⁰²

The construction of the Oxford Canal, opened from Coventry to Banbury in 1774, and through to the Thames at Oxford in 1790, was followed by widespread parliamentary enclosure and the diffusion of the sainfoin and turnip crops which symbolised improved commercial mixed/arable husbandry. 'The canal is of immense importance to Oxfordshire, immediately connecting London, through Oxford, with Birmingham, Manchester and Liverpool, and with the Wednesbury Collieries.'¹⁰³ That the Canal also opened up wider markets and meant scarcer and dearer corn locally and increasing hardship for the more numerous labourers was widely recognised. 'The general opinion here is that canals are a great injury to the Poor by enabling farmers to send their grain abroad.'¹⁰⁴

Agriculture in Oxfordshire: regional diversity

The nature of farming was still closely geared to the conditions presented by the natural environment in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. This is made abundantly clear by the County Agricultural Reports produced at the time for the newly created Board of Agriculture, and summarised by William Marshall in 1818.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰¹ *ibid.*, 324

¹⁰² A.Yarranton, *Improvement*, 180-5

¹⁰³ A.Young, *Oxfordshire*, 325

¹⁰⁴ Sir F.M.Eden, *State*, 284

¹⁰⁵ W.Marshall, *Review*

These summaries begin with a 'Systematic Index', which opens with page references to material on 'Natural Districts' and 'Natural Economy'.

The Chiltern chalklands (60,000 acres) had access to London via the navigable Thames at Henley from long before the start of this period. In the main, it consisted of old enclosed parishes and formed a farming region quite unlike the rest of the county. Approaching from Oxford across the Clay Vales, one comes across a steep escarpment stretching from the Thames near Goring, north-eastwards into Buckinghamshire. At its highest near Nettlebed it reaches 260m. The dip-slope falls gradually to the south-east from the top of the escarpment and the region is bounded by the Thames again in the east where the river flows northwards between Reading and Henley.

The chalk is almost everywhere overlain with glacial drifts of gravel, plastic clays and flints. As Arthur Young remarked, the clay-covered chalklands, with fields full of flints, seemed at first sight unpropitious for farming 'so that strangers, unacquainted with the soils, are apt to think that land must be miserably poor which is worth [the high rent of] 20s. per acre.'¹⁰⁶ There was also a band of low-lying alluvial water meadows, frequently liable to flood, alongside the Thames with a variety of loams and clays between them and the chalk. Parish boundaries were arranged so that most of the parishes had some or all of the soil types. Most had a small frontage on the river and stretched inland across the chalk hills into the Clay Vale. Each parish had ample common woodland and grazing on the hills where it was too steep to plough.

Most parishes had small open-fields on the flat land by the river and enclosed fields further up the hills. Many of these were not fully enclosed until the 1850s, presumably

¹⁰⁶ A. Young, *Oxfordshire*, 7

because of the sheer extensiveness of the common woodland and rough grazing. The area of open-fields was more extensive on the flatter eastern side of the region than in the western part. In parishes entirely on the top of the hills, open-fields were rare. Thus, the communal husbandry of nucleated open-field villages which was still widespread elsewhere in the county in the mid-eighteenth century was of far less importance in the Chilterns, where farming in severalty with enclosed fields and scattered farmsteads strewn through common woodland and scrub was prevalent.

Although the region was traditionally characterised by arable farming supplemented by sheep grazing and other extensive usage of the dipslope open pastures and beechwoods, the balance had tilted in favour of corn by the mid-eighteenth century. The proportion of the cultivated acreage given over to wheat increased from 19% to 34% between 1580-1640 and 1660-1730.¹⁰⁷ J.R.Wordie compared the Oxfordshire Chilterns to their counterparts in Hertfordshire.¹⁰⁸ He found that in the latter region, the proportion of the cultivated acreage given over to wheat production actually fell between 1660 and 1730, even though it presented a similar physical environment and was no further from London. It was not, however, linked to the metropolis by a navigable river or waterway. In this instance, marketing considerations outweighed the natural environment in determining the nature of the regional farming system.

There were many aristocratic and gentry estates in the region, split into large farms and characterised by a combination of capitalist enterprise and paternalistic community management. It was in such parishes that the cultivation of sainfoin and turnips as part of an improved mixed-arable farming system prevailed. The spread of

¹⁰⁷ M.A.Havinden, *Rural*, 37

¹⁰⁸ J.R.Wordie, in J.Thirsk (ed.), *Regional*, 328

this system throughout the region was remarked upon by both Richard Davis and Arthur Young in their County Reports. Other Chiltern parishes, even though they had few land-owners, were let out in small farms which, as at Watlington, were 'heavily impoverished, the occupiers distressed and very poor.'¹⁰⁹

Population in the region was noticeably more sparse than anywhere else in Oxfordshire, except on the highest and most windswept parts of the Cotswolds.¹¹⁰ The low population density on the Chiltern chalklands was in part due to physical geography, but also resulted from the absence of an open-field economy, and therefore villages, in much of the region.¹¹¹ Havinden noted that in parishes like Caversham, and Eye and Dunsden on the flatter land near the Thames, which were open-field parishes, population density was comparable to that of other regions.¹¹² He also noted that the number of tenants was smaller and the average farm size larger in the enclosed parishes.¹¹³

The Clay Vales region (168,000 acres) which thrusts itself through central Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire, and on into north-west Berkshire, was the stronghold of the three-field system. The northern part of the region, between the limestone uplands and the River Thames, is underlain by a belt of thick, impervious Oxford Clay, covered in parts by gravel terraces and alluvium near the river. Just below the Chiltern escarpment and before the Gault clay is a narrow belt of fertile upper Greensand on which many villages were clustered. It was particularly attractive to settlement because numerous springs emerge at the base of the porous chalk hills.

¹⁰⁹ PP 1834 (XXX), Evidence of Thomas Barnes

¹¹⁰ M.A.Havinden, *Rural*, 118

¹¹¹ *ibid.*, 119

¹¹² *ibid.*, 120

¹¹³ *ibid.*, 128

It is very difficult to generalise about farming types in this region 'to which no particular characteristic can be assigned.'¹¹⁴ While much of it was covered by open-field villages, utilising a three-field rotation, on some of the heavier, more poorly drained soils, enclosure followed by conversion to pasture had already taken place. This trend continued during the mid-eighteenth century and Richard Davis remarked that the vales themselves were largely under pasture.¹¹⁵ The rearing of livestock was especially prominent around Bicester, while dairying on the rich enclosed pastures around Thame supplied butter to the London market. The heavy soils, which were prone to flooding, were not as suited to the new fodder crops as those elsewhere in the county. However, the high wheat price during the Napoleonic War years, combined with the construction of the Oxford Canal, encouraged the extension of arable cultivation.¹¹⁶

Prosperous dairy farming was also prevalent on the Redlands (80,000 acres) in the north of the county, extending into Northamptonshire and Warwickshire. Virtually the whole area was underlain by marlstone or ironstone rocks and the soil was chiefly of the red ironstone variety, with some clays of the lower lias in the valleys and with upper lias outliers forming some of the hills. The red-loam soils are extremely fertile and well-suited to either arable or pastoral husbandry. Arthur Young noted that 'this red district, in respect of soil, may be considered as the glory of the county.'¹¹⁷ Although only the meadow or pasture lands of the Cherwell Valley appear to have lent themselves naturally to livestock, Richard Davis observed that the whole region was 'chiefly appropriated to dairy.'¹¹⁸ Havinden's analysis of probate inventories showed

¹¹⁴ A.Young, *Oxfordshire*, 8

¹¹⁵ R.Davis, cited by A.Young, *Oxfordshire*, 7

¹¹⁶ G.E.Mingay (ed.), *Agrarian*, 49

¹¹⁷ A.Young, *Oxfordshire*, 5

¹¹⁸ R.Davis, cited in *ibid.*, 7

more dairying and livestock rearing in the region than might be expected from the nature of the soil.¹¹⁹

The fertility of the region made it one of early and dense settlement, and farms tended to be small, worked in conjunction with commons on the old medieval pattern of the virgate or half-virgate.¹²⁰ At the same time, there was little incentive to enclose in order to extend arable cultivation because the marketing of grain faced considerable problems. Until the extension of the Coventry Canal into Oxfordshire in the late eighteenth century, this region remained isolated from the major centres of demand in London and the West Midlands. Emphasis was therefore placed upon livestock, which could be driven on the hoof to Oxford, and upon livestock products such as wool, cheese and butter which had high value-to-weight-ratios and could bear the cost of overland transport. In this region, as on the Chiltern chalklands, marketing considerations could exercise a stronger influence on farming systems than soil types. The construction of the canal removed these barriers and was followed by widespread parliamentary enclosure.

The Oolitic limestone of the Cotswolds (166,000 acres) was sandwiched between the pasturelands of the Redlands and the Clay Vales. In the west of the region, soils were of a light, reddish, cornbrash variety similar in some respects to those of the marlstone uplands but becoming less fertile to the north. Around Chipping Norton, the brash was poor and sandy, but it became heavier and more fertile around Bicester to the east due to a greater admixture of clays.

Many of Havinden's examples of improvement in open-field farming came from this region and it is therefore little surprise that Richard Davis observed that the

¹¹⁹ M.A. Havinden, *Rural*, 266

¹²⁰ J. Thirsk (ed.), *Regional*, 319

Cotswolds were 'though more or less stony, in a convertible state.'¹²¹ Parliamentary enclosure was delayed in this region until the late eighteenth century and one of Arthur Young's correspondents remarked that occupiers on the stone-brash lands resisted enclosure because 'by adopting the turnip and grass-seed system upon their stone-brash land ...they might increase the value of the produce equal to an enclosure, at a time when they are paying no more than a common-field rent for their land.'¹²²

However, parliamentary enclosure was also encouraged on the Cotswold uplands in the last quarter of the eighteenth century by the construction of the Oxford Canal and high wheat prices. It was associated with the further adoption of the improved system of husbandry and the extension of cultivation onto former commons and wastes. It would seem likely that this shifted the emphasis towards grain production at the expense of the traditional mixed husbandry of the region.

The most densely settled parts of the region were in the valleys of the Rivers Windrush, Evenlode and Cherwell, which dissect the limestone plateau from north to south. The settlement pattern in the Evenlode Valley was different from the rest of the region, however, as most of the villages were settlements carved out of Wychwood Forest. These were typically large parishes with high populations, consisting of several small hamlets rather than one large nucleated village, each with its own field system. Enstone, for example, was made up of five settlements. Outside the forest ones, settlements were typically nucleated with one village and one field system.

Rural industry in Oxfordshire: a tale of decline

Although Oxfordshire was a predominantly agricultural county, several industries had

¹²¹ R.Davis, cited by A.Young, *Oxfordshire*, 8

¹²² R.Wills, cited in *ibid.*, 102

risen to a position of regional and even national importance by the late seventeenth century. Woollen cloth dominated manufacturing in the county. The Witney blanket industry, which was the biggest consumer of wool in Oxfordshire, was described in vivid detail by Robert Plot in 1677.¹²³ He declared that 'near 3,000 poor people, from children of eight years to decrepit old age, do work out above one hundred packs of wool per week.'¹²⁴ He also noted that 'Oxford has the reputation of the best gloves and knives of any place in England.'¹²⁵

Richard Davis remarked in 1794, in his survey of the county for the newly formed Board of Agriculture, that the chief commercial activities in the Oxfordshire were blanket manufacture at Witney, shag manufacture at Banbury, and glove making and polished steel production at Woodstock.¹²⁶ Yet, in 1819, Brewer was able to remark that industries in the county were 'few, and not in a remarkably flourishing condition.'¹²⁷ Although there were pockets of affluence, the majority of the county's industries experienced a rapid decline during the 1790s and early 1800s.

Woollen cloth had been manufactured at Witney since the Middle Ages.¹²⁸ By the seventeenth century the town had become famous for white blankets. The industry was organised on a putting-out basis, with the wool being hand-spun by outworkers in villages up to fourteen miles away. Fulling was the only part of the production process carried out in a mill. The industry employed 2,000 hands in 1768, including 400 weavers in their own homes.¹²⁹ Output peaked in 1795-6 when the industry consumed

¹²³ R.Plot, *Natural*, 278

¹²⁴ *ibid.*, 278

¹²⁵ *ibid.*, 280

¹²⁶ R.Davis, cited by A.Young, *Oxfordshire*, 328

¹²⁷ J.N.Brewer, *Topographical*, 42

¹²⁸ For a detailed history of the Witney blanket industry, see, A.Plummer, *Blanket*.

¹²⁹ Revd. J.A.Giles, *Witney*, 61

80,000 lb. of wool per week and a journeyman weaver could earn 20-25s. per week.¹³⁰

The industry was hard hit by the outbreak of war with France in 1793, which closed many of its continental markets. It was also hit by the 1812 American War which cut off demand for blankets from the American Indians, another important market. Arthur Young remarked in 1813 that ‘the manufacture at Witney declined for so many years, that there was very little expectation of its ever reviving.’¹³¹ However, he also noted that the recent introduction of spinning jennies and spring looms, ‘by which one man does the work of two’, had brought a recovery so that output rivalled forty years previously.¹³² Despite this resurgence in output, wages had stagnated and ‘less than half the number [were employed] that were here in the former period.’¹³³ Poor rates had increased in the town as a consequence.¹³⁴

The manufacture of shag or plush spread rapidly through the Banbury district after 1750 and proved more resilient than the Witney blanket industry because its main markets at home, and in southern Europe, were not so adversely affected by the French Wars.¹³⁵ By 1800, the industry dominated the economy of the whole of the Banbury district, spreading throughout North Oxfordshire, and into parts of Northamptonshire, Warwickshire and Worcestershire.¹³⁶ It was also organised on a putting-out basis and yarn was sent out from Banbury to weavers within a radius of 10-12 miles and occasionally more.¹³⁷ A reliable contemporary estimate suggests that by the early 1830s the industry employed 550 men in Banbury and the surrounding

¹³⁰ *ibid.*, 61

¹³¹ A.Young, *Oxfordshire*, 326

¹³² *ibid.*, 326

¹³³ *ibid.*, 326

¹³⁴ *ibid.*, 326

¹³⁵ R.P.Beckinsale, *Plush*, 58

¹³⁶ *ibid.*, 58

¹³⁷ *ibid.*, 58

villages.¹³⁸ However, there is also evidence that by the early nineteenth century it was struggling to cope with competition from the industrial north.¹³⁹

Woodstock was the final centre of manufacturing to which Richard Davis referred. It had been an important glove-making centre since the late sixteenth century: both Elizabeth I and James I are said to have been presented with richly embroidered gloves there.¹⁴⁰ In 1813, Arthur Young noted that the glove industry centred on Woodstock ‘furnished employment to the poor for many miles around.’¹⁴¹ Again, it was organised on a putting-out basis. Between 60 and 70 men were employed as ‘grounders of leather and cutters of gloves’, earning between 1 guinea and 30s. per week.¹⁴² The finished leather, in bundles of 3, 6 or 12 pairs, was sent out to the glovereses in the surrounding villages, along with the sewing thread and money for the last batch of finished work. The finished gloves were picked up once or twice a week by the village pack-woman who carried the loads in a cart or sack on her back. Arthur Young estimated that 1400-1500 women and girls were involved in sewing the gloves with a weekly output of 260-400 dozen (pairs). He noted that ‘the trade is extremely flourishing.’¹⁴³ It was encouraged by the outbreak of the Napoleonic Wars, boosting demand from the Cavalry for the particular heavy glove for which Woodstock was famous.

However, great dismay arose in the Woodstock district in 1826 when William Huskisson, the President of the Board of Trade, removed the centuries’ old restraints on the import of foreign gloves.¹⁴⁴ Although the production of heavy gloves was not

¹³⁸ *ibid.*, 58

¹³⁹ *ibid.*, 59

¹⁴⁰ T.E.Schulz, *Woodstock*, 144

¹⁴¹ A.Young, *Oxfordshire*, 329

¹⁴² *ibid.*, 329

¹⁴³ *ibid.*, 329

¹⁴⁴ T.E.Schulz, *Woodstock*, 144

as hard-hit by cheaper imports as some other types, the decline of the glove-industry in West Oxfordshire is evident in the replies contained within the *Rural Queries* section of the 1834 Poor Law Report.¹⁴⁵ Although glove production was noted in several parishes in West Oxfordshire, the parishes responding to the *Queries* noted that the trade had fallen off.¹⁴⁶

In the mid-eighteenth century, Woodstock had also been famous for the manufacture of articles of polished steel produced from old horseshoe nails. Articles produced included buckles, buttons, bracelets and spurs.¹⁴⁷ Although Arthur Young maintained that the industry had been established in the early eighteenth century, there is evidence of an earlier start.¹⁴⁸ By the late eighteenth century, however, the industry was experiencing a rapid decline in the face of growing competition from mass steel production in Sheffield and Birmingham.¹⁴⁹ The number of men employed fell from 25-30 in 1765 (wages 15s. to 2 guineas per week) to 10-12 men (wages 1 to 1.5 guineas per week) in 1813.¹⁵⁰

Although Richard Davis concentrated his attention on these four industries, there were other domestic manufactures of at least local importance. These included basket-making using locally grown osiers at Thame and Oxford; hand-loom weaving and clock-making at Charlbury; lace-making, straw-plaiting and chair-making on the Chilterns; saddle-making and a bell-foundry at Burford; brick-making at Cropredy,

¹⁴⁵ PP 1834 (XXX)

¹⁴⁶ The returns suggest that the glove trade, centred on Woodstock, provided very little employment in 1834 even where it was recorded and that this employment was often intermittent and poorly rewarded. It was described as 'very bad' at Enstone and had 'much fallen off' at Wootton. The gloveresses at Chadlington were paid 'a very low wage', *ibid.*, Evidence of William Gardener & F.Elton; Lancelot Lee, and Samuel Keyte.

¹⁴⁷ T.E.Schulz, Woodstock, 144

¹⁴⁸ A.Young, *Oxfordshire*, 328; *ibid.*, 144

¹⁴⁹ A.Young, *Oxfordshire*, 328

¹⁵⁰ *ibid.*, 328

and the production of leather-breeches at Bampton.¹⁵¹ The fate of most of these industries was settled by the early 1800s. They were destined to decline as the social and economic circumstances to which they owed their origin disappeared and as transport routes opened up the Oxfordshire market to cheaper goods from elsewhere.

Richard Davis remarked that ‘the employment of the female poor, on the southward side of the county, is lace-making.’¹⁵² It was boosted by the outbreak of the French Wars and the establishment of Napoleon’s Continental Blockade which restricted imports from Belgium. These restrictions ceased with Napoleon’s defeat in 1815 and the declining state of this trade by the early 1830s is evident in many of the returns to the *Rural Queries*. These referred to the low earnings and intermittent employment offered by this activity.¹⁵³ William F. Lowndes, in his reply for the parish of Brightwell Baldwin, noted that a few women ‘earned a trifle through lace-making, although not often.’¹⁵⁴ At Pyrton, most women made lace when they could not find employment on the land but the returns of 2-3s. per week were poor.¹⁵⁵ The lace-making parishes were concentrated along the Chiltern escarpment, close to traditional lace-making areas of Buckinghamshire. The manufacture of lace was also recorded in the villages around Banbury; at Duns Tew where six women earned a ‘trifling return’, and at Oddington and Great Milton, where the trade was also becoming ‘increasingly unprofitable.’¹⁵⁶

Robert Plot noted that in parts of Oxfordshire ‘...before they thresh rye, they sometimes take care to preserve some of the straw whole or unbroken, to serve the

¹⁵¹ See, for example, P. Keegan, Cropredy; N.L. Leyland & J.E. Troughton, *Glovemaking*; R. Plot, *Natural*, 278; C. Sibbit, *Bells*

¹⁵² cited by A. Young, *Oxfordshire*, 330

¹⁵³ PP 1834 (XXX)

¹⁵⁴ *ibid.*, Evidence of William F. Lowndes

¹⁵⁵ *ibid.*, Evidence of Thomas Wiggins

¹⁵⁶ *ibid.*, Evidence of John Davis, William Gordon, Philip Serle and Thomas Ellis

straw-worker.’¹⁵⁷ The straw-plait industry which was centred on Bedfordshire, Hertfordshire, Essex and east Buckinghamshire, was given a major impetus by the outbreak of war in 1793 which restricted competition from imports, particularly from Italy.¹⁵⁸ The imposition of prohibitive duties in 1805, which were further increased in 1819, also helped to boost the industry.¹⁵⁹ Entry to the industry required little or no capital outlay and it used widely available local raw materials. Like lace-making and spinning, it was ideal for the rural agricultural labourers' family, the members of which learnt the technique in their early childhood.

The Oxfordshire straw-industry was concentrated on the chalky soils of the Chilterns which produced a better quality straw, ideal for plaiting.¹⁶⁰ Richard Davis observed in 1794 that ‘the employment of the female poor on the southward side of the county is lace-making, but in the middle and northward side the more general employment is spinning.’¹⁶¹ However, the boom was short-lived and the end of the Napoleonic War in 1815 meant that the importation of finer cheaper Leghorn plaits could resume.¹⁶² In 1823, William Cobbett noted that ‘the manufacture was, only a few years ago, very flourishing, but it has now greatly declined, and has left in poverty and misery, those whom it once well-fed and clothed.’¹⁶³ By 1834, the price of plait had slumped to just 20% of the level at the start of the nineteenth century.¹⁶⁴

Rural industry which might have provided an important supplement to family income and therefore potentially allow a family to remain independent of the parish was not really an option in Oxfordshire by the early nineteenth century. The French

¹⁵⁷ R.Plot, *Natural*, 258

¹⁵⁸ L.Grof, *Straw*, 21

¹⁵⁹ *ibid.*, 25

¹⁶⁰ *ibid.*, 19

¹⁶¹ cited by A.Young, *Oxfordshire*, 330

¹⁶² L.Grof, *Straw*, 28

¹⁶³ cited by L.Grof, *Straw*, 28

Wars (1793-1815) provided a temporary boost to some industries and women and children were able to supplement family incomes in some parts of the county. After 1815, such employment was increasingly both intermittent and poorly remunerated. Weekly earnings of 2-3s. might have been possible which would have provided an important contribution to family income, particularly during the winter. However, even where such wages were paid for this work, the work itself might not have been available.

Sources and methodology

I have used a wide array of parish, county and national archives in this study. Parish-based sources include overseers' accounts and correspondence, vestry minutes, farm accounts, estate papers, enclosure records, memoirs and diaries. County-level sources rely heavily on *Jackson's Oxford Journal* and Quarter Session Minutes. Nationally-based archives include tithe documents and maps, Home Office Papers and a hitherto neglected source: the correspondence between the nascent Poor Law Unions, Assistant Commissioners and Poor Law Commissioners sitting in London. While this correspondence relates directly to the mid-1830s, it provides a great deal of information on the administration of the Old Poor Law and the state of the county in the years leading up to reform in 1834.

While a study of the geography of poor relief expenditure, using the administrative unit of the county as a tool rather than simply as a statistical convenience, is fundamental to an understanding of the role of the Poor Laws in rural society at this time, the sheer weight of empirical evidence means that certain questions and relationships must be emphasised at the expense of others. This will, of course,

¹⁶⁴ *ibid.*, 28

compromise the advantages of a regional synthesis in some ways but will strengthen it in others by focusing attention upon specific sorts of relationships, central to the particular issues in mind.

Questions which will be considered include: What forms did poor relief take? At what scale did these forms vary? What factors determined the nature of poor relief at these scales? How did the effects of high bread prices vary? How did poor relief policies and practices respond to these high prices? Did the living standards of the rural poor vary? How important were national political decisions at the local level? How did the composition of the relief burden vary? Can general trends in poor relief expenditure be explained by these changes? Who were the poor and what proportion of the total population did they represent? To what extent do variations in poor relief expenditure correspond with differences in the degree of poverty and unemployment? What factors determined these variations?

Chapters 2-6 consider the empirical evidence relating to the geography of poor relief expenditure in Oxfordshire during this period. Chapter 2 examines the material contained within the series of Parliamentary Returns on the Poor Laws and establishes the actual extent of human-ecological variations in poor relief expenditure. Chapters 3 and 4 pursue these variations in much more detail and continuously through time, using material gleaned from county and parish-based archives. In Chapters 5 and 6, attention is focused upon four parishes: Cropredy, Pyrton, Spelsbury and Stoke Lyne, selected for the comprehensiveness of their records and their location in different human-ecological regions of the county. Emphasis is placed upon the operation of the Poor Laws during the years of scarcity and high prices in 1795-6, 1800-2, 1812-13 and 1817-18. The conclusion, in Chapter 7, provides a summary of these empirical

findings and an evaluation of the conceptual and methodological questions raised in this Chapter.

Parliamentary reports and returns

The system of poor relief in Oxfordshire in the early 1830s

D.O.P.Okeden, the Assistant Commissioner responsible for Oxfordshire, stated that his report, submitted to the Poor Law Commissioners on 25 September 1832, was ‘an examination of the practical operation of the Poor Laws west of the Great Canal.’¹ He maintained that he was informed in his task by regular attendance at the petty sessions in the area and that he had also organised meetings with local magistrates to inquire into the administration of the Poor Laws in each division. He concluded that ‘the poor rates of every parish are steadily and invariably on the increase’ and that the blame for this lay squarely on the shoulders of those responsible for the formulation of relief policy and practice, principally the magistrates.²

According to Okeden, the payment of head money regulated by a scale of allowances had been adopted twenty four years earlier and had spread throughout the divisions under his investigation. The magistrates decided on the sum which, in their opinion, was necessary for the support of a labourer and his dependants and, by a scale of allowances, overseers were ordered to make up wages, if lower, from the parish rates. This system of allowances operated in all its varieties, including the roundsman system, to produce a situation where ‘one system pervades all the districts, and all are governed precisely in the same form, only varying at times from the better or worse

¹ PP 1834 (XXVIII), 1

Figure 1.1 shows the location of the ‘Great [Oxford] Canal’.

² *ibid.*, 2

management of the overseers.’³ Although Okeden acknowledged trifling variations in the scale of allowances in some districts, he concluded that these were so small as hardly to deserve notice.⁴

The payment of head money in Oxfordshire had, he continued, created all the problems to which Malthus and other opponents of the Poor Laws referred. It had encouraged early marriage (for the avowed purpose of increasing income) and therefore the generation of superfluous labour, all demanding work or payment from the rates. This practice had also served to equalise the rewards of industry and idleness, honesty and dishonesty. Attention was not paid to the character or circumstances of the recipient when granting relief. Instead, all were relieved according to the scale and this had undermined the productivity of labour and agricultural capital. This system was, he maintained, so complete that ‘the history of one of the parishes is the history of all.’⁵ He concluded that ‘it is my humble opinion that, if some measure be not adopted to arrest the progress of the evil, a fearful and bloody contest must ensue.’⁶

Okeden’s analysis of the administration of the Poor Laws in Oxfordshire in 1832 was founded upon the belief that the system of outdoor relief payments to able-bodied labourers was universal throughout the county. These conclusions were confirmed by Richard Hall and Edward Gilson in the early months of 1835. They were appointed as Assistant Poor Law Commissioners responsible for the smooth implementation of the Poor Law Amendment Act in Oxfordshire. Each Assistant Commissioner was allocated a number of nascent Poor Law Unions, for whose establishment they were held responsible. Hall was allocated Bicester, Chipping Norton and Woodstock

³ *ibid.*, 1

⁴ *ibid.*, 3

Unions while Gilson was responsible for those focused on Banbury, Headington, Henley, Thame and Witney. Both travelled widely throughout Oxfordshire during the last few months of 1834, talking to those responsible for the administration of the existing system and to those in receipt of relief. They also obtained returns of poor relief expenditure and the numbers and types of paupers from selected parishes.⁷ Their observations were compiled into reports which were sent to the Poor Law Commissioners in London.

Hall stated on 10 July 1835 that he had ‘visited over 140 parishes in Oxfordshire during the previous few months.’⁸ He concluded from his observations that ‘the evils of pauperism have been by no means exaggerated by previous enquiries.’⁹ He identified what he termed ‘the malignant features of the old system ...a system fraught with mischief and ruin’, and concluded that ‘I am inclined to say generally, that the evils resulting from a principle which destroys the connection between work and wages, flourishes more vigorously in Oxfordshire, than in the district of Berkshire where it was first formally avowed and sanctioned.’¹⁰

He referred in his report to ‘the original Bread Table, by which the parish allowance was systematically substituted for the wages of labour, the industrious man was brought down to the same level with him that was content to eat the bread of idleness, independence was discouraged, improvidence rewarded and the labouring classes were proclaimed free of those moral restraints which act so beneficially on all

⁵ *ibid.*, 1

⁶ *ibid.*, 6

⁷ Unfortunately, very few of these returns were actually included in their reports. They were primarily used to illustrate general principles.

⁸ PRO MH32/34, Richard Hall to Commissioners, 10 July 1835

⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁰ *ibid.*

other orders of the community.’¹¹ The magistrates, he continued, had acted in accordance with their compassionate and humane feelings when framing this measure. The farmers supported it ‘because it meant that they did not have to increase wages to what the exigencies of the time made necessary for the support of the labourer,’¹² and also ‘enabled him to throw part of the burden of his support on the ratepayer who did not employ him.’¹³ The quantity of relief therefore came to be regulated according to the number of mouths to feed and the price of bread and ‘opened wide the hospitable portals of the parish to all who claimed admittance, as if their very object had been to remove every doubt.’¹⁴

In his report on the Bicester Poor Law Union, Hall concluded that ‘nowhere have I seen the relationship between employer and employee so much disturbed as in the vicinity of Bicester.’¹⁵ Yet he also concluded that, with the exception of the parish of Bicester Market-End where an improved mode of administration had been adopted, ‘the condition of the parishes which I propose to write about is ...very nearly similar; they present the same features of pauperism that I have observed in other Oxfordshire parishes.’¹⁶ He continued to describe the usual form of parochial management in this part of the county:

‘The parish settles the proper amount of income for every labourer within it, according to the number of family and price of bread. Farmers at a general meeting held once every year bid against each other for men, and that master receives any labourer as his servant who he will undertake to pay the largest portion of the sum which the parish decreed that he is to receive ...good character is of no advantage to the labourer ...his industry does not increase his means, or add to his respectability and comfort.’¹⁷

¹¹ *ibid.*

¹² *ibid.*

¹³ *ibid.*

¹⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁵ PRO MH12/9614, Richard Hall to Commissioners, 4 July 1835

¹⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁷ *ibid.*

He also noted a slight deviation from this custom in some places; the terms of their sale by auction could vary. Some parishes would not allow the man to go for less than the full price, and 'all that are not thus disposed are sent round with tickets.'¹⁸ In others, attempts had been made to rent land for the paupers to dig, while work had also been provided for them at the parish stone pit and grubbing roots 'according to local circumstances.'¹⁹ All parishes, he noted, had roads to repair and 'the most usual way of employing the pauper is to be put on the roads.'²⁰ While travelling through the parish of Brightwell Baldwin, Hall stopped at the roadside to talk to six or seven men who were employed repairing the parish highways. He recorded the following conversation:

Q: Do you earn money by working on the road?

A: If I do, said one, it is by walking home and back, morning and evening.

Q: Why, do you do the road no good?

A: Not a morsel sir, I think rather we do it harm.

Q: Then what, do you think, you are put here for?

A: Oh sir, we know the overseer only puts us here to suffer us and I have often told him he had better give us our money for nothing.

Q: But why not get employment from the farmers?

A: The farmers will not give us any just at present. They keep us here like potatoes in a pit, and only take us out when they can no longer do without us.'²¹

That the disease of pauperism, caused by the evils inherent in the system of outdoor relief, had spread throughout the parishes in the Chipping Norton and Woodstock

¹⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁹ *ibid.*

Poor Law Unions is evident in Hall's other reports. He maintained that '...it is unnecessary to enter into minute details as to the circumstances [of the 33 parishes in Chipping Norton Union], their condition being precisely similar to that of the parishes of which you have recently received the reports.'²² Thus, he continued, the problem of pauperism 'assumes no new shape in the parishes around Chipping Norton, there is the same reckless expenditure; the same apparent surplus population created by that expenditure; the same insubordinate and discontented dispositions on the part of the rate receiver, that have disclosed themselves to our investigation in other places.'²³ Again, in his report on the Woodstock Union, Hall remarked that '...pauperism assumes no new aspect in the parishes which form the subject of this report; the same abuses prevail, the same evils are apparent in all.'²⁴

Like Hall, Edward Gilson maintained that the symptoms of the disease took on a similar form wherever it struck. In his report on the Headington Union, he observed that '...with respect to this District generally, I have found the same fearful state of demoralisation consequent upon the lamentable extent of pauperism existing in these parishes as I have attempted to describe to the Board in my former reports upon the Henley and Thame Unions.'²⁵ In his report on the Henley Union, Gilson identified the twin pillars upon which the system of outdoor relief was built. He specifically referred to the adoption of bread scales and the practice of paying labour out of the rates. These same abuses of management, he continued, accounted for the highly pauperised state

²⁰ *ibid.*

²¹ PRO MH32/34, Richard Hall to Commissioners, 10 July 1835

²² PRO MH12/9637, Richard Hall to Commissioners, 24 August 1835

²³ *ibid.*

²⁴ PRO MH12/9775, Richard Hall to Commissioners, 20 June 1835

²⁵ PRO MH12/9658, Edward Gilson to Commissioners, 24 August 1835

of the labouring population throughout Oxfordshire, which had ‘...made active strides towards an entire disorganisation of society.’²⁶

The system to which they both referred was perceived to be self-perpetuating. The provision of outdoor relief undermined the industry and morals of the labouring population and ‘...their bad character is made a pretext for the continuance of a system which produces the very grievances complained of.’²⁷ Both Assistant Commissioners constantly referred to the high level of support expressed throughout Oxfordshire for the rapid adoption of the new principles of poor relief, the successful adoption of which had been observed in neighbouring Unions. This level of support, they maintained, was a reflection of the extent to which the disease of pauperism had spread throughout the county, and the degree to which it was acknowledged that its origins lay in the existing administration of the Poor Laws. According to Gilson, this support came from both ratepayers and magistrates. In the Witney Union, he had ‘...no hesitation in saying that nineteen out of every twenty of the influential ratepayers - and all the magistrates - are in favour of the measure.’²⁸

They did, however, acknowledge two attempts made prior to the reforms of 1834 to adopt improved systems of relief management. Both involved the introduction of a ‘workhouse test’ and were accounted a success by the authors of these reports.

The ‘workhouse test’ at Bicester Market-End and Henley-upon-Thames

According to Richard Hall, ‘...the expenditure of Bicester Market-End in the financial year ending 25 March 1833 was so extravagant, and the demoralisation of the lower orders so alarming, that the vestry determined on trying to effect of the workhouse

²⁶ PRO MH12/9689, Edward Gilson to Commissioners, 7 May 1835

²⁷ PRO MH12/9614, Edward Gilson to Commissioners, 4 July 1835

system.’²⁹ Towards the close of the autumn in the same year, the experiment was made of ordering relief to able-bodied applicants in the workhouse, but the house provided was so insufficient for the demand on its services that the system could only be imperfectly carried on. The vestry was therefore obliged to exercise discretion as to what paupers should be received into the house, and who should be employed or relieved without being submitted to this order.

However, there was a considerable decrease in poor relief expenditure during the spring months of 1834 as compared to 1833.³⁰ Hall attributed this to the adoption of the ‘workhouse test’ which had resulted in a ‘perceptible improvement in the conduct of the poor which encouraged the vestry to adhere to the plan.’³¹ The principles laid down were maintained and ‘a considerable improvement was made.’³² Both the total relief expenditure and the number of able-bodied applicants fell dramatically ‘after payment off the book in-aid-of-wages ceased.’³³

Edward Gilson also remarked upon the adoption of the ‘workhouse system’ at Henley, comparing the town to the surrounding districts which he found to be heavily pauperised.³⁴

‘The workhouse system had been acted upon for some time in degree and this parish is a strong instance of the good resulting from it. The rates are reduced to nearly one half and the town itself would be well satisfied to remain as they are.’³⁵

Gilson met Sir Henry Verny MP at Bicester Market-End and attended a Select Vestry.³⁶ He remarked on the level of support expressed in favour of the ‘Union

²⁸ PRO MH12/9753, Edward Gilson to Commissioners, 2 March 1835

²⁹ PRO MH12/9614, Richard Hall to Commissioners, 8 July 1835

³⁰ *ibid.*

³¹ *ibid.*

³² *ibid.*

³³ *ibid.*

³⁴ PRO MH12/9689, Edward Gilson to Commissioners, 7 May 1835

³⁵ *ibid.*

³⁶ *ibid.*

System’ and that the Select Vestry was unanimous in its wish to have it adopted as soon as possible. He also referred to the time and attention which Lord Chetwynd, Chairman of the Select Vestry, had bestowed on the management of the parish, as a result of which the parish workhouse had ‘been placed upon a more severe footing than I have ever seen since I embarked in the service of the Board.’³⁷ The rules ‘were so severe that none but the necessitous will submit to them.’³⁸ He noted the workhouse diet, shown in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1. Workhouse diet at Bicester Market-End, May 1835

Breakfast and supper:	each day	Gruel and 8oz. of bread
Dinner:	2 days	6oz. meat and 3oz. bread
	4 days	Suet pudding and potatoes
	1 day	Potatoes only

The pump supplied their only beverage

Source: PRO MH12/9689, Edward Gilson to Commissioners, 7 May 1835

Gilson also noted the system of classification and separation of inmates in the workhouse: men were placed in one building, women and girls in another, and boys were housed in a third building which, he added, ‘was significantly called the Pest House.’³⁹ The only time that a man and wife could see each other was in going to and from church. Although ‘as may be supposed, they complain loudly - they have rebelled - but the strong arm of the law has been resorted to, and they are now quiet.’⁴⁰

The Assistant Commissioners’ reports: summary

The analysis of the assistant commissioners was founded upon the belief that a universal system of outdoor relief payments to able-bodied labourers existed in rural Oxfordshire during the early 1830s. The origins of this system lay in the magistrates’

³⁷ *ibid.*

³⁸ *ibid.*

³⁹ *ibid.*

decision of 1795 to adopt a 'Bread Table' to regulate parish allowances. The progressive increase in poor relief expenditure was the inevitable result of the evils inherent in this system.

However, their reports might well provide a distorted view of poor relief practices and their effects. They were sent out with a set of quite specific instructions to guide their enquiries.⁴¹ These instructions rested upon clear preconceptions concerning the nature and effects of poor relief. Most of the instructions involved digging up evidence on the allowance, labour rate and roundsman systems in order to identify their general outlines and to expose the evils inherent in their practice.

They provide little information on how this system of outdoor relief had spread over the previous forty or so years since its conception. It was simply assumed that it had become widespread after 1795. However, a proper consideration of the role played by the Poor Laws in rural Oxfordshire during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries should trace the evolution of the institution as well as its condition on the eve of reform.

It will now be demonstrated that it was not a rigid institution. Its shape varied both temporally and spatially in response to a multitude of factors. To come to terms with this changing and variegated form and the influences which moulded it, it is necessary to examine all the available material on the pre-1834 period. The starting point is the set of official statistics on the Poor Laws contained in the Parliamentary Papers.

Parliamentary reports: contents and comparability

The parliamentary reports vary in the quantity and quality of the information which

⁴⁰ *ibid.*

⁴¹ A.Brundage, *Making*, 28

they contain. Although the pre-1834 period was not a pre-statistical era, it was a period dominated by *ad hoc* specialised returns. The only regular continuous information available are the annual tabulations of poor relief expenditure by parish beginning in the financial year 1812-13.⁴² Apart from this, statistics were collected occasionally and it is necessary to rely heavily on a series of major returns on poor relief expenditure by parish made in 1775, 1787, 1803-4, 1824 and 1832.

The report for the year 1775-6 contains material on the cost of poor relief listed by parish and summed for each hundred.⁴³ That of 1787-8 also contains exclusively financial information, listed by parish, but not summed for hundreds, for the years 1782-3, 1783-4 and 1784-5.⁴⁴ The Poor Law Report of 1803-4 is in many ways the most comprehensive and informative.⁴⁵ It contains financial information similar to that of the two earlier reports, from which it reproduces completely figures on sums collected, and averages of expenditure on the poor over the three years covered by the 1787-8 report by parish, all summed for hundreds. Identical information is provided for the financial year 1802-3. In addition, there is an abundance of material on how the money was spent, which describes the poor themselves. It lists the existence and cost of workhouses and the numbers of adults and children housed in them, as well as the outpoor on permanent relief, the number of their children, and adults provided with occasional relief. The report of 1818 contains information listed by parish, summed for hundreds, for the years 1812-13, 1813-14 and 1814-15 on the cost of relief, identical with that of earlier reports.⁴⁶ Material on the poor themselves includes the

⁴² Unless otherwise stated, the financial year covered the period between 25 March each year.

⁴³ House of Commons Papers, vol.31 Geo. III, Poor Relief &c 1775-1780, 107-350, Abstract of the Returns made by the Overseers of the Poor

⁴⁴ *ibid.*, vol.60 Geo.III, 13-322, Poor Relief 1787 and 1788

⁴⁵ PP 1803-4 (XIII)

⁴⁶ PP 1818 (XIX)

number of people (whether adults or adults and children is not specified) relieved in workhouses, permanently relieved outpoor and occasionally relieved in- and outpoor.

The Poor Law Report of 1834 is by far the most voluminous, containing twelve volumes of discussion, information abstracted from earlier parliamentary papers and statutes, reports of surveys of counties and smaller areas by agents of inquiry and answers to 53 questions directed to particular parishes, as well as material from censuses relating to those parishes.⁴⁷ The only part of Oxfordshire covered by an agent's report is the area west of the canal, described by Okeden. Detailed information is given for 27 individual parishes in Oxfordshire, with aggregated data for the hundreds of Banbury, North Bloxham and Banbury, and Ploughley.

The data in these reports are not so easy to use systematically as might at first appear. Variations in the nature of some of the spatial units used in the tabulations is a source of considerable potential error. In the reports of 1803-4 and 1818, data are not tabulated uniformly by parish, as they are in some of the earlier reports (except for long-standing divisions like that of Middle Aston from Steeple Aston, which are used consistently in all poor law reports and censuses). Parishes were often split into their constituent townships, hamlets and liberties and entries recorded for each part. Thus, in the 1803-4 and 1818 Poor Law Reports, the parish of Pyrton was divided into the hamlets of Clare, Goldor, Greenhill, Pyrton and Standhill and the liberty of Assendon. Listed alphabetically, these parts were widely separated in the tabulations.

The practice of splitting parishes in different ways in successive enumerations had greatly abated by the time of the 1821 census. However, it is necessary to sum the figures given for each of these parts in the reports of 1803-4 and 1818 and the

⁴⁷ PP 1834 (XVIII-XXVIII)

censuses of 1801 and 1811 to obtain totals for parish units comparable with those used in earlier and later reports and later censuses. All parts of parishes were summed to give true parish totals for both the poor law and census figures.

It must also be remembered that the parish returns were derived from parish accounts kept, in the most part, by amateurs who differed markedly in the levels of skill and interest with which they undertook their task. Undoubtedly they incorrectly entered some debits and credits and imperfectly separated expenditure on relief from other types of rate-assisted expenditure, like the county rate, maintenance of the parish church, and payments to the surveyor of the highways. Whether these errors were significant and whether they all lay in the same direction is a moot point, but it seems likely that at the scale of the county as a whole a multiplicity of small errors would cancel each other out - though this does not, of course, apply at the parish level.

Poor relief expenditure: Oxfordshire and national trends

Oxfordshire was one of the counties where the problem of rising poor relief expenditure was most acutely felt. Annual disbursements on the relief of the poor increased more than five-fold, rising from £28,750 in 1775-6⁴⁸ to £156,410 in 1817-18.⁴⁹ Total expenditure increased most sharply between the early 1780s (£36,109)⁵⁰ and 1802-3 (£91,304).⁵¹ After falling between 1812-13 and 1814-15, from £143,108 to £106,495, expenditure surged to its overall peak in 1817-18.⁵² Figure 2.1 shows that it then fell for five successive years to £105,198 in 1822-3, before rising slightly

⁴⁸ House of Commons Papers, vol.31 Geo.III, Poor Relief &c 1775-1780

⁴⁹ PP 1818 (XIX)

⁵⁰ This is the average annual relief expenditure during the financial years 1782-3, 1783-4 and 1784-5, House of Commons Papers, vol.60, Geo. III, Poor Relief 1787 and 1788

⁵¹ PP 1803-4 (XIII)

⁵² PP 1818 (XIX)

during the later 1820s.⁵³

The raw data themselves cannot be used to indicate relative relief levels and trends for areas varying in population size. To establish comparability with national trends it is necessary to express poor relief expenditure as an index number, with the financial year 1802-3 being set as the base level (100) for both. Figure 2.2 indicates that the pattern of relief expenditure in Oxfordshire closely followed the national trend although the level in 1802-3 was slightly higher relatively in Oxfordshire, which explains why subsequent relief levels tend to lag behind the national pattern.

Population and prices

The pattern of annual poor relief expenditure, although broadly outlining the changing incidence of payments, is of little value on its own, but needs to be adjusted for variations in both population size and price levels. According to Revd. David Davies, who collected subsistence budgets of a number of labourers in his parish of Barkham in Berkshire during the late 1780s, wheaten bread purchases amounted to 66% of their total annual expenditure.⁵⁴ That the surges and slumps in wheat prices were followed by the trend of poor relief expenditure is also shown in Figure 2.2. By adjusting levels of expenditure according to fluctuations in bread (or wheat) prices it is possible to calculate real values of poor relief expenditure.⁵⁵

Using the level of national wheat prices in 1802-3 as the base level (100), the index of Oxfordshire poor relief expenditure in real terms rose from 44 in 1775-6 to an average of 53 between 1782-3 and 1784-5. It subsequently increased to 100 in 1802-3, but had dropped to 87 in 1812-13. Figure 2.3 shows that although absolute poor relief

⁵³ Although a figure for national poor relief expenditure in 1829-30 is available, the return for Oxfordshire has not survived.

expenditure peaked in 1817-18, if one adjusts for fluctuations in the price of wheat, the real value of expenditure actually rose over the next five years to a peak in 1822-3.

However, although the real value of relief never fell back to its level of 1802-3 in the twenty three years 1812-13 to 1834-5 inclusive, national expenditure only ran at twice the 1802-3 level in one year, 1822-3, and in Oxfordshire only rose to a peak of 186. Through the whole period, poor relief expenditure in Oxfordshire ran at an average of 146, while nationally it averaged 165. Given that population also increased in this period, the increase in real expenditure per head was moderate.

This can be demonstrated by setting annual expenditure against population enumerated in the nearest census in order to calculate per capita relief expenditure. It rose in Oxfordshire from 16s. 2d in 1802-3 (second highest county total after Sussex) to 24s. 10d in 1812-13 (third highest after Sussex and Berkshire). It subsequently fell to 19s. 1d in 1820-1, which was equal third-highest after Sussex and Essex. Mark Blaug also estimated per capita relief expenditure from the parish responses to the Rural Queries section contained in the 1834 Poor Law Report. He maintained that by the early 1830s relief expenditure in Oxfordshire had fallen to 16s. 11d (fifth highest after Sussex, Berkshire, Suffolk and Essex).⁵⁶

If these figures are calculated in real terms, taking into account fluctuations in the price of bread, it can be shown that per capita poor relief expenditure, when expressed in terms of 1802-3 prices, actually fell between 1802-3 and 1812-13, from 16s. 2d to 13s. 9d. It subsequently peaked at 19s. 8d in 1820-1, but fell back slightly to 19s. 5d in 1828-9. John Howlett, an eighteenth century political arithmetician, estimated that on

⁵⁴ Revd. D.Davies, *Husbandry*, 115

⁵⁵ Using a wheat price deflator derived from B.R.Mitchell & P.Deane, *Abstract*, 756

⁵⁶ M.Blaug, *Re-examined*, 236, Table 1

average each adult needed a Quarter of wheat per annum to survive.⁵⁷ If per capita relief expenditure is converted into the amount of wheat-equivalent it could purchase, it is possible to show that even at its peak in the early 1820s, poor relief expenditure in England and Wales was equivalent to the consumption of 17% of the population. Although absolute relief expenditure increased nearly ten-fold between the mid-eighteenth century and the early 1820s, real per capita relief only doubled. In Oxfordshire, the real burden of relief was greater, rising to a level equivalent to the grain consumption of 29% of the county's population in the early 1820s.

The Old Poor Law: an exaggerated burden?

These arguments about the cost of poor relief are apparently very simple. An examination of official expenditure statistics suggests that the progressive upward spiral was to an extent a statistical chimera. Nationally, the level of poor relief expenditure in the early 1830s (approximately £7m per annum) was around £1m lower than the peak in 1817-18. If population increase and the changing level of prices are also taken into account, this conclusion is reinforced. Similarly, poor relief expenditure in Oxfordshire also shows a pattern characterised by booms and slumps, following the price of wheat, rather than any specific upward or downward direction. The progressive upward spiral to which the Assistant Commissioners referred does not seem to have existed when food price inflation and population growth are taken into account.

However, the effects of the Old Poor Law cannot be measured in terms of changes in expenditure alone. The arguments contained in the reports of Hall, Gilson and Okeden were not solely concerned with the trend of poor relief expenditure. Like the

⁵⁷ J.Howlett, *Insufficiency*

1834 Poor Law Report, they also focused upon a kind of shadow expenditure. Thus, the Report concluded, 'a great part of the expense is incurred, not by direct payments out of the rates, but by the purchase of unprofitable labour.'⁵⁸ The introduction of the notion of shadow expenditure rules out the possibility of simply testing the effects of the Poor Laws by referring to official expenditure statistics. The arguments contained in the 1834 Poor Law Report about the effects of poor relief on the labouring population were much more complicated than a simple consideration of total expenditure can accommodate.

While it might in principle perhaps be possible to measure the effect of the provision of outdoor relief on the skill, diligence, honesty and therefore productivity of able-bodied labourers, it is impossible to measure its effects on certain other aspects of their lives. Critics of the Poor Law maintained that it served to undermine domestic economy resulting in dirty and unsavoury homes, and undermined the mutual dependence between the working adult, his children and his own aged parents.

At the same time, increased poor relief expenditure, deflated for population growth and changing price levels, does not on its own clearly indicate an increase in poverty. It is impossible to draw any firm conclusions from such calculations about the general state of the poor or the role of the Poor Laws in rural society. It is possible, for instance, that the standard of living of the poor increased even though poor rates were spiralling upwards. The increase in expenditure may have been because those responsible for the administration of the system had adopted a more sympathetic attitude towards the poor, or, simply, that the ratepayers, for whatever reason, were able to bear a higher burden of poor rates. An increase in expenditure might also have

⁵⁸ S.G. & E.O.A. Checkland (eds.), *Report*, 128

been caused by an increase in the number of recipients rather than a change in the size of individual allowances.

The function of the Poor Laws would differ, for instance, between a parish in which there was a low number of poor who turned to the parish quite often, and a parish in which there was a high number of occasionally relieved poor. A lower level of expenditure might also reflect the absence of rateable income in a parish, or the availability of alternative sources of support, like private charitable donations, rather than an absence of poverty. Robert Phillimore J.P. illustrated this situation with the example of Cookham in Berkshire. This parish had been used by the Poor Law reformers in 1834 to illustrate the beneficial effects of denying the payment of outdoor relief to able-bodied labourers.⁵⁹ Phillimore's brother, Sir John, lived in this parish and informed him that the relatively low poor relief burden owed much to a number of charitable bequests to the poor of the parish. Upwards of £200 was given away annually which 'helped to disguise the real problem of poverty.'⁶⁰ Poor relief expenditure statistics therefore yield a poor impression of the extent of poverty when divorced from figures concerning the numbers on relief, the types of relief paid and evidence of other sources of support for the poor.

The Abstract of Returns for 1802-3

Although the 1802-3 returns are the most important official source of information on pre-1834 relief practices, they have been relatively neglected in recent debate on the Poor Laws.⁶¹ They include parish replies to eight questions concerning expenditure and eight questions about the numbers relieved in the parochial financial year 20 April

⁵⁹ S.G. & E.O.A. Checkland (eds.), *Report*, 337

⁶⁰ PRO MH12/9753, Robert Phillimore to Commissioners, 12 October 1834

1802 to 12 April 1803, and are particularly valuable because of the very high response rate. Replies were returned for every parish and other enumeration place in Oxfordshire.⁶²

They also provide an insight into parish relief practice which cannot be derived from expenditure totals alone. In particular, it is possible to determine the relative importance of aged and infirm paupers.⁶³ It is also possible, by subtracting this figure from the total number of paupers, to calculate the number of able-bodied men, women and children amongst the pauper host. For the first and only time before 1834, it gives an approximate measure of the involvement of the Poor Laws in assisting able-bodied male labourers and their dependents.

In the financial year ending 12 April 1803, 21,985 parishioners received poor relief in Oxfordshire,⁶⁴ 19.4% of the county's population enumerated in the 1801 census.⁶⁵ Of these, 1,243 were relieved permanently within the confines of a Workhouse or House of Industry, leaving the vast majority in receipt of outdoor relief.⁶⁶ In England and Wales as a whole, 1,040,000 paupers were relieved during the financial year 1802-3, 11.4% of the enumerated population,⁶⁷ 92% outdoors, compared to 94.4% in Oxfordshire.⁶⁸

Outside the workhouse, 14,594 adults and children were relieved on a permanent basis in Oxfordshire, 66% of the total number of recipients (compared to 63% in England and Wales as a whole). A further 6,148 parishioners were relieved

⁶¹ PP 1803-4 (XIII)

⁶² In England and Wales as a whole, 14,611 parishes out of a total of 15,550 made returns.

⁶³ Question 13 asks, 'What was the total number of persons relieved, who were above 60 years of age, or disabled from labour by permanent illness, or other infirmity?', *ibid.*

⁶⁴ *ibid.*

⁶⁵ PP 1801 (II)

⁶⁶ PP 1803-4 (XIII)

⁶⁷ PP 1801 (II); *ibid.*

⁶⁸ *ibid.*

occasionally, 28% of the total number of recipients (34%). This suggests that nearly one-third of the pauper population received relief discontinuously. However, parishes may have returned either an average load figure or a total of all paupers relieved. In the last case, they may or may not have made allowances for double-counting of individuals who obtained occasional relief more than once during the year, in which case, the total returned could be many times as large as the average load figure. It is impossible to establish directly what kinds of totals were returned, but the evidence of the returns themselves suggests that the question was understood in one sense and that most of the returns gave totals of one kind which are comparable with each other. The relationship between the numbers occasionally relieved and the total number of paupers is remarkably consistent on a county-by-county basis.⁶⁹

The vast majority of those in receipt of relief were classified as able-bodied. In Oxfordshire, 2,912 persons were classified as non-able-bodied in receipt of poor relief during the financial year 1802-3.⁷⁰ A further 19,023 adults and their children, 86.8% of the pauper total, were classified as able-bodied.⁷¹ If one assumes, like Karel Williams, that around one-third of these were young widows or temporarily sick men with dependents, this leaves around 12,500 able-bodied men and their dependents.⁷²

If one makes the further assumption that the average family in receipt of relief included a man, wife and four children, this means that around 2,100 adult males obtained relief because they were either unemployed, underemployed or were in full-

⁶⁹ A notable exception in Oxfordshire is the parish of Pyrton, where the number returned as 'occasionally relieved' actually exceeds the parish population enumerated in the 1801 census. However, as will be demonstrated in Chapter 6, Pyrton's poor relief burden was exceptionally high, with over 75% of the parish population receiving permanent relief in certain years. In addition, according to the *Rural Queries* section of the 1834 Poor Law Report, some of Pyrton's poor lived in the neighbouring parish of Watlington and were therefore included in its census returns rather than those of Pyrton, suggesting that the number of parishioners was actually higher than the census population of the parish, PP 1834 (XXX), Evidence of Thomas Wiggins.

⁷⁰ PP 1803-4 (XIII)

⁷¹ *ibid.*

time employment at low wages. If the age-structure in 1802-3 was similar to that provided by the 1821 census, males aged between 20 and 50 years constituted 17.8% of the total population of Oxfordshire.⁷³ Thus, the Poor Law must have assisted around 11% of the male population of Oxfordshire aged 20-50 years in 1802-3, compared to 6.5% in England and Wales as a whole.

Emphasis tends to be placed upon the able-bodied in studies of the Old Poor Law, but nationally, 167,000 individuals were classified as aged or infirm.⁷⁴ Although a relatively small proportion of the total number of recipients, it was still important in absolute terms. In Oxfordshire, 8.3% of the population was aged 60 years or over in 1821.⁷⁵ If one makes the same assumption as before that the age-structure in 1802-3 was similar to 1821, this yields a figure of 9,098 persons aged 60 years or above at the earlier date. Unfortunately it is not possible to distinguish between those included in this category and those who were less than 60 years old but were classified as infirm. However, it does show that the provision of relief to the aged was selective because even if one could safely assume that all those returned in this category were aged, this would only constitute 32% of the total population aged over 60 years.⁷⁶

These figures show that dependence on poor relief was the lot for a small minority of the population in 1802-3. It must be acknowledged, however, that there was not a fixed relationship between the amount spent on paupers and their numbers in a given period and district. The rough calculations of per capita sums spent at a national, county or even parish level might conceal great variations in the numbers actually

⁷² K. Williams, *Pauperism*, 41

⁷³ *ibid.*, 42; PP 1801 (II), PP 1822 (XV)

If this age-structure is assumed to hold strong for Oxfordshire, it gives a total of 19,500 males aged between 20 and 50 years in 1801.

⁷⁴ PP 1803-4 (XIII)

⁷⁵ PP 1822 (XV)

relieved. The composition of the pauper host may have changed from time to time and varied from place to place.

The Abstract of Returns for 1812-13 to 1814-15

The number of permanently relieved adult outpoor increased from 6,539 in 1802-3 (6.2% of the county's population in 1801) to 7,792 in 1812-13 (7.0% of the county's population in 1811).⁷⁷ In the same period, the number of persons relieved occasionally increased from 6,148 (5.6%) to 7,215 (6.5%).⁷⁸

The 1812-13 totals are not, however, directly comparable with the 1802-3 returns because they include payments made to both parishioners and non-parishioners. The 1802-3 returns excluded payments to non-parishioners from these totals. A separate return was made in 1802-3 which shows that 2,800 non-parishioners were relieved, equivalent to 7.9% of the total number of parishioners relieved.⁷⁹ Assuming, however, that the proportion of non-parishioners in the later returns did not change markedly from 1802-3, it is possible to conclude that outdoor relief payments continued to dominate poor relief practice in rural Oxfordshire between 1812-13 and 1814-15.

In the financial year 1812-13, 851 adults were permanently relieved in workhouses. This figure includes non-parishioners but does not include children whose parents were permanently relieved.⁸⁰ It is therefore not comparable with the 1802-3 returns which excluded non-parishioners, but included children. However, it does suggest the extent to which outdoor relief payments continued to dominate relief practices in 1812-13, assuming that thousands of children were not relieved in workhouses at this

⁷⁶ This proportion may have been larger because the Returns do not state whether they included the spouses of the aged and infirm poor who were married.

⁷⁷ PP 1803-4 (XIII); PP 1818 (XIX)

⁷⁸ *ibid.*

⁷⁹ PP 1803-4 (XIII)

later date. Bearing in mind that workhouses were only recorded in 31 out of 280 returns, this assumption seems quite safe.⁸¹

Types of relief

While an examination of the 1802-3 returns suggests that the majority of relief payments were made outdoors to able-bodied adults and their dependents, this tells us very little about the nature of these payments. Before the 1834 Poor Law Report there are only occasional comments attached to the returns of expenditure and numbers in receipt concerning the precise nature of the system adopted in particular parishes.

Abstract of Returns: 1802-3

Although the aim of 43 Eliz., c.2 was 'to set on work ...all such persons, married or unmarried, who have no means to maintain themselves, and use no ordinary and daily trade of life to get their living by', in the financial year ending 12 April 1803, total expenditure in Oxfordshire on the purchase of materials for the employment of the poor was a mere £1,397.2.6, or 1.5% of total relief expenditure.⁸²

Expenditure on purchasing materials for the employment of the poor in Workhouses or Houses of Industry was £837.16.0.⁸³ The total income received from the sale of the products of this work was £1270.15.8.⁸⁴ At Banbury, a centre of plush weaving, the workhouse poor were 'chiefly employed in spinning.'⁸⁵ The £52.7.8 which was raised by the sale of the product of this work was put towards their

⁸⁰ PP 1818 (XIX)

⁸¹ *ibid.*

⁸² PP 1803-4 (XIII)

⁸³ *ibid.*

⁸⁴ *ibid.*

⁸⁵ *ibid.*

maintenance.⁸⁶

The vast majority of applicants were relieved in their own homes and yet even here very little was spent on purchasing materials for the employment of the poor: only £559.6.0 in Oxfordshire as a whole.⁸⁷ The sale of the products of this industry, which raised £1221.4.0, was put towards the maintenance of the poor.⁸⁸ At Filkins, near the woollen-cloth manufacturing town of Witney, £48.7.5 'was expended in Flax, of which thread was made, the value of the thread was £72.11.3, which thread was divided into lbs. and distributed to the parishioners in proportion to the amount of rates which they paid.'⁸⁹ In this instance, the ratepayers benefited financially because income exceeded costs by £24.3.9, though whether the ratepayers needed the thread, or would rather have kept the money is another matter !

Thus, relatively little effort seems to have been made to provide for the poor in this fashion although there are notable successful exceptions in particular parishes. Dorothy Marshall maintained that such employment was doomed to failure because when trade was good an average workman had no difficulty in obtaining work,⁹⁰ while when trade was bad such parish labour provided goods for which there was no market. She also added that the inmates of workhouses tended to be either aged or impotent (which is borne out in my earlier calculations), that it was often cheaper to provide allowances without finding employment, and that the unpaid overseers had neither the skill nor the enthusiasm to make these schemes work.⁹¹

⁸⁶ The total amount raised by the poor rate was £2019.2.6. Total expenditure on the relief of the poor amounted to £1336.7.1, *ibid.*

⁸⁷ *ibid.*

⁸⁸ *ibid.*

⁸⁹ *ibid.*

⁹⁰ D.Marshall, *Eighteenth*, 127

⁹¹ *ibid.*, 127

The low level of expenditure on such activities may also in part reflect the lack of rural domestic industry in many parts of the county and therefore a deficiency in the necessary skills and aptitudes. Certainly attempts were made by some parishes to instil practical skills into the children of the poor so that they might learn a trade and remain independent of the parish in their adulthood. At Chinnor, 41 pauper children attended a 'school of industry' where they were taught lace-making and sewing.⁹² In total, 275 pauper children were recorded as attending these schools in 1802-3, constituting just 3.76% of the total number of children of the adult outpoor recorded in the parish returns.⁹³ These efforts were concentrated on the Chilterns and around Wychwood Forest, both traditional regions of rural domestic industry.

Another likely explanation for the low level of expenditure on purchasing materials for the employment of the poor was that the majority of labourers possessed farming rather than industrial skills and that this or labouring was the work provided for them when it was not available through private hire. Applicants regarded by the overseers as sufficiently able-bodied to complete a day's work were allocated farm work or other labouring according to a number of different systems.

Notes appended to the 1802-3 returns suggest that the three townships which made up the parish of Deddington each operated their own system of labour allocation.⁹⁴ At Deddington itself, £915.6.5 was spent on maintaining the poor out of the workhouse.⁹⁵ The overseer of the parish added that 'of this sum, a considerable part was paid to labourers, who have not constant places, and go to work at stone pits, hedging, banking or other such field work as the overseer thinks proper to put them to.'⁹⁶ At

⁹² PP 1803-4 (XIII)

⁹³ *ibid.*

⁹⁴ *ibid.*

⁹⁵ *ibid.*

⁹⁶ *ibid.*

Clifton, the overseer sent the able-bodied applicants to work for the local farmers but paid them out of the rates. The overseer at Hempton maintained that in his township 'the overseer does provide Materials for such of the paupers as have not constant work, but they are sent to work for the Farmers and others, 'on the Rounds', in proportion to their farms, and paid by the Overseer.'⁹⁷ Only at Hempton were labourers allocated amongst farmers according to any strict rule.

The decline in employment opportunities in agriculture, particularly in arable farming, during the winter months is often stressed as one explanation for the increase in the labour surplus and rise in poor relief expenditure during that part of the year. However, a note added to the tabulations of relief expenditure by the overseer at Cornwell, a parish in Chadlington Hundred, identified another influence. He maintained that:

'As the Rate in the Pound of this Parish may appear low in comparison with that of other Parishes, it may not be improper to add, that we always made a Point of giving our Labourers good Wages, and they are thereby enabled to support their Families comfortably, and seldom apply to the Parish for Relief, except in very particular cases. They are all, without exception, in agriculture.'⁹⁸

The overseer at Cornwell high-lighted that the poor rate in his parish was only 2s. 7d in the £, compared to the county average of 4s. 8d.⁹⁹

The payment of low wages by farmers, insufficient for the subsistence of a labourer and his family, could contribute greatly to the relief burden. In parishes where there were other ratepayers besides labour-employing farmers, and where these farmers dominated the vestry meetings where poor relief policy and practice was discussed and formulated, it was cheaper to recruit labourers who were supported entirely or at

⁹⁷ *ibid.*

⁹⁸ *ibid.*

⁹⁹ *ibid.*

least partly by poor relief for large parts of the year than to provide them with year-round employment at sufficient wages to support themselves and their families.

Abstract of Returns: 1824

The 1824 Select Committee on Labourers' Wages sent out a questionnaire which inquired into the administration of the Poor Laws. It contained nine questions, seven of which were concerned with the condition of the labouring poor and the types of relief which they received.¹⁰⁰ The returns contain answers which, if tabulated, make it possible to estimate the extent of different kinds of relief to the able-bodied.¹⁰¹ Notably, it is possible to determine the extent to which two kinds of relief were paid to different classes of able-bodied: child allowances to the low paid and payments to the unemployed.

All the districts in Oxfordshire admitted to the payment of child allowances in 1824, while 70% replied that pensions were paid to the unemployed.¹⁰² Child allowances typically began with the third child. In addition, Question 4 asked, 'Is it usual for the overseer of the poor to send round to the farmers, labourers who can not find work, to be paid partly by the employer, and partly out of the poor rate?'¹⁰³ The roundsman system was recorded in 80% of the returns.¹⁰⁴ In Bampton Hundred, the roundsman system was recorded even though its return denied that wages were subsidised out of the rates. The Borough of Banbury returned that it practised neither the roundsman system nor the payment of wages out of the rates.

¹⁰⁰ In Oxfordshire, ten sets of returns were made which cover all the Hundreds in the county.

¹⁰¹ PP 1825 (XIX)

¹⁰² *ibid.*

¹⁰³ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ *ibid.*

The 1834 Poor Law Report

Some respondents to the *Rural Queries* section of the 1834 Poor Law Report did not reply to every question, while some of the questions, which were often poorly framed, gave the respondents license to answer as they pleased.¹⁰⁵ Replies were often ambiguous and irrelevant. Different parishes gave information on different aspects of administration in reply to the same question. Answers to different questions could also be contradictory. William F. Lowndes, who completed the return for the parish of Brightwell Baldwin, suggested, in answer to the question on the existence of roundsmen, that this mode of relief had never been adopted in his parish. In a later reply he claimed that the labourers in his parish 'have been spoilt by the system of going as Roundsmen.'¹⁰⁶

Despite these problems, the replies to the *Rural Queries* do contain a great deal of information on the types of relief practised in Oxfordshire during the final days of the Old Poor Law. Although the questions asked by the Royal Commissioners were very wide ranging, they tended to focus on certain related themes. Three themes in particular stand out: the types of outdoor relief payments made to able-bodied labourers; the effects of the system of outdoor relief on the character and condition of the labourers and the fortunes of agriculture, and attempts to reform the system prior to the Poor Law Amendment Act.

Although the answers to Questions 24 and 25 suggest that some form of allowance was paid to able-bodied labourers and their dependents in every Oxfordshire parish and hundred from which replies were received, when they are examined in more

¹⁰⁵ PP 1834 (XXX-XXXIV)

¹⁰⁶ PP 1834 (XXXI-XXXII), Evidence of William F. Lowndes

detail, significant variations, both in the types of scale and the level of poor relief afforded under each, are revealed.

The use of bread scales in fixing levels of relief was reported by 11 of the 30 respondents. Figure 2.4 shows that these parishes, with the exception of the town of Banbury, were concentrated on the Chilterns and Clay Vales in the south and centre of the county. It was usually reported that the exact scale was fixed by the magistrates, though not at independently-minded Banbury where it was fixed 'by the opinion of the Select Vestry.'¹⁰⁷ At Goring, the level was specified as being a gallon loaf to each person relieved; at Summertown, the value of a gallon loaf plus 3d; at Headington, as a peck loaf for the father and mother and a quartern loaf each per child weekly; at Ipsden, as 'at present two gallons of bread to the man, one or one and a half to his wife, and one to each child.'¹⁰⁸ Although it was also remarked upon that 'this is a reduced scale',¹⁰⁹ it was still twice the amount of bread provided at nearby Goring! At Waterstock in the Vales region:

'our magistrates profess to have no scale, but to make our allowances according to circumstances. The Overseers, however, understand our usual mode of calculation is the price of [half] a peck loaf of household bread, plus 3d over, for each person, great and small in a family.'¹¹⁰

Presumably everywhere, as at Ducklington, any wages earned in the week were deducted from the value of the parish allowance. Thus, although bread scales were common, the actual scale varied considerably from place to place.

Elsewhere in the county, the value of weekly relief was fixed according to a family allowance scale, with so much money per person, rather than in terms of bread. Given the large proportion of labourers' spending that went on bread, there is no reason why

¹⁰⁷ PP 1834 (XXXI), Evidence of John Davis

¹⁰⁸ *ibid.*, Evidence of John Reade

¹⁰⁹ *ibid.*, Evidence of John Reade

¹¹⁰ *ibid.*, Evidence of W.H.Ashurst

this family allowance scale should differ much from one based on the price of bread alone. The extracts above show that bread scales took family composition into account, and it is striking that the price of 1s. 6d for a loaf at Pyrton, in the Chilterns, was identical with the sum allowed for the third child and above at Hook Norton, at the opposite end of the county in the Cotswolds.

Ten respondents did not report whether all children received allowances. Of the remaining twenty, only seven paid relief to all children irrespective of family size: Deddington paid relief to every child beyond the first; seven parishes paid to all children after the second, and four only to children after the third. At Hook Norton, an intricate scale was adopted where 1s. was paid for the first and second child, then 1s. 6d per boy from 10 to 12 years old, 2s. 6d per boy of 14-16, 3s. per boy of 16-18, 3s. 6d per boy of 18-20, and 4s. per boy above that age. At Duns Tew, also on the Cotswolds, the amount paid per child varied from 1s. 6d for the third to 1s. for the fourth 'and so on.'¹¹¹

It may have been the case that where not all children qualified for allowances the relief paid to a man and wife was meant to be sufficient for the support of a number of children. In the eight parishes which reported levels of relief appropriate for a man, wife and two children, the sums were 8s. or 9s. per week, comprising, where a breakdown was given, 5s. or 6s. per man and wife and 1s. 6d per child. Weekly allowance payments were set at a sum equal to weekly wages, suggesting that where wages were lowest (on the Cotswolds), so, too, were the level of allowances.

In accord with this, in twelve of the replies, recorded weekly wages for married men were considerably higher than those for single men; usually by 20-30%. This was

¹¹¹ *ibid.*, Evidence of William Gordon

inevitable, given that basic weekly wages, like relief entitlements, seem generally to have been set at levels allowing only a bare subsistence. This was explicitly stated at Pyrton, where weekly wages were given as 5s. per man, 6s. per man and wife, 7s. for man, wife and child, and 8-9s. for a family with two children. However, the report for Pyrton also stated that piece-work rates did not vary between married and single men. This is not surprising because such rates were paid for the completion of a specific task rather than hiring labour for a specific period of time; a married labourer, aided by his wife and children, could perform more work than his single counterpart.

However, at Chadlington in the remoter part of the Cotswolds region near Chipping Norton, immediately neighbouring Cornwell mentioned in 1802-3 as a place of high wages and low relief in, it was remarked that high wages meant that such wage differentials and large demands for relief were unnecessary: 'we have no question of that sort arising. A good feeling respecting the labourer prevails, and none ever want work.'¹¹² Whereas weekly wages in adjacent parishes were 9s. per married man, from 16s. to 18s. could be earned on piece rates at Chadlington.

Richard Hall concluded that while 'pauperism assumes no new shape around Chipping Norton ...expenditure per head is not as high in this Union as in other Unions.'¹¹³ He accounted for this by the 'fact that the practice of paying labour from the Book has not obtained so generally in this part of Oxfordshire as elsewhere.'¹¹⁴ In some of the parishes, he continued, 'pauperism has never arrived at this peculiar modification of abuse, in others it has been recently corrected; in most the able-bodied labourer receives assistance, should his family be large, but in very few has the

¹¹² PP 1834 (XXXII), Evidence of Samuel Keyte

¹¹³ PRO MH12/9637, Richard Hall to Commissioners, 24 August 1835

¹¹⁴ *ibid.*

roundsman system which swells the amount of poor rate so enormously in the neighbourhood of Bicester and Thame been prevalent.’¹¹⁵

In Chadlington itself, there were very few labourers on relief in winter. The parish correspondent observed that ‘we have five who receive regular relief during the winter on account of their families of 5,5,4,9 and 6 children, the average wage of the neighbourhood not being sufficient to maintain them’,¹¹⁶ presumably because only day-work rather than piece-work was available in the winter, or because the shorter days meant that even piece-work could not provide sufficient income for such large families. Chadlington’s poor relief burden was consequently very low. Poor relief per head of population in the parish was between 10s. and 15s. in 1802-3, 1821 and 1831. However, in the bad harvest year of 1812-13 it rose to £1.4.7.

At Enstone, nearby in the west of the Cotswold region, wages were acknowledged to be low at 8s. per week, and all who applied for relief were given it to the level of normal weekly wages, with equal allowances for every child beyond the second, irrespective of their number. Here, per capita poor relief was much higher than in Chadlington except in the bad year of 1812-13. When there is little work, the size of wages and relief levels linked to wages would ensure this switch in the direction of difference. However, in 1821 and 1831, per capita relief expenditure at Enstone was more than twice as high as at Chadlington.¹¹⁷

Thus, the payment of higher piece-work rates at Chadlington meant that fewer people, in proportion to the population, needed to depend on relief in normal times. However, despite the higher wages and lower poor relief burden in the parish, the

¹¹⁵ *ibid.*

¹¹⁶ PP 1834 (XXXI), Evidence of Samuel Keyte

¹¹⁷ Per capita poor relief expenditure at Chadlington was 10s. in 1802-3, £1.5.3 in 1812-13, 15s. 5d in 1820-1 and 12s. 10d in 1828-9. At Enstone, the respective figures were 13s. 4d, £1.4.6, £1.3.7 and £1.7.7, PP 1834 (XXX), Evidence of Samuel Keyte, Evidence of William Gardner.

respondent noted that 'deerstealing was, a few years back, much practised ...and poaching is much followed.'¹¹⁸ This, he remarked, was caused by farmers ceasing to have their labourers living in as servants in husbandry.¹¹⁹

The extent to which relief represented *ex gratia* payments, as distinct from remuneration for work which happened to be paid by the overseer rather than the employing farmer, depended upon the system of relief in practice. In low wage parishes where relief was used to fund such practices, high relief expenditure was a spurious index of underemployment and dependence. Relief expenditure was used to subsidise the labour-employing farmers who would otherwise have employed more labourers directly and at higher wages.

In some parishes, attempts had been made to get round this problem by adopting a system of labour allocation in proportion to the rateable value of farms, with farmers paying wages to the labourers allocated to them. It was intended to keep down the poor rates, while rewarding the better sorts of labourers with higher wages and therefore reducing the shadow expenditure. It was recorded at Chinnor and Duns Tew, while at Enstone half the wages of allocated men were paid out of the rates. All, however, were parishes with conspicuously high per capita relief expenditures. Six other parishes reported that they used the system, but did not stipulate who paid the labourers. In four parishes, one of which also operated the labour allocation system, the overseers provided work for labourers otherwise without a job. Sometimes it was on the highways, sometimes in ditching, trenching and stone clearing, all of which would have been of some value to the farming community. Figure 2.5 shows the parishes in which these practices were recorded.

¹¹⁸ PP 1834 (XXXIV), Evidence of Samuel Keyte

¹¹⁹ *ibid.*

Richard Hall concluded that 'in many parishes, especially in Oxfordshire, I have seen the roundsman and ticket systems adopted as the best means of conveying to the pauper that amount of income which the parish is determined to be his due.'¹²⁰ However, those parishes in which the roundsman system was operated, shown in Figure 2.6, trace quite a clear pattern across the Cotswolds and along the Chiltern scarp. The parishes which definitely did not use the system were strung out along the Central Vale and along the foot of the Chiltern dip slope, adjacent to the Thames in the south.

Okeden described the operation of the roundsman system in the Redlands parish of Bodicott:

'At the parish of Bodicott ...a printed form is delivered to those who apply for work. The labourer takes this to the farmers in succession, who, if they do not want his labour, sign their names. The man, on his return, receives from the overseer the day's pay of an industrious labourer, with the deduction of two-pence. The same system takes place in other parishes. In the parish of Sidford Gore [Sibford Gower] in the same district, where the poor rates are under 650£ per annum, 114£ was paid last year in six months to men who did not strike one stroke of work for it.'¹²¹

At Enstone,

'several labourers apportioned to farmers are constant, and others are sent round by the yardland. They have a ticket when the time is expired; they receive 2s. to 2s. 6d from the master and the rest from the parish ...All that apply to the Vestry for employment have half their money, or more, out of the poor rates.'¹²²

Fewer details are given in the reports of Chilterns parishes. Chinnor and Pyrton employed both the roundsman and labour allocation systems, whilst at Watlington those labourers who could not be allocated were given parish work.

¹²⁰ PRO MH32/34, Richard Hall to Commissioners, 10 July 1835

¹²¹ PP 1834 (XXVIII), 2

¹²² *ibid.*, 2

The system of outdoor relief: comments

All this leads us to conclude that the improved commercial arable farming regions of the county did present the system in its most extreme form. However, it is very difficult to perceive patterns through the glow of local variations presented in the parish reports. For instance, the roundsman system was employed in the pastoral Redlands as well as in the arable Cotswolds and Chilterns, and it is possible to find contradictory examples in terms of each variable examined at the parish level. However, dimly discernible patterns do emerge from beneath this variegated mass of details on systems of relief. Attention will now be turned to see whether these patterns were reflected in variations in levels of poor relief expenditure.

The regional geography of poor relief expenditure

In order to establish comparability it is necessary to express poor relief expenditure and bread prices as index numbers, with 1802-3 being set as the base level (100). Unless otherwise stated, the bread price refers to the price of a half-peck loaf of standard wheaten bread at Oxford, recorded weekly in *Jackson's Oxford Journal*. Figure 2.7 shows that its average annual price closely followed fluctuations in the national wheat price while Figure 2.8, which shows the price of a half-peck loaf in various parts of Oxfordshire, also exhibits similar trends. This suggests that Oxfordshire was integrated into a national grain market by the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

The level of poor relief expenditure more than doubled in all four regions between 1775-6 and 1802-3. The rise was especially marked on the Limestone and Clay Vales, where expenditure in 1775-6 was only 25% of its level in 1802-3. However, the subsequent increase was less rapid in these two regions. Expenditure on the Clay

Vales peaked at 148 in 1812-13, then again at 169 in 1817-18, before falling to 36% above its 1802-3 level in 1828-9. On both the Redlands and the Chilterns relief expenditure was nearly double its 1802-3 level in 1817-18. Relief payments on the Chilterns peaked at 187 in 1812-13, then again at 182 in 1817-18, before falling to 38% above its 1802-3 level in 1828-9.

Thus, although the general trends of poor relief expenditure were similar, there were some significant differences. Before 1802-3, expenditure increased much more markedly on the Cotswolds and the Clay Vales than elsewhere. However, subsequently, the most marked increases were recorded on the Redlands and Chilterns. Figure 2.9 shows that these differences became much less marked after 1812-13, with poor relief expenditure in all four regions, as well as the county as a whole, following the surges and slumps in the bread price.

The relationship between population size and poor relief expenditure can be examined by calculating the amounts of poor relief spent per head of population enumerated in the nearest census. These totals are given for each of the four regions in Table 2.2.

Table 2.2. Regional poor relief expenditure per capita

Region	1802-3	1812-13	1820-1	1828-9
Clay	17s. 10d	24s. 7d	20s. 0d	17s. 10d
Redlands	18s. 3d	26s. 8d	20s. 1d	17s. 8d
Limestone	16s. 3d	23s. 0d	20s. 0d	15s. 10d
Chilterns	19s. 5d	33s. 0d	24s. 4d	19s. 6d

Sources: PP 1803-4 (XIII); PP 1818 (XIX); PP 1825-6 (XX); PP 1830 (XXXI); PP1801 (II); PP 1812 (XI); PP 1822 (XV); PP 1831 (XVIII)

It is evident from this information that not only did relief rise fastest in the Chilterns, but it was also at the highest levels per head of population there. There was a contrast between the high rates of spending in the Chilterns and the relatively low ones of the Vales and Cotswolds. The size of the differences varied through time, generally getting less marked.

Thus, an examination of regional trends in poor relief expenditure reveals marked variations in fortunes. Also concealed by county level statistics, though only partly masking the regional patterns, is a great variability between hundreds. Figure 2.10 shows similar statistics for the hundreds of Banbury, Chadlington, Pyrton and Ploughley between 1812-13 and 1828-9. These show considerably more variability amongst themselves and divergence from the trend for the county as a whole than the figures for the regions. Tables 2.3 and 2.4 show that poor relief expenditure increased in all the hundreds as well as the county as a whole between 1775-6 and 1828-9.

Table 2.3. Poor relief expenditure in £s by hundred, 1775-6 to 1828-9

Hundred	1775-6	1783-5	1802-3	1812-13	1820-1	1828-9
Bampton	2,281	2,870	10,248	14,165	13,299	11,252
Banbury	1,777	2,634	7,067	12,050	12,765	10,598
Binfield	2,551	3,214	3,409	9,602	7,220	6,473
Bloxham	1,801	2,091	5,799	9,239	8,035	7,106
Bullington	2,081	2,550	5,652	9,187	7,892	8,862
Chadlington	2,566	3,231	9,707	14,781	15,276	11,914
Dorchester	764	869	2,287	4,371	2,921	3,027
Ewelme	1,717	1,943	4,576	8,637	7,443	7,407
Langtree	1,240	1,764	4,313	7,181	4,925	4,449
Lewknor	1,375	1,591	3,804	5,557	5,537	5,746
Pyrton	1,243	1,454	2,976	3,789	3,371	3,748
Ploughley	2,303	3,152	7,117	13,299	12,544	12,226
Thame	1,019	1,425	5,345	5,432	5,171	5,358
Wootton	2,689	3,882	11,554	17,892	15,338	14,468
Total	24,817	32,672	83,656	135,182	121,667	112,634

Sources: Abstract of Returns, 1775; Abstract of Returns, 1787; PP 1803-4 (XIII); PP 1818 (XIX); PP 1826-7 (XX); PP 1830 (XXXI)

Table 2.4. Index of poor relief expenditure by hundred, 1775-6 to 1828-9¹²³

Hundred	1775-6	1783-5	1802-3	1812-13	1820-1	1828-9
Bampton	22	28	100	138	130	110
Banbury	25	37	100	171	181	150
Binfield	80	100	100	300	225	202
Bloxham	32	36	100	159	136	123
Bullingdon	37	45	100	163	140	157
Chadlington	26	33	100	152	157	123
Dorchester	30	38	100	191	128	132
Ewelme	37	42	100	189	163	162
Langtree	29	41	100	166	114	103
Lewknor	36	42	100	146	146	152
Pyrton	42	49	100	127	113	126
Ploughley	33	44	100	187	176	172
Thame	20	27	100	102	97	100
Wootton	19	34	100	155	133	125
Total	30	36	100	163	146	134

Sources: See Table 2.3

The most marked increase was in Wootton Hundred where expenditure in 1775-6 had been only 19% of its level in 1802-3. The subsequent rise was less rapid in Wootton, peaking at 155 in 1812-13, then again at 160 in 1817-18 before falling back to 33% above its 1802-3 level by 1821. In both Bullingdon and Ewelme Hundreds, on the Vales and in the Chiltern Chalklands, relief payments were almost double their 1802-3 level by the time of the twin peaks of 1812-13 and 1817-18, and the second of these was more marked than the first, especially in pastoral Bullingdon. However, whereas relief payments subsided to 40% above their 1802-3 level by 1821 in Bullingdon, they were still 63% higher in Ewelme. The second highest rise to 1802-3 was in Thame, where it was flattest afterwards while the smallest increase to 1802-3 was in Binfield Hundred, where it was greatest afterwards.

Poor relief expenditure in most of the hundreds followed the peaks and troughs evident in the figures for the four regions and the county as a whole, peaking in 1812-13 and 1817-18, before subsiding after 1822-3. However, in Chadlington, Ewelme, Lewknor, Pyrton and Ploughley Hundreds, the peak expenditure was recorded in

¹²³ Poor relief expenditure in 1802-3 is set as the base level (100).

1818-19, while it was recorded in 1819-20 in Thame Hundred. The greatest relative increase was in Binfield Hundred where expenditure increased three-fold between 1802-3 and its peak in 1817-18, before falling to 150 by 1824-5. Relative relief expenditure in most hundreds varied between 100-120 during the mid-to-late 1820s and 150-200 during the peak of 1817-18.

This analysis demonstrates that although the general trends of poor relief expenditure were shared, there was some significant divergence in different hundreds. What seems to have been happening is a staggered timing of increase, where the highest expenditures pre-1802/3, were the highest afterwards, and vice versa. A consideration of the relationship between population size and poor relief expenditure will shed further light onto these variations.

Per capita poor relief expenditure by hundred

Figure 2.11 (a) indicates that in 1802-3 there was a marked contrast between the high spending hundreds south and east of a line stretching from Thame to Langtree and the low ones north and west of that line. Expenditure per head varied between 27s. 3d in Langtree to only 14s. 5d in Ploughley: that is, by nearly 100%.

By 1812-13 the burden of poor relief had increased throughout the county. Average per capita relief in Oxfordshire as a whole rose from 16s. 2d in 1802-3 to 24s. 10d in 1812-13. As in 1802-3, the highest level of expenditure per head was recorded in Langtree (48s. 5d) and the lowest in Bullingdon (21s. 3d). Bullingdon Hundred, like Ploughley Hundred which recorded the lowest per capita expenditure in 1802-3, is situated principally on the Clay Vales. Figure 2.11 (b) also demonstrates that the contrast between the high spending hundreds in the south-eastern corner of the county and the low spending ones in the north, centre and west was maintained. However, the

difference had increased, and the line dividing these two regions had shifted north and west-wards in 1812-13. Dorchester and Ewelme were now included in the region of high relative relief expenditure (30s. to 40s. per head).

The pattern had become more complicated by 1820-1. Figure 2.11 (c) indicates that while levels of poor relief per capita had fallen quite considerably throughout the county and the contrast between the existing areas of high and low expenditure was to a great extent maintained, there was a shift in the geography of the relief burden. The traditionally low spending regions to the north and west had become divided into two with relatively high expenditure in the hundreds of Banbury, Chadlington and Bampton to the north and west, and relatively low expenditure in the central and eastern hundreds of Bloxham, Bullingdon, Ploughley and Wootton. However, Figure 2.11 (d) shows that by 1828-9 the distinction had disappeared and the region of relatively high expenditure, though at a much lower level than in 1812-13, was now confined again to the hundreds in the south-eastern corner.

Throughout the first three decades of the nineteenth century poor relief expenditure per capita was continually higher in the hundreds strung along the Chiltern escarpment. It was not simply that expenditure per head was highest there, but that relief also rose fastest in these hundreds during years of high prices. Although relief per head of population fell dramatically after the peak in 1812-13 it was still considerably higher than in the other hundreds. Thus, although expenditure per head of population varied widely from hundred to hundred and changed markedly through time, there was a consistent contrast between high rates of spending in the Chilterns and the low ones of the Vales and Limestone regions. The data from Banbury Hundred, which covered much of the Redlands region, suggests that it lay somewhere in between the two; not only did per capita relief expenditure rise to a relatively high

level during the scarcity of 1812-13 in Banbury Hundred, but also the average level of expenditure throughout the period was above that of the hundreds covering the Cotswolds and Clay Vales regions. This is illustrated in Table 2.5.

Table 2.5. Per capita poor relief expenditure by hundred, 1802-3 to 1828-9

HUNDRED	1802-3	1812-13	1820-1	1828-9	Average
Bampton	17s. 0d	23s. 0d	20s. 1d	15s. 3d	18s. 10d
Banbury	17s. 8d	27s. 10d	26s. 0d	18s. 6d	22s. 6d
Binfield	10s. 2d	27s. 3d	18s. 2d	15s. 0d	17s. 5d
Bloxham	18s. 5d	26s. 5d	19s. 5d	16s. 5d	20s. 3d
Bullington	15s. 3d	21s. 3d	14s. 10d	13s. 10d	16s. 3d
Chadlington	16s. 3d	23s. 5d	21s. 8d	16s. 0d	19s. 4d
Dorchester	17s. 3d	31s. 5d	19s. 0d	18s. 7d	21s. 7d
Ewelme	19s. 5d	35s. 3d	26s. 10d	23s. 10d	26s. 5d
Langtree	27s. 3d	48s. 5d	26s. 5d	20s. 2d	31s. 0d
Lewknor	20s. 2d	33s. 5d	24s. 0d	22s. 7d	25s. 0d
Pyrton	23s. 3d	35s. 0d	23s. 3d	22s. 8d	26s. 0d
Ploughley	14s. 5d	24s. 0d	19s. 0d	17s. 5d	18s. 8d
Thame	14s. 5d	27s. 8d	24s. 10d	22s. 7d	26s. 4d
Wootton	17s. 10d	25s. 8d	18s. 5d	16s. 4d	19s. 7d
Oxfordshire	17s. 5d	26s. 8d	20s. 10d	17s. 4d	20s. 4d

Sources: PP 1803-4 (XIII); PP 1818 (XIX); PP 1825-6 (XX); PP 1830 (XXXI)

Table 2.6. Proportion of population returned as paupers in 1802-3

1802-3 ¹²⁴	Lias	Clay	Limestone	Chilterns
1	6.4%	6.6%	6.2%	7.4%
2	0.96%	1.2%	0.86%	1.0%
3	8.1%	8.0%	8.2%	8.8%
4	5.9%	5.9%	4.1%	9.9%
5	21.4%	21.9%	19.4%	27.1%

Source: PP 1803-4 (XIII)

Information on the numbers of poor contained in 1802-3 *Abstract of Returns*, shown in Table 2.6, also indicate quite clear contrasts between the four regions. The Chilterns region had the highest proportion of its population on relief. In 1802-3 over one-quarter of its population received poor relief sometime during the year. Although

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1. Permanent adult (outpoor) 2. Permanent adult and children (inpoor)
3. Children of permanent adult outpoor 4. Occasional poor
5. Total

the information available on the numbers of the poor is not sufficient to calculate a similar statistic for 1812-13, Table 2.7 shows that the proportion of the population of the Chilterns region covered by the categories of recipient used in that year was markedly higher than in the other regions.

Table 2.7. Proportion of population returned as paupers in 1812-13

1812-13 ¹²⁵	Lias	Clay	Limestone	Chilterns
1	7.6%	6.4%	7.0%	8.0%
2	0.64%	0.69%	0.61%	0.40%
3	6.1%	4.4%	4.0%	9.0%
4	14.3%	11.5%	11.6%	17.4%

Source: PP 1818 (XIX)

While the proportions of the population who were paupers when calculated by region varied from 19.4% on the Limestone to 27.1% on the Chilterns in 1802-3, geographical variations in these proportions are much more marked when calculated at the level of the individual hundreds. The proportion of the population on relief in 1802-3 varied from 14.9% in Bloxham Hundred to 33.3% in Langtree on the Chilterns. Langtree also had the highest proportion of its population dependent upon poor relief (27.6%) in 1812-13, while Bullingdon had the lowest (8.7%). There was an even more marked distinction between the high proportions found in the hundreds strung out along the Chilterns in 1812-13 and the low proportions found in the hundreds across the centre of the county than in 1802-3. In the normal conditions of 1802-3, the difference between the highest and lowest proportions was 2.2 times, but this increased to 3.2 times during the high price year of 1812-13.

¹²⁵

1. Permanent adult (outpoor)	2. Permanent adult (inpoor)
3. Occasional poor	4. Total

Only 16 of the 27 parishes covered in the 1834 Poor Law Report answered the questions on the numbers of poor housed in workhouses and in receipt of out-relief in the previous week.¹²⁶ The usefulness of the information is also compromised to some extent because it is not clear whether the parishes included persons whom they relieved but lived elsewhere. Only West Shutford mentions such persons, having ‘six or seven families not resident in the parish’ who were in receipt of relief from the overseers.¹²⁷ Three parishes returned the number of families, rather than persons, in receipt of relief.¹²⁸

However, the regional averages given in Table 2.8 show patterns consistent with what would be expected from other evidence. The samples are very small, but it does seem clear that the Chiltern parishes had the highest rates and the Vale parishes the lowest.¹²⁹

Table 2.8. Percentages of the populations of samples of parishes in Oxfordshire regions in receipt of poor relief in 1831

Redlands		Cotswolds		Vales		Chilterns		Average	
No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
1	15.6	6	13.5	3	7.8	6	17.6	16	14.1

Source: PP 1834 (XXXI)

Thus, however unreliable, the information on the numbers of poor does support the conclusions drawn from the expenditure data. The Chilterns region had more paupers than elsewhere in proportion to its population. This did not necessarily mean that the region had more of the same: that conclusion could only be drawn after a detailed

¹²⁶ PP 1834 (XXXI)

¹²⁷ *ibid.*, Evidence of John Anderton

¹²⁸ These figures are multiplied by four to convert them to estimates of total poor, though this sum probably errs on the small side. At Watlington, there were said to be ‘one hundred and eight families, most of them with more than three children’, *ibid.*, Evidence of Thomas Barnes.

¹²⁹ The Redlands percentage should probably be ignored, being dependent on data for only one parish.

examination of the types of relief granted in particular parishes in the different regions of the county.

Conclusion: spatial variations at the parish scale

An examination of the information contained in the parliamentary papers shows some clear regional differences in the level of poor relief expenditure and the chronology of their changes. The principal distinction was between the high spending Chiltern chalkland parishes, associated with improved arable farming, and the rest of the county. The lowest expenditure was on the pastoral Clay Vales. However, variability becomes considerably more marked as the unit of analysis becomes smaller, and when administrative rather than topographical units are used at the regional scale.

At the same time, consideration of poor relief expenditure at the regional or hundred level subsumes the parochial context of the operation of the Poor Laws beneath larger, more convenient, units of analysis. Although unitary magisterial activity or shared economic and social environments might have brought some degree of common poor relief policy, practice and experience to different parishes, it must be remembered that Oxfordshire was made up of 200 or so parish units. While subject to some outside interference and shared economic experience, it was within this context that the supply of poor rates and demand for poor relief came together.

The need to study the operation of the Poor Laws at the parish level is reinforced by the nature of the source materials available. Although the succession of parliamentary reports and returns provide some insight into the level of expenditure and types of relief at the parish level, they only yield certain kinds of information for a few selected years. They provide a series of static views of the Poor Laws which cannot replicate the characteristic fluidity of the system. Given that the critical

Poor relief and the parish: Oxfordshire, 1601 to 1811-12

Sources: overseers' accounts and vestry minutes

In theory, each separate unit of Poor Law administration should have a complete set of overseers' accounts, listing details of poor relief expenditure, dating from the establishment of the Old Poor Law in 1601 to its demise in 1834. Unfortunately, few have survived. While sets of overseers' accounts exist for 62 rural Oxfordshire parishes, many only cover a few years in the whole period: long series are rare. Vestry minutes, which potentially provide information on the formulation of poor relief policy and practice at the parish level, are even rarer. Twenty two sets exist, thirteen of which only detail the activities of Select Vestries in the final fifteen years leading up to reform.

The reconstruction of poor relief expenditure in rural Oxfordshire can therefore only be a patchy affair. The coincidence in survival of overseers' accounts and vestry minutes is exceptional and, in most instances, stretches over a few years only. Data are also in-complete and non-continuous in some surviving volumes; lists of payments are missing where the account books have been damaged. For example, damp has rendered the overseers' accounts at Cropredy covering the period 1780-1793 too fragile for examination.¹ In other cases, pages have been torn out and details of disbursements lost.

¹ OA.Par.Cropredy, b.8

Few parishes therefore have records, and those which have survived vary considerably in the number of years covered. These records also differ in terms of the care with which they were made. In many instances, the accounts were drawn up by unpaid, amateur overseers who at best found the job an onerous obligation and at worst felt it a time-consuming nuisance. Although a scrutiny of the handwriting in the accounts suggests that most overseers in Oxfordshire were reasonably literate, some accounts were more legible than others.

The quantity and quality of the material contained within them also varies. Several of the accounts for the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries simply record an annual total of 'Payments to the Poore'.² By the 1720s, a weekly breakdown of regular 'pensions' (listing the name of the recipient, amount received and date of payment), and 'extraordinary' or 'casual' disbursements was recorded in every parish for which accounts survive.³ These entries will provide the principal data source in this study.

The lists of disbursements were not, in most cases, recorded in any systematic fashion. Weekly, fortnightly or monthly 'pensions' were written down as they were paid rather than under specific headings. Payments to widows, single women and bastards, the aged and infirm, and the able-bodied and their dependants were therefore mixed up within the pages of the accounts. This situation was further complicated because 'extraordinary' payments were also listed as they were paid. Although the accounts in some parishes, particularly by the early 1820s, were recorded in a more

² See, for example, OA.Par.Mapledurham,b.3; OA.Par.Shiplake,c.8

³ The most comprehensive accounts, where these distinctions emerged first and which contain the greatest detail, tend to be found in larger parishes like Dorchester and Whitchurch. Here the higher population and poor relief burden meant that it was more important to keep a firm track of expenditure, OA.Par.Dorchester,b.10; Oa.Par.Whitchurch,c.4.

professional fashion, with each entry being placed under a specific heading, these accounts are in the minority.

The identity and circumstances of the recipient were recorded in varying degrees of detail. In some accounts, the overseer simply listed the name of the recipient (sometimes just the surname), the date and amount of payment, while others provided additional information. 'Widows', 'Old men', 'ill' and 'bastard' were frequently appended to the surnames of the recipients. When payments were made in this way to 'Widow Thomas', 'Old John Bennett' or 'Sarah Smith bastard', they can be traced from week to week and year to year in the accounts.

The greatest difficulty was in identifying able-bodied labourers and the nature of relief provided to them. Although roundsman payments and other forms of labour allocation were frequently specified as such, the amount of detail included concerning the number of days worked and the rate of pay varied. In some instances, payments to roundsmen were recorded as 'paid John Wells six day's work by the round 4s.', while in others a similar payment was simply referred to as 'paid John Wells six day's work 4s.' In this case, other evidence was looked for in the overseers' accounts and vestry minutes to determine the nature of relief.

The payment of relief to un(der)employed labourers according to a systematic relief scale was rarely stated in an explicit fashion in the accounts, in which case other evidence had to be pieced together. Some overseers appended notes to the weekly lists which referred to 'Bread Money' or 'Head Money', while others used terms like 'Justices' Allowance' and 'Weekly Pay'. The price of bread and the number of children in a recipient's family were sometimes inserted next to the list of payments suggesting that the level of pay was regulated by these variables. It is therefore

possible, where the size of a labourer's family is inserted in the accounts, to determine the scale of allowances in use.

The overseers' accounts also contain a huge variety of 'extraordinary' relief payments. Items provided included food, fuel, clothing and housing. Payments were also made, if necessary, for the provision of a midwife at birth, medical expenses during one's life-time and a coffin at death. Payments towards the maintenance of a workhouse or poorhouse are also found in some sets of accounts, while legal and other administrative costs, particularly relating to the issues of settlement and removal, could be important. Bills incurred by the overseer during the year were often settled when the financial year ended at Easter.

Totals of annual expenditure and income (from parish rates and other sources) were inserted in the accounts at the end of the financial year. These were submitted to the scrutiny of a parish vestry which was also responsible for the nomination of the following year's overseers, whose names were also recorded in the accounts. The overseers were then responsible for presenting their accounts to two neighbouring magistrates for their examination. The accounts, when passed, were signed by the magistrates, and the annual cycle began once more.⁴

While the lists of disbursements contain many similarities, they also exhibit marked differences, both in terms of the nature of payments and the manner in which they were recorded. This is reflected in the difference between the overseers' accounts at Pyrton and those at Spelsbury. While the Pyrton accounts, covering the period between 1787-8 and 1835-6, are contained in five large leather bound volumes, with payments neatly inserted in the same hand under precise headings, those at Spelsbury,

⁴ The financial year in the parish ran from Easter to Easter.

between 1800-1 and 1834-5, were kept in seven tatty volumes, several of which look remarkably like school exercise books;⁵ the lists of ‘pensions’ and ‘extraordinary’ payments are jumbled up and are not readily amenable to the application of statistical techniques of analysis.

However, a careful examination of the overseers’ accounts, taken in conjunction with vestry minutes and other Poor Law papers, can provide reliable and immensely detailed information on the amount and types of poor relief expenditure and the identity and circumstances of recipients. Also, while emphasising the details of expenditure, it must not be forgotten that these sources go beyond a mere statistical regurgitation of pounds, shillings and pence. They provide a level of insight into the state of the poor and the attitudes of those shaping the system of poor relief which would seem impossible to those confronted with much recent Poor Law historiography, characterised by its trawling through the stagnant waters of the parliamentary papers.

Poor relief expenditure in Oxfordshire, c.1700-93

At least some of the years between 1601 and the late eighteenth century are covered by overseers’ accounts in twenty seven rural Oxfordshire parishes with Poor Law records. Table 3.1 shows the eight parishes for which long-series of accounts are available.

Figure 3.1 shows that although annual poor relief expenditure in these eight parishes fluctuated quite markedly from year-to-year during the first three quarters of the eighteenth century, these variations were around low absolute levels of payments. Potential explanations for these fluctuations, both between parishes and within the

⁵ OA.Par.Pyrton, c.4, c.5, c.7, c.8, c.9; OA.Par.Spelsbury, b.6, b.7, f.1, f.2, f.3, f.4, f.5

same parish over time, include differences in population size, localised outbreaks of smallpox, the purchase and equipping of workhouses, and the effect of bad harvests.⁶ An upswing in poor relief expenditure during the mid-eighteenth century is also evident in most of the parishes. However, the fact that the turning-points stretch over a thirty year period suggests that local circumstances were important in shaping the geography of expenditure. The acceleration in expenditure was also more marked in some parishes than others. It is therefore necessary to examine the overseers' accounts in order to determine the changing composition of the poor relief burden.

Table 3.1. The survival of overseers' accounts in rural Oxfordshire

Parish	Region	Overseers' accounts	Population in 1801	Acreage in 1831
Chilworth	Clay	1691-1819	63	1,100
Islip	Clay	1714-1780	557	1,680
Dorchester	Clay	1680-1793	777	900
Wiggington	Redlands	1720-1793	192	1,780
Souldern	Limestone	1712-1780	240	2,270
Wootton	Limestone	1732-1780	823	3,700
Shiplake	Chilterns	1682-1700, 1736-1793	476	3,120
Whitchurch	Chilterns	1665-1793	577	2,070

Sources: PAR171/5/1F1/1; OA.Par.Islip,b.10; OA.Par.Dorchester,b.10,b.11,b.7; OA.Par.Wiggington,b.6,b.7;OA.Par.Souldern,c.5,c.8; OA.Woot.P.C.IV/III/2,Woot.P.C.IV/III/3; OA.Par.Shiplake,c.8,c.9,c.1;OA.Par.Whitchurch,c.3,c.4,c.5; PP 1801 (II); PP 1831 (XVIII)

Who were the poor?

At Wiggington, a small Redlands parish in Bloxham Hundred, only two or three individuals were relieved each week during the 1760s and 1770s, when the annual relief burden fluctuated between £30 and £50.⁷ By the late 1780s, when annual poor relief expenditure had increased to £70-80, the number of persons receiving weekly

⁶ See, for example, J.Howard-Drake, Shipton.

pensions had increased to four or five per week. In both periods, the recipients were listed as either widows or elderly men. At Dorchester, a more populous Clay Vales parish south of Oxford, the number of persons in receipt of weekly pensions increased from fifteen in the 1760s to twenty in the early 1790s.⁸ Total poor relief expenditure also increased, rising from an average of £117.8.0 between 1765-6 and 1769-70 to £279.10.0 between 1790-1 and 1794-5. Thirteen of these twenty recipients were women, many of whom were either widows or had borne bastards.

At Leafield, a village assarted from Wychwood Forest, five males and five females were relieved each week in 1750-1, when annual expenditure amounted to £51.13.9.⁹ Their weekly pensions varied between 1s. and 2s. 6d each, totalling 14s. 6d per week. In 1791-2, three males and four females received weekly pensions, also amounting to 14s. 6d.¹⁰ However, total annual expenditure had increased to £155.15.3, suggesting a large increase in 'extraordinary' payments. A glance down the list of payments in 1791-2 revealed payments to a workhouse master, John Pratt, suggesting that this was used to house some of the poor.

Regular weekly pensions at Culham in 1792-3 included payments to two boys, four girls, seven women and two men.¹¹ Of the total annual expenditure of £204.0.3, £138.18.11 was spent on weekly 'pensions' and £65.1.4 on 'casual' payments, including weekly payments for 'five dozen sparrows' and occasional payments 'for hedgehogs'. A memorandum in the overseers' accounts at Shiplake recorded that £24.3.0 of the annual expenditure of £280.19.11 in 1783-4 was 'laid out in bread and

⁷ OA.Par.Wiggington,b.6

⁸ OA.Par.Dorchester,b.7,b.11

⁹ OA.Par.Leafield,b.1

¹⁰ *ibid.*

¹¹ OA.Par.Culham,b.6

distributed amongst the poor for about eight weeks together for 6 pence a gallon loaf' on account of the 'very sharp and severe winter.'¹²

One should not, therefore, get carried away by the apparent significance of the turning-points in poor relief expenditure in the mid-eighteenth century. The provision of poor relief seems to have carried on in much the same fashion throughout this period, with the length of lists and types of relief varying with local circumstances. The importance of the upswings in relief are also reduced when one compares them to the absolute levels of, and fluctuations in, payments recorded during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. A large proportionate increase may lose much of its significance when one acknowledges that the level from which this rise took place was very low. A quadrupling of poor relief expenditure from £2 to £8 may seem significant in relative terms but it is of slight importance, in terms of the demands placed the system, when compared to a doubling of relief expenditure from £500 to £1000. By seizing upon relative levels of relief expenditure and therefore emphasising the increases in relief expenditure during the 1760s and 1770s, Boyer, amongst others, has manipulated the evidence to suit his arguments.¹³

Unemployment in the parish in the eighteenth century

Figure 3.2 shows the parishes in which payments to roundsmen were recorded before the mid-1790s. It indicates a marked contrast between the Clay Vales, where the practice was very rare, and the densely populated pastoral parishes of the Cherwell Valley, as it thrust itself through the Redlands and Cotswolds regions, where it was

¹² OA.Par.Shiplake,c.1

¹³ Boyer concluded that 'the events of 1795 did not lead to a large sustained increase in relief expenditure', and that the 1760s and 1770s, rather than 1795, marked the real watershed in poor relief policy and practice, G.R.Boyer, *English*, 29-30.

more common. However, the mere existence of this form of relief does not indicate its significance. It does not say how much relief was paid in this manner and to whom.

The earliest reference which I have found to the roundsman system in the overseers' accounts was in the Redlands parish of Adderbury in October 1759.¹⁴ A payment of 1s. was made in that month to John Warren for 'five days on the round'.¹⁵ Further roundsmen payments were made at Adderbury during the winter of 1759-60, but this form of relief then stopped and did not return before the accounts themselves ended in April 1774. When the accounts resumed in April 1791, 3-4 roundsmen were relieved each week during the winter months. Sixteen other individuals, including eleven widows, received weekly pensions throughout the year.

Roundsman payments began at Bloxham, adjacent to Adderbury, in October 1774.¹⁶ Five labourers were employed 'on the round' throughout the winter months. In the following year, however, the maintenance of the poor was contracted out to Thomas Pearce at £26.5.0 per month and the detailed lists of disbursements ceased. The first roundsman payment of 1s. 8d was made to John Harvey 'for two day's work' in the neighbouring parish of South Newington on 12 February 1786.¹⁷ In the Cotswolds parish of North Aston, also in the Cherwell Valley, two labourers received roundsman payments each week throughout the winter of 1775-6.¹⁸ These payments were repeated each winter over the next few years, stopped during 1780-1 and 1781-2, and re-appeared after the harvest of 1782-3.

At Souldern, another Cotswolds parish in the Cherwell Valley, roundsman payments began in November 1775, with 2-3 labourers being relieved in this manner

¹⁴ OA.Par.Adderbury,c.2

¹⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁶ OA.Bloxham.III/4

¹⁷ OA.Par.South Newington,b.11

each week during the winter months.¹⁹ A further six individuals, mainly widows, were relieved throughout the year. Roundsman payments which had stopped in March 1778, were made to 2 labourers during the winter of 1778-9 and to 3 individuals during the following winter. This pattern resumed each year until the accounts stopped in April 1791, although the number of roundsmen varied from year to year.

Table 3.2. Roundsman payments at Garsington, 1788-9 to 1792-3

Year	Total expenditure	Roundsman	(2)/(1)
	(1)	exp.(2)	(%)
	£.s.d	£.s.d	
1788-9	129.16.0	19.4.0	14.8%
1789-90	119.17.0	15.4.0	12.7%
1790-1	189.9.0	22.15.0	12.0%
1791-2	143.13.0	32.18.0	23.0%
1792-3	153.9.0	15.6.0	10.0%
TOTAL	730.4.0	105.7.0	14.4%

Source: OA.Par.Garsington,b.11

The first roundsman payment of 2s. ‘for three day’s work’ was made to William Knight in the Clay Vales parish of Yarnton on 15 January 1782.²⁰ Annual payments to roundsmen were recorded separately in the overseers’ accounts at Garsington, also on the Clay Vales, in the late 1780s and 1790s.²¹ Table 3.2 shows that the size of these payments varied from year to year, both in absolute terms and in proportion to total expenditure.

Surplus labourers could also be provided with other forms of work by the parish overseer. At a vestry meeting held at Eynsham on 19 December 1784, ‘it was ordered and agreed that poor men out of work shall be employed in picking pebbles and for the repairs of the parish roads.’²² This agreement was renewed on 30 October 1785

¹⁸ OA.Par.North Aston,b.6

¹⁹ OA.Par.Souldern,b.8

²⁰ OA.Par.Yarnton,b.9

²¹ OA.Par.Garsington, b.11

²² OA.Par.Eynsham,e.1

with the additional option of ‘fetching furze from the heath’ being made available.²³

The workhouse in the eighteenth century

An examination of the 1775-6 parliamentary returns on poor relief expenditure shows that workhouses were not widespread in rural Oxfordshire.²⁴ They were mentioned in 23 returns, excluding the City of Oxford, and were ‘capable of accommodating’ 719 inmates at an average of 31 persons each.²⁵ Figure 3.3 shows that the greatest number were concentrated in Bampton and Chadlington Hundreds, while the hundreds of Bullington, Ewelme and Langtree did not record a single institution. Those places which returned workhouses tended to be more populous than the county average. Although only 10% of parishes in Oxfordshire had workhouses they contained 30% of the population enumerated in the 1801 census.²⁶ The average population of these settlements in 1801 was 1,413.²⁷ This is not surprising, bearing in mind the fixed costs which establishing and running a workhouse entailed. For example, a vestry minute dated 25 November 1707 recorded that Banbury parish had spent a total of £440.1.8 on the purchase of a workhouse.²⁸

The smallest workhouse, housing eight inmates, was located at Blackbourton which had a population of 273 in 1801, while the largest one, housing seventy inmates, was found at Henley-on-Thames which had a population of 2,948.²⁹ Most workhouses were of a medium size ‘capable of accommodating’ between 20 and 40 inmates; three housed between 40 and 70, and another three housed fewer than twenty

²³ *ibid.*

²⁴ House of Commons Papers, vol.31 Geo.III, Poor Relief &c 1775-1780

²⁵ *ibid.*

²⁶ *ibid.*; PP 1801 (II)

²⁷ *ibid.*

²⁸ OA.Par.Banbury.c.2

²⁹ House of Commons Papers, vol.31 Geo.III, Poor Relief &c 1775-1780; PP 1801 (II)

each. Nineteen of the parishes had a population of over 500, 12 of them over 1,000 and 4 over 2,000.

Figure 3.3 also shows a further twenty three parishes, in addition to those recorded in the 1775-6 parliamentary returns, which operated a workhouse at some stage during the 1770s and 1780s. These were identified using a variety of sources including overseers' accounts, vestry minutes and advertisements for workhouse masters in *Jackson's Oxford Journal*. At Dorchester, for instance, a vestry minute of 4 July 1742 recorded that 'it was agreed that the officers of our parish shall be allowed reasonable charges in seeking after a workhouse for the poor.'³⁰ Subsequently, on 21 April 1745, a vestry minute recorded that the parish had contracted out the workhouse to John Wiggins.³¹ The parish continued to contract out the workhouse to various individuals over the next few years, the details of which are recorded in the overseers' accounts.

In 1754-5, the parish paid Mary and John Swan £33.7.0 out of a total annual expenditure of £97.14.0 to keep the workhouse.³² By 1784-5, the workhouse master, John Wallis, was being paid the weekly sum of 30s. with the parish paying the rent of the house. According to the contract he was responsible for 'maintaining in a decent manner all the poor that shall become chargeable, small-pox patients, those with broken bones, and expenses of parish settlements and bastards excepted.'³³ He was also reimbursed by the parish for the purchase of three beds and bedding, several bedsteads and three spinning wheels.

Very little is actually said about who was maintained in the workhouse or how they were relieved. However, the opening of the workhouse at Dorchester in 1745 was

³⁰ OA.Par.Dorchester,c.8

³¹ *ibid.*

³² OA.Par.Dorchester,b.11

³³ *ibid.*

followed by the curtailment of the weekly pension lists.³⁴ Those who had previously been relieved outdoors and were presumably committed to the workhouse included ten widows, three young women and their bastards, and four old men. When the overseers abandoned the workhouse in April 1766, the weekly pension lists resumed, before disappearing when the workhouse reopened the following year.

At Eynsham, an agreement was made between the parish and Thomas Gibbons on 2 April 1782.³⁵ He was 'to maintain, clothe and keep all the necessary poor people of the parish in the workhouse in such manner as people are customarily maintained.'³⁶ It was also agreed that 'the said necessitous poor people who are legally brought in there shall be kept close confined and to work for the said Thomas Gibbons and not suffered to wander, loiter, gossip or so on at any time' and that 'such as are able shall go to church every Sunday but not to gossip or go into people's houses going to or from church.'³⁷ The vestry agreed to pay him an annual salary of £84.

The advertisements for workhouse masters placed in *Jackson's Oxford Journal* show that at least some effort was made to provide the inmates of many of the county's workhouses with employment. Attempts were frequently made to contract out their management to persons with links to particular branches of the textile trade. The typical tasks which were suggested in the advertisements, like carding, spinning and weaving, were common amongst the general population. Wiggington parish decided to set up a workhouse in 1785 and entered into an agreement with Thomas Wilkes, a woolcomber, to feed and clothe the paupers according to a prescribed scale. He was also expected to pay for the nursing of the sick and to provide a decent burial

³⁴ *ibid.*

³⁵ OA.Par.Eynsham,e.1

³⁶ *ibid.*

³⁷ *ibid.*

for those who died other than from smallpox.³⁸ The parish paid him £67.5.0 per annum and he was also to ‘have the benefit of the labour and service of the said poor persons which shall be in the said workhouse.’³⁹ At South Leigh, an agreement was made in 1776 between the parish and Thomas Brooks, a local cordwainer, that in return for £120 per annum and the profit of pauper labour, he would find suitable housing and support the inmates.⁴⁰ A vestry order made at Watlington in 1787 stated that the poor be instructed ‘in the art and mystery of sack-weaving.’⁴¹

Table 3.3. Average annual expenditure on setting the poor to work, 1783-5

Hundred	Total exp. (1)	Exp. on work(2)	(2)/(1)	No. of workhouses in
	£.s.d	£.s.d		1775
Bampton	2,869.18.0	21.7.0	0.74%	7
Banbury	2,892.1.0	14.4.0	0.49%	2
Binfield	3,211.11.0	2.0.0	0.06%	1
Bloxham	2,145.13.0	1.8.0	0.06%	2
Bullington	2,606.7.0	16.6.0	0.63%	0
Chadlington	3,165.2.0	24.5.0	0.77%	2
Dorchester	870.0.0	0.4.0	0.02%	1
Ewelme	1,897.1.0	0.5.0	0.13%	0
Langtree	1,762.19.0	0.18.0	0.05%	1
Lewknor	1,632.1.0	5.10.0	0.03%	1
Pyrton	1,454.6.0	0.0.0	0.00%	1
Ploughley	3166.6.0	22.2.0	0.70%	1
Thame	1,427.16.0	6.1.0	0.40%	1
Wootton	3,883.16.0	34.8.0	0.90%	4
Total	30,114.11.0	127.2.0	0.40%	24

Sources: House of Commons Papers, Abstract of Returns, 1775-1780; House of Commons Papers, Abstract of Returns, 1787 and 1780

Table 3.3 appears to show that the workhouses were failing their institutional role as places where the poor could be set to work. This is reflected in the contents of an

³⁸ OA.Par.Wigginton,b.6
³⁹ *ibid.*
⁴⁰ OA.Par.South Leigh,b.7
⁴¹ OA.Par.Watlington,b.3

inventory of the goods contained in the workhouse at Adderbury on 17 July 1754, shown in Table 3.4. This does not provide any evidence of the provision of spinning wheels or other implements on which the poor could be set to work.

Table 3.4. Inventory of workhouse goods at Adderbury on 17 July 1754

a furnace	a mess tub	2 washing tubs	2 barrels	2 wheels	7 chests
2 porridge pots	a tin kettle	a brass kettle	flesh fork	tinder box	warming-pan
bellows	fire shovel	tongs	2 tin cups	frying pan	5 candles
snuff mill	candle box	cloth basket	5 bedsteads	6 bolsters	8 blankets
2 feather beds	4 flock beds	2 pillows	14 sheets	4 trunks	5 boxes
coffer	coal grate	hatchet	2 buckets		

Source: OA.Par.Adderbury,c.2

However, the fact that very little money was spent on employing the poor within their walls may simply reflect the nature of the applicants for relief rather than the failure of the parish in its duty to set the poor to work. If the majority of those claiming poor relief were non-able-bodied it would not be surprising that the amount of work done in return for relief was limited. It may also reflect the fact that unemployed labourers were put to work elsewhere, particularly as roundsmen, on the parish roads or digging stones.

There is some evidence that by the early 1780s all was not well with the workhouse institution in some parts of the county. At Thame, an agreement had been drawn up at a vestry meeting in 1775 to allow any person contributing to the poor rate to inspect the workhouse and the inmates.⁴² The workhouse master, who was paid an annual sum of £400 on top of the profits of any work done by the poor, was to be fined 20s. for each case of neglect substantiated before the vestry.⁴³ The workhouse contract was re-advertised in *Jackson’s Oxford Journal* on six occasions between 17 June 1782 and

⁴² Mallard Brown, J. & Guest, W., *Thame*, 163

⁴³ *ibid.*

11 November 1790. The overseers at Enstone advertised for a workhouse master on five occasions between 6 July 1782 and 5 May 1790, while the overseers at Bicester Market-End and Henley-on-Thames both advertised four times over the same period.

On 4 August 1793, the parish vestry at Bampton established a committee 'to inspect the management of the workhouse of the parish and see if the rules, orders and articles by which it was to be farmed are fulfilled and make further enquiries as they think necessary.'⁴⁴ At a vestry meeting held seven days later the committee reported that it had found some clauses of the agreement unfulfilled. Several articles were wanting in the house, especially the clothing of the poor. The committee therefore resolved to get the necessary articles, except those which the master was himself meant to provide and, if the master refused, the committee itself would supply them, reducing the master's monthly payment by that amount.

It is difficult to measure the success of workhouses in providing poor relief. The hesitancy with which many parishes adopted them and the frequent changes of policy suggests that many parish officials were not completely satisfied as to the desirability of this method of managing the poor, even though it saved trouble and might reduce rates. At Adderbury, the cost of poor relief jumped from £60 in 1755-6 to £100 in 1757-8 and to £96 in the first half of 1758-9 after the workhouse was closed in April 1756.⁴⁵ The reopening of the workhouse was followed by a 50% reduction in expenditure. It is probably safe to say that in the conditions which existed in the 1760s, 1770s and early 1780s, when a large proportion of those receiving poor relief were either too old or sick to look after themselves, the provision of relief in workhouses, when carried on with some degree of humanity, proved adequate.

⁴⁴ OA.Par.Bampton,c.8

⁴⁵ OA.Par.Adderbury,c.2

Poor relief expenditure, c.1700-93: Summary

The surviving overseers' accounts show many similarities in the size and composition of poor relief burdens in the parishes of rural Oxfordshire during the late seventeenth and the first three-quarters of the eighteenth century. They all demonstrate rising expenditure from around the mid-eighteenth century and the gradual lengthening of pension lists. In most cases, these lists were dominated by widows, the aged and infirm, and single mothers and their bastards. However, the extent and timing of these increases did differ between parishes suggesting that while there were general trends, local details could be superimposed upon them.

The variety of relief forms adopted also makes simple generalisation difficult. Although weekly pensions were ubiquitous, evidence suggests that in some parishes these only made up half, or even less, of the total poor relief burden. The wide array of 'extraordinary' payments reflects the diversity inherent in a welfare system based upon 15,000 or so separate parishes. Disbursements ranged from the catching of hedgehogs at Culham, to the purchase of seawater to treat Mary Leach at Bampton on 16 April 1793,⁴⁶ to the £225 spent on the treatment of Ann Hutchman, a pauper lunatic, by the parish of Dorchester between her diagnosis in 1746 and her commitment to the incurable side at Bethlem in 1763.⁴⁷

Poor relief expenditure: the scarcity of the mid-1790s

The general upswing in grain prices which had set in sometime after 1750 was rudely interrupted in the mid-1790s as a series of bad harvests drove the price of wheat above

⁴⁶ OA.Par.Bampton,c.8

⁴⁷ OA.Par.Dorchester,b.10

75s. per Quarter and caused the doubling of the bread price.⁴⁸ The average price of a half-peck loaf of standard wheaten bread at Oxford increased from around 1s. in the early 1790s to 1s. 9d in 1795-6, before dropping to 1s. 4d in 1796-7.⁴⁹ This increase occurred at the same time as an upsurge in poor relief expenditure across the county, suggesting links between them.

Several public subscriptions, raised to provide the poor with cheap bread during the winter of 1794-5, were cited in *Jackson's Oxford Journal*. These subscriptions were on top of, and were excluded from records of rates collected. At Thame, Lord Charles Spencer and Lord Viscount Wenman patronised a scheme organised owing to the 'unusual price of bread and the inclemency of the weather, which very much diminish the employment of the labouring people.'⁵⁰ Contributions were also made by members of the clergy, large rentiers and farmers. The subscription was renewed at the start of July when the blame for distress was again laid on the price of necessities, particularly of bread.⁵¹ Over one thousand people were said to have benefited from the subscription; the poor were 'not altogether ungrateful for the benefit.'⁵²

A subscription at Bampton during the early summer of 1795 to supply the poor with bread at a moderate price 'till harvest shall have relieved the present scarcity and dearness of that necessary article' supplied between 300 and 400 persons with an 8 lb. loaf each per week.⁵³ The overseers' accounts of Rotherfield Greys contain details of a 'subscription raised towards the relief of the poor of this parish' which raised £24.19.6

⁴⁸ B.R.Mitchell & P.Deane, *Abstract*, 756

⁴⁹ Unless otherwise stated, the bread price refers to the price of a half-peck loaf of standard wheaten bread at Oxford, recorded weekly in *Jackson's Oxford Journal*.

⁵⁰ *JOJ*, 21 February 1795

⁵¹ *JOJ*, 5 September 1795

⁵² *ibid.*

⁵³ *JOJ*, 1 August 1795

on 11 January 1795.⁵⁴ This was used to purchase bread to be given away amongst the poor of that parish. Further subscriptions were raised each week until 8 March 1795.

Rumours were also rife throughout the county at this time that farmers, middlemen and shopkeepers were exploiting the scarcity to charge inflated prices and make excess profits.⁵⁵ In some instances the poor responded to these practices by taking the law into their own hands, seizing cartloads of produce and fixing what they regarded as a fair price.⁵⁶ In January 1795, *Jackson's Oxford Journal* reported that the poor at Deddington had stopped a grain boat on the canal and forced the sale of the cargo locally at reduced prices.⁵⁷ Disturbances also occurred at Oxford, Henley, Burford, Banbury, Bloxham, Witney and Long Handborough.⁵⁸

The Quarter Sessions responded to these disturbances by issuing proclamations against shopkeepers trying to increase their profits by using short weights and measures. The first such proclamation was published in *Jackson's Oxford Journal* on 26 June 1795 and stated that 'the distress of the poor are much enhanced in many places by the practice of retailing the necessities of life by short weights and measures.'⁵⁹ The proclamations were also circulated amongst the magistrates and high constables in their respective divisions. Although the magistrates could seize any grain or bread sold in this manner, the failure to enforce this proclamation successfully is reflected in its reiteration on 26 August 1795 and 30 July 1796.⁶⁰

At the Summer Sessions of 1795, it was resolved that 'in order to keep down the present high of wheat and as the most effectual means of preventing a scarcity, it is

⁵⁴ OA.Par.Rotherfield Greys,e.2

⁵⁵ W.Thwaites, Market, 27

⁵⁶ *ibid.*, 28

⁵⁷ *JOJ*, 4 January 1795

⁵⁸ W.Thwaites, Market, 28

⁵⁹ *JOJ*, 26 June 1795

⁶⁰ *JOJ*, 26 August 1795, 30 July 1796

strongly recommended that families in which any diminution can be made to be as sparing as possible in the use of wheaten flour.’⁶¹ It was also suggested that bread should be supplied to the poor at 14d per gallon loaf and the difference between this and the market price be paid either by private subscription or out of the poor rates.⁶² It was advised that an allowance of a gallon loaf per week should be made to each individual of a family where a subscription had been raised.⁶³ Farmers and owners of land were also encouraged to ‘bring into and sell in open market all such wheat as can be spared from the necessary consumption of their families and neighbourhood’ and that ‘the inhabitants of the county be advised carefully to abstain from every act of violence which must tend only to increase the present scarcity and their own sufferings.’⁶⁴

The 16 January 1796 edition of *Jackson’s Oxford Journal* included a series of resolutions signed by several leading magistrates announcing their intention to ‘reduce the consumption of wheat in our families by at least one-third of the usual quantity consumed in normal times.’⁶⁵ They also resolved to limit the quantity of fine wheaten bread used by their own families and hoped that others would follow suit by consuming only mixed bread, ‘of which not more than two-thirds shall be made of wheat.’⁶⁶ They also focused upon the need to adopt ‘timely and effectual methods’ to reduce the consumption of wheat so that it might be possible ‘to prevent the pressure of actual scarcity previous to the next harvest ...and secure it as far as possible, the

⁶¹ OA.QSM.I/5, Summer 1795

⁶² *ibid.*

⁶³ *ibid.*

⁶⁴ *ibid.*

⁶⁵ *JOJ*, 16 January 1796

⁶⁶ *ibid.*

necessary subsistence of the people of the Kingdom until it shall please Divine Providence to restore the blessing of a general plenty.’⁶⁷

As early as the Epiphany Sessions of 1794 the Chairman of the Quarter Sessions, Sir Christopher Willoughby, had tried to encourage farmers to employ labourers at a living wage, rather than leaving their support partially to the parish.⁶⁸ He therefore recommended that farmers be urged to increase wages so that they should rise with the price of provisions.⁶⁹ That this had failed is evident in the scale of allowances fixed at the Epiphany Sessions of 1795.

The Justices’ Allowance of 1795

The following proclamation was issued at the Epiphany Sessions of 1795:

‘It was unanimously agreed by the magistrates that the following weekly incomes were at this time absolutely necessary for the support of the poor industrious labourers and that when the utmost exertion of a family cannot produce the under mentioned sums it must be made up by the overseer, exclusive of rent:

Single man according to his labour

Man and wife not less than 6s. per week

Ditto with 1 or 2 small children not less than 7s. per week

And for every additional child 1s.

This regulation was unanimously approved of and ordered to be communicated to the magistrates by the Clerk of the Peace and likewise ordered to be printed and sent to the overseers of the poor of the several parishes and hamlets within the county to be by them inserted in their respective books of accounts.’⁷⁰

The magistrates therefore acknowledged that despite their efforts, labourers’ incomes had not kept up with the price of bread and that it was necessary to guarantee a

⁶⁷ *ibid.*

⁶⁸ OA.QSM.I/5, Epiphany 1794

⁶⁹ *ibid.*

minimum subsistence throughout the county. According to this resolution, individual parishes' decisions were now co-ordinated under the control of the Justices.

Roger Wells has recently suggested that scales of this sort were not a strict antecedent of Speenhamland because 'they contained no provision to offset further inflation' and did not base relief on fluctuating living costs.⁷¹ However, a further resolution passed at the Michaelmas Sessions of 1795 suggests that relief would be altered with changing circumstances:

'having taken into consideration the order made at the last Epiphany Session respecting the weekly earnings of the industrious labourer and his family, do unanimously resolve that the weekly sums thus ordered were absolutely necessary for their support and maintenance - and they do further resolve that they will from time to time order such relief as the exigencies of the times may in their judgements and discretion make necessary.'⁷²

Poor relief expenditure, 1792-3 to 1797-8

Table 3.5 shows that poor relief expenditure more than doubled between 1792-3 and 1795-6 in every parish for which overseers' accounts have survived. At Yarnton and Culham, poor relief expenditure increased more than three-fold between 1792-3 and the peak in bread prices in 1795-6. Overall, the increase in payments in this three year period averaged 181%. The general tendency for poor relief expenditure to increase rapidly during this period suggests that similar forces were at work throughout the county, and by far the most important influence was the bread price. This conclusion is confirmed by the general tendency of expenditure to fall in 1796-7 and 1797-8 as the price of bread also fell. As I have already shown, care must be taken when comparing poor relief expenditure in proportionate terms. A doubling or trebling in expenditure may stem from the fact that the base level from which the rise took place

⁷⁰ OA.QSM.I/5, Epiphany, 1795

⁷¹ R.Wells, *Wretched*, 291

was low. This is certainly evident at Yarnton where, although relief more than trebled, it only rose to just over £200 in 1795-6. However, many of the overseers' accounts also show large absolute increases in expenditure during the mid-1790s.

Table 3.5. Poor relief expenditure by parish, 1792-3 to 1797-8

Parish	Region	Pop. in 1801	1792-3 £.s.d	1793-4 £.s.d	1794-5 £.s.d	1795-6 £.s.d	1796-7 £.s.d	1797-8 £.s.d	Increase 1792-3 to 1797-8
Bletchington	Clay	503	181.11.0	214.16.3	269.16.0	254.10.0	334.10.0	335.16.0	140%
Chilworth	Clay	63			65.18.3	66.17.4	45.11.4	79.0.1	
Culham	Clay	364	213.5.0	233.18.0	185.12.0	714.18.0	282.12.0	292.1.0	335%
Dorchester	Clay	777	248.0.0	313.3.0	326.11.0	456.10.0	455.18.0	416.14.0	196%
Forest Hill	Clay	115	38.17.0	40.2.0	48.11.0	59.7.0	76.5.0	59.4.0	153%
Garsington	Clay	493	153.17.0	229.18.0	201.14.0	257.7.0	266.7.0	228.7.0	168%
Noke	Clay	150	131.0.0	15.15.0	15.5.0	24.11.0	22.18.3	34.1.0	188%
Nuneham C.	Clay	278	108.10.0	81.19.0	97.16.0	260.6.0	172.11.0	109.6.0	240%
South Leigh	Clay	240	62.3.0		106.1.0	131.4.0	186.0.0	152.2.0	211%
St. St. John	Clay	349	119.19.0	155.1.0	177.9.0	228.1.0	204.14.0	208.19.0	190%
St. Audley	Clay	379	100.6.0	124.5.0	175.4.0	148.4.0	149.2.0	134.17.0	134%
Witney	Clay	2,584		914.13.0	820.13.0	984.16.0	984.16.0	984.18.0	
Yarnton	Clay	215	60.2.3	93.12.0	178.3.0	201.16.0	176.19.0	148.11.0	335%
Adderbury	Redlands	1,144	296.17.0	297.11.0	489.16.0	634.9.0	523.1.0	366.15.0	213%
Cropredy	Redlands	470		278.2.0	388.13.0	247.1.0	430.17.0	384.2.0	
North Aston	Redlands	220	106.2.0	127.14.0	106.9.0	155.14.0	157.9.0	174.7.0	147%
S. Newington	Redlands	395	209.13.0	205.2.0	275.10.0	457.1.0	418.6.0	315.17.0	218%
St. Aston	Redlands	333	67.16.0	72.0.0	69.13.0	120.5.0	130.14.0	128.15.0	177%
Wiggington	Redlands	192	68.3.0	97.10.0	88.5.0	87.5.0	117.7.0	109.7.0	128%
Leaffield	Limestone	487	115.7.0	125.1.0	169.18.0	145.16.0	218.9.0	203.2.0	189%
Salford	Limestone	225	63.2.0	90.7.0	107.0.0	150.15.0	159.18.0	138.2.0	219%
Souldern	Limestone	394						256.0.0	
Stoke Lyne	Limestone	334	132.7.0	153.3.8	212.6.8	274.6.9	338.0.6	276.5.1	207%
W. Barton	Limestone	184	57.1.0	76.2.0	69.14.0	82.10.0	81.16.0	88.19.0	145%
A.Rowant	Chilterns	689						628.0.0	
Pyrtton	Chilterns	527	608.5.2	719.10.4	676.3.3	976.3.7	960.2.0	721.8.4	160%
Shiplake	Chilterns	476	368.11.0	405.5.0	353.17.0	523.14.0	483.3.0	493.1.0	142%
Average ⁷³			164.4.0	184.7.0	204.11.0	297.6.0	272.19.0	237.6.0	181%
Bread Price			1s. 1d	1s. 0d	1s. 2d	1s. 9d	1s. 4d	1s. 4d	

Sources: PP 1801 (II); OA.Par.Bletchington,b.6; OA.PAR171/5/1F1/1; OA.Par.Culham,b.6; OA.Par.Dorchester,b.7; OA.Par.Forest Hill,b.3; OA.Par.Garsington,b.11; OA.Par.Noke,b.3; OA.Par.Nuneham Coutenay,b.2; OA.Par.South Leigh,b.7; OA.Par.Stanton St. John,b.2; OA.Par.Stratton Audley,b.1; OA.Par.Witney,b.14; OA.Par.Yarnton,b.9; OA.Par.Adderbury,b.5; OA.Par.Cropredy,b.9; OA.Par.North Aston,b.6; OA.Par.South Newington,b.11,b.12; OA.Par.Steeple Aston,e.2; OA.Par.Wiggington,b.7; OA.Par.Leaffield,b.2; OA.Par.Salford,b.7; OA.Par.Souldern,b.9; OA.Misc.Dew II/3; OA.Par.Westcote Barton,b.5; OA.Par.Aston Rowant,c.14; OA.Par.Pyrtton,c.4; OA.Par.Shiplake,c.1,c.2

⁷² OA.QSM.I/5, Michaelmas 1795
⁷³ This statistic excludes data from Chilsworth, South Leigh, Witney, Cropredy, Souldern and Aston Rowant which are incomplete.

Average poor relief expenditure of those parishes listed in Table 3.5 increased from £164.4.0 in 1792-3 to £297.6.0 in 1795-6, before falling slightly to £272.19.0 in 1796-7 and to £237.6.0 in 1797-8. Although poor relief expenditure peaked in the majority of parishes in 1795-6, the size and precise timing of these increases did vary. At Culham, for instance, annual expenditure sky-rocketed from £185.6.0 in 1792-3 to £714.18.0 in 1795-6, before dropping to £282.6.0 in the following year. A few miles away at Bletchington, where the population enumerated in the 1801 census (503) was actually larger than at Culham (364), expenditure actually fell from £269.11.0 in 1794-5 to £254.5.0 in 1795-6, before rising to a peak of £335.16.0 in 1797-8. Poor relief expenditure peaked in 1796-7 at Forest Hill (Clay Vales), Garsington (Clay Vales), North Aston (Redlands), Steeple Aston (Redlands), Wiggington (Redlands), Leafield (Limestone), Salford (Limestone) and Stoke Lyne (Limestone).

Who were the poor?

While seven labourers were sent on the round each week at Bletchington during the winter of 1793-4, this increased to fifteen per week during the following winter as the bad weather reduced employment opportunities.⁷⁴ On 7 February 1795, 'it was agreed at the monthly meeting' that eight men should be paid the 'Justice's Allowance' of 2s. each for two weeks.⁷⁵ Several men received both allowances and payments as roundsmen. By early March, however, only three labourers were employed as roundsmen and the payment of the additional allowances had stopped. Allowance and roundsman payments resumed on 12 October 1795 when ten labourers were relieved

⁷⁴ OA.Par.Bletchington,b.6

⁷⁵ *ibid.*

in this manner. The scale of allowances was inserted in the accounts on 14 November 1795 and is shown in Table 3.6.

Table 3.6. Scale of allowances at Bletchingdon, 14 November 1795

Number of Children	Weekly allowance
	£. s. d.
2	0.1.0
3	0.1.6
4	0.2.6

Source: OA.Par.Bletchingdon,b.6

Although the payment of allowances to labourers ceased on 12 March 1796, it resumed on 25 November 1796. Some labourers were paid in loaves while others received a combination of bread and cash payments. These payments ceased on 25 February 1797. Ten labourers were sent on the round during the winter of 1795-6, several of whom also received allowances. Roundsman payments which had stopped in March 1796 resumed after the harvest and nine labourers were relieved in this manner, several of whom again received allowances. In the following winter, however, the number of roundsmen had fallen to five or six per week.

Other parishes in which the roundsman system was practised include Noke (Clay Vales), Souldern (Limestone), North Aston (Redlands), Barford St. Michael (Redlands), Cropredy (Redlands), Stoke Lyne (Limestone), South Leigh (Clay Vales) and South Newington (Redlands).⁷⁶ At South Leigh, £27 out of a total annual expenditure of £186 in 1796-7 was paid ‘for leabour’.⁷⁷ At Barford St. Michael, £45 was paid out to roundsmen in 1796-7 out of a total expenditure of £253, although the magistrates had also added the remark that ‘the accounts must be made out more

⁷⁶ OA.Par.Noke,b.3; OA.Par.Souldern,b.8,b.9; OA.Par.North Aston,b.6; OA.Par.Barford St. Michael,b.6; OA.Par.Cropredy,b.9; OA.Misc.DewII/3; OA.Par.South Leigh,b.7; OA.Par.South Newington,b.11

correctly before they can be allowed.’⁷⁸ Seven labourers were employed as roundsman each week at South Newington between November 1794 and the end of March 1795.⁷⁹ In the following winter, the number of roundsmen had increased to ten, but fell to five in the winter of 1796-7.

On 14 August 1795, the overseers at Culham spent £94.12.6 on the purchase of wheat, for its grinding and baking, and the delivering of bread to the poor.⁸⁰ A further 4 loads of wheat and 51 sacks of flour were purchased at a cost of £298.0.0 on 26 March 1796. This was sold to the poor at less than cost price, raising £173 which was offset against the expenditure. At Blackthorn, £6.17.9 was paid to John Kirby on 17 April 1796 for 3 Quarters of wheat and 5 Quarters of barley at 38s. per Quarter.⁸¹ This was sold to the poor at 32s. per Quarter, raising £5.8.6. The overseers of Nuneham Courtenay paid £91.10.0 to Mr Calvert for 15 Quarters of wheat and £21.6.0 for 10 Quarters of barley on 12 March 1795.⁸² A further £45.12.0 was spent on the purchase and grinding of 8 Quarters of wheat and 3 Quarters of barley on 18 April 1796.

At a vestry meeting held at Dorchester on 9 November 1795, it was recorded that ‘the churchwardens, overseers and principal inhabitants have agreed to make a 6d rate in order to give the poor bread at 1s. 5d per gallon loaf.’⁸³ The price of a half-peck loaf had risen to 1s. 9d at this time. The overseers’ accounts at Adderbury recorded that on 7 December 1795, 400 bushels of wheat and 393 bushels of barley were purchased and the ‘corn delivered to the poor.’⁸⁴ Coal was distributed amongst the

⁷⁷ OA.Par.South Leigh,b.7

⁷⁸ OA.Par.Barford St. Michael,b.6

⁷⁹ OA.Par.South Newington,b.11

⁸⁰ OA.Par.Culham,b.6

⁸¹ OA.Par.BlackthornIII/i/1

⁸² OA.Par.Nuneham Courtenay,b.2

⁸³ OA.Par.Dorchester,c.8

⁸⁴ OA.Par.Adderbury,b.6

poor at South Newington during the winter of 1795-6.⁸⁵ It was delivered to the aged and infirm at the rate of 2 cwt. per week each and 'to others' at half this rate.

Poor relief expenditure and the scarcity of the mid-1790s: Summary

The entries in the surviving overseers' accounts show that although a scale of allowances was issued at the Epiphany Sessions of 1795, a wide variety of methods were adopted to deal with the scarcity. These reflect the diversity of relief practices inherent within the existing system of poor relief and the variation in social and economic circumstances with which it had to contend.

However, while levels of expenditure did vary markedly between parishes and followed different trajectories in different parishes, these do not, on their own, indicate the changing living standards of the poor. Expenditure data are of little use when divorced from information on the numbers of poor and the types of relief. Were, for example, disbursements of flour and bread merely supplements to other sources of income or were they the sole source of subsistence?

The scarcity of the mid-1790s marked a crucial turning-point in at least one sphere. The Justice's Allowance of 1795 opened the door to the more direct involvement of magistrates in poor relief policy and practice. This door was wedged open by a resolution passed at the Summer Sessions of 1795 which stated that:

'in addition to what has already been done for the relief of the poor the magistrates will be ready to hear and give further relief to all persons peaceably quietly disposed who shall make application to them and prove that they have not sufficient means for the subsistence of themselves and their families.'⁸⁶

⁸⁵ OA.Par.South Newington,b.11

⁸⁶ OA.QSM.I/5, Summer 1795

Although magisterial intervention in the administration of poor relief was authorised by the County Bench in 1795 it was not confirmed by legislation until 1796, with the passage of 36 Geo.III, c.23. However, the attempts of the Sessions to establish uniformity in relief practice were faced by the immense diversity already characteristic of the administration of the Poor Laws. Thus, even though the overseers at Bletchington referred to their scale of relief as the 'Justices' Scale', it differed from the original scale. Also, an allowance scale issued by Gloucestershire magistrates at their Michaelmas Sessions of 1795 was inserted in the vestry minutes at Burford.⁸⁷ According to this scale, if the price of a half-peck loaf was 1s. 2d (as it was when the Oxfordshire magistrates issued their scale in January 1795), 3s. 8d should be paid to a man and wife per week; 4s. 8d to a man, wife and child, and 1s. per additional child. Although the allowances per additional child were the same according to both scales, the minimum guaranteed income for a man and wife was set 1s. 4d lower by the Gloucestershire magistrates.

Poor relief expenditure and the scarcity of 1800-2

The belief expressed at the Michaelmas Sessions of 1795 that the prevailing scarcity was a temporary affair seemed to have been vindicated by the collapse in bread prices and poor relief expenditure in the months leading up to the harvest of 1796-7. However, whilst the harvests of 1797-8 and 1798-9 were sufficient to maintain the equilibrium, the weather during that 'frightfully devastating year'⁸⁸ of 1799-1800 and in 1800-1 drove the price of grain to historically unprecedented levels. The average price of a half-peck loaf at Oxford increased from 1s. 1d in 1798-9 to 1s. 9d in 1799-

⁸⁷ OA.Par.Burford,c.35

⁸⁸ R.Wells, *Wretched*, 37

1800, before jumping to 2s. 7d in 1800-1 following a second successive poor harvest. The bread price peaked at 3s. 5d in March 1801, before falling to an average of 1s. 11d in 1801-2 and 1s. 3d in 1802-3 as conditions improved.

The response of the magistrates

A letter sent by the Duke of Portland via the Lord Lieutenant to the Quarter Sessions at Oxford was included in the minutes of the Epiphany Sessions of 1800.⁸⁹ This recommended the adoption of measures ‘judged most expedient for lessening the consumption of bread corn.’⁹⁰ The Sessions therefore issued the following proclamation:

‘to commence on 17 February, the makers of bread for sale will be prohibited from making for sale, baking, selling or exposing to or for sale any other or more sorts of bread being or purporting to be of suspicious quality and sold at a higher price than the Standard Wheaten Bread.’⁹¹

While a number of resolutions relating to marketing abuses and the consumption of corn had been passed by the Quarter Sessions during the mid-1790s, this was the only one passed during the second period of scarcity.

However, the 7 December 1799 edition of *Jackson’s Oxford Journal* had detailed a resolution passed by magistrates acting for Wootton Hundred which stated that ‘the Bread called Standard Wheaten Bread only was to be made to prevent the inconveniences attendant upon the scarcity and dearness of corn.’⁹² Moreover, the same edition of the newspaper reported that a baker at Bladon, also in Wootton Hundred, had been convicted by Sir Christopher Willoughby of having defective weights. Of the forty loaves found in his shop, thirty seven were found to be short in

⁸⁹ OA.QSM.I/6, Epiphany 1800

⁹⁰ *ibid.*

⁹¹ *ibid.*

weight.⁹³ The 9 May 1801 edition reported that ‘we hear from Woodstock [in Wootton Hundred] that several bakers of that town have been convicted and fined for selling bread short of weight.’⁹⁴ This shows that magistrates were active within their respective administrative divisions.

The 15 November 1801 edition of *Jackson’s Oxford Journal* reported that Sarah Smith, a spinster of West Chadlington, had been convicted by the Revd. John Cobb J.P. of the full penalty of £20 for wearing hair powder as an article of dress, ‘without having obtained the necessary certificate for that purpose and without showing any cause of mitigation.’⁹⁵ The penalty was distributed amongst the poor of the township in bread. The 10 October 1802 edition reported that Mr Joseph Harris, keeper of the county’s weights, had inspected weights and balances of shops in the villages of Wootton, Kidlington, Glympton, Middle Barton, Sandford, Great Tew and Deddington, and found that many were defective.⁹⁶ He concluded that such miscreants ‘defraud the public and rob the poor of the fruits of their labour’ and fined them 20s. each.⁹⁷

The attempts by magistrates to stamp out marketing abuses seem to have been focused upon the divisions rather than the county as a whole during this period of scarcity. It was reported in the 11 January 1800 edition of *Jackson’s Oxford Journal* that:

‘the Chairman, Sir Christopher Willoughby, took the public opportunity of contradicting a report which had been industriously propagated throughout the county that the magistrates had appointed a fixed rule of allowances for the relief of the poor. He reprobated in strong language the impropriety of such an indiscriminate measure

⁹² *JOJ*, 7 December 1799

⁹³ *ibid.*

⁹⁴ *JOJ*, 9 May 1801

⁹⁵ *JOJ*, 15 November 1801

⁹⁶ *JOJ*, 10 October 1802

⁹⁷ *JOJ*, 10 October 1802

and said it was the determination of himself and his brother justices within their said divisions, at the same time, that they relieved with a liberal hand the necessitous poor who appeared sober and industrious, to treat with less consideration the complaints of the profligate and idle.’⁹⁸

This statement reflects the fundamental shift which had taken place in the scale of magisterial activity in the few years since the scarcity of the mid-1790s. This was the first explicit statement suggesting a more localised interpretation of the Poor Laws. While introducing another source of potential geographical variation it also meant that magistrates operating within their respective divisions could bring some common policy across groups of parishes. Depending upon the area under their jurisdiction, magistrates could therefore bring some degree of uniformity to parts of the county.

A printed sheet pasted in the front of Souldern’s overseers’ account book shows that magistrates were already dictating poor relief practices in their respective divisions at the time of Willoughby’s statement.⁹⁹ This sheet detailed an allowance scale adopted by magistrates in Ploughley Hundred. It stated:

‘Bicester 3 January 1800

Magistrates acting for the division of Ploughley Hundred are of the opinion that it is necessary for supporting the labouring poor and families at all times, that each individual be able to procure at least a half-peck loaf of wholesome and nourishing bread per week.

In the present scarcity and dearness of bread if not able by labour to earn sufficient the overseer should relieve according to the following table:

Man, wife and child	7s. per week
Man, wife and 2 children	8s. 6d per week
Man, wife and 3 children	10s. per week
Man, wife and 4 children	12s. per week
Man, wife and 5 children	14s. per week
(And so on, 2s. per additional child)	

Signed, Brackman, Greenhill, Bullock and Browne’¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ *JOJ*, 11 January 1800

⁹⁹ OA.Par.Souldern,b.9

¹⁰⁰ *ibid.*

However, it does not appear that each hundred had its own scale. The administrative areas for which individual magistrates were responsible, using their signatures in the overseers' account books and on other Poor Law papers as an indication of the distribution of their activity, are shown on Figure 3.4. It shows that the magistrates operated within five administrative regions, overlapping the boundaries of individual hundreds. It may be expected therefore that the scale of allowances issued in Ploughley Hundred was also applied to parishes in surrounding hundreds which came within the area administered by those magistrates responsible for its formulation.

This situation was confirmed by the diary of a North Oxfordshire clergyman J.P., probably Revd. John Greenhill J.P., covering the period between January 1793 and October 1800.¹⁰¹ He lived at Cottisford in Ploughley Hundred, was rector of Fringford and Marsh Gifford, and regularly attended what he termed the 'Bicester Overseers' Sessions' and the 'North Aston Overseers' Sessions'. Bicester is a market town in Ploughley Hundred while North Aston is located in Wootton Hundred. He noted his attendance at the Bicester sessions on 3 April 1793, 23 April 1794, 8 April 1795, 30 March 1796 (with Dr Browne), 19 April 1797, 15 November 1799 (with Mr Bullock and Dr Browne) and 3 October 1800. In addition, he attended the North Aston sessions on 22 April 1793, 25 April 1794, 7 February 1800 and 10 September 1800.

Poor relief expenditure, 1798-9 to 1802-3

Table 3.7 shows that annual poor relief expenditure increased markedly during this period of scarcity in every parish for which overseers' accounts have survived. The

¹⁰¹ OA.Misc.Will.I/1

increases in poor relief expenditure during this period were much larger in absolute terms than those recorded in the mid-1790s.

Table 3.7. Poor relief expenditure by parish, 1798-9 to 1802-3

Parish	Region	Pop. in 1801	1798-9 £.s.d	1799-1800 £.s.d	1800-1 £.s.d	1801-2 £.s.d	1802-3 £.s.d	Increase 1798-9 to 1800-1
Bletchington	Clay	503	295.10.0					
Chilworth	Clay	63	42.0.3	89.3.6	194.4.0	93.14.11	81.9.0	462%
Culham	Clay	364	252.1.0	516.10.0	1,318.0.0	905.0.0	391.10.0	522%
Dorchester	Clay	777	470.16.0	637.1.0	1125.5.0			176%
Forest Hill	Clay	115	73.18.0	96.16.0	136.8.0	151.4.0	84.10.0	184%
Garsington	Clay	493	293.14.0	307.12.0	754.4.0	672.2.0	379.4.0	257%
Noke	Clay	150	44.14.0	84.18.0	212.10.0	155.14.0	94.0.0	475%
Nuneham C.	Clay	278	152.12.0	318.14.0	536.12.0	387.14.0	221.0.0	352%
St. Audley	Clay	379	238.6.0	241.2.0	506.10.0	369.14.0	242.6.0	212%
Witney	Clay	3,486	915.18.0	1,809.8.0	2,846.2.0	3,523.9.0	2,353.9.0	311%
Yarnton	Clay	215	211.18.0	331.12.0	486.2.0	437.18.0	329.2.0	230%
Adderbury	Redlands	1,354	344.4.0		1,085.0.0	757.0.0	602.9.0	315%
Claydon	Redlands	235	222.18.0	365.11.0	307.15.0	161.4.0	164.13.0	138%
S. Newington	Redlands	395	484.10.0	454.0.0	793.18.0	592.0.0	452.6.0	164%
Steeple Aston	Redlands	333	178.4.0	109.14.0	410.13.0	176.6.0	168.4.0	230%
Tadmarton	Redlands	387				553.13.0	475.13.0	
Wiggington	Redlands	192	112.15.0	136.10.0	237.9.0	199.9.0	169.16.0	211%
Leaffield	Limestone	487	224.8.0	503.10.0	552.14.0	453.18.0	315.14.0	246%
Salford	Limestone	225	144.19.0	228.0.0	351.1.0	418.12.0	215.13.0	242%
Souldern	Limestone	394	200.14.0	340.0.0	353.2.0	527.6.0	293.8.0	176%
Stoke Lyne	Limestone	334	250.18.7	350.7.1	694.0.6	522.6.9	355.17.6	277%
West. Barton	Limestone	184	107.18.0	120.0.0	279.8.0	278.8.0	150.0.0	259%
Aston Rowant	Chilterns	689	555.0.0	952.12.0	1,853.0.0	1,315.9.0	791.6.0	333%
Pyrton	Chilterns	527	661.12.3	1,011.17.0	1,786.1.8	1,886.9.3	1,057.3.6	270%
Shiplake	Chilterns	476	451.10.0	568.4.0	939.12.0	816.8.0	530.0.0	208%
Average ¹⁰²		575	277.4.0	425.11.0	740.10.0	668.19.0	421.1.0	276%
Bread Price			1s. 1d	1s. 9d	2s. 7d	1s. 11d	1s. 3d	

Sources: PP 1801 (II); OA.Par.Bletchington,b.6; OA.PAR171/5/1F1/1; OA.Par.Culham,b.6; OA.Par.Dorchester,b.7; OA.Par.Forest Hill,b.3; OA.Par.Garsington,b.11; OA.Par.Noke,b.3; OA.Par.Nuneham Courtenay,b.2; OA.Par.Stratton Audley,b.1; OA.Par.Witney,b.14; OA.Par.Yarnton,b.9; OA.Par.Adderbury,b.5,b.6; OA.Par.Claydon,b.5; OA.Par.South Newington,b.12; OA.Par.Steeple Aston,e.2; OA.Par.Tadmarton,b.4; OA.Par.Wiggington,b.7,b.8; OA.Par.Leafield,b.2; OA.Par.Salford,b.7; OA.Par.Souldern,b.9; OA.Misc.DewII/3,Misc.Cor.I/1; OA.Par.Westcote Barton,b.5; OA.Par.Aston Rowant,c.14 ; OA.Par.Pyrton,c.4; OA.Par.Shiplake,c.2

Poor relief expenditure at Witney increased from an average of around £1,000 between 1793-4 and 1798-9 to over £3,500 in 1801-2.¹⁰³ At Culham, annual poor

¹⁰² This statistic excludes data from Bletchington, Dorchester, Adderbury, and Tadmarton which are incomplete.

relief payments jumped from £185.6.0 in 1798-9 to £1,318.0.0 in 1800-1.¹⁰⁴ Average expenditure, detailed in the surviving overseers' accounts, increased from £277.4.0 in 1798-9 to £425.11.0 in 1799-1800, before jumping to a peak of £740.10.0 in 1800-1, an increase of 276% since 1798-9. It then fell slightly to £668.19.0 in the following year before dropping to £421.1.0 in 1802-3. Yet, while both average expenditure and payments in most individual parishes peaked in the high price year of 1800-1, it peaked in the following year at Forest Hill, Witney and Souldern suggesting that in these instances, at least, other factors apart from the price of bread were important.

The great variations in the size of each parish, measured in terms of their populations, means that the usefulness of comparisons based upon total expenditure is limited. Table 3.8 reveals that per capita poor relief expenditure varied markedly between the parishes in 1800-1.

If the average bread price in 1802-3 is used to deflate relief expenditures, this yields an average per capita expenditure of only 16s. 2d in 1800-1, of 18s. 7d in 1802-3, 12s. 3d in 1812-13, 18s. 0d in 1820-1 and 14s. 4d in 1828-9. Table 3.9 combines the parish statistics into regional averages, confirming the distinctions previously established between the high spending Chiltern and Redlands parishes and the low spending parishes on the Cotswolds and the Clay Vales. The Chilterns region recorded the highest level of per capita expenditure in every year, while the lowest absolute levels and fluctuations were recorded on the Cotswolds.

¹⁰³ OA.Par.Witney,b.14

¹⁰⁴ OA.Par.Culham,b.6

Table 3.8. Per Capita poor relief expenditure, 1800-1, 1802-3, 1812-13, 1820-1 and 1828-9

Parish	Region	1800-1	1802-3 ¹⁰⁵	1812-13 ¹⁰⁶	1820-1	1828-9
Culham	Clay	72s. 5d	22s. 6d	24s. 9d	25s. 7d	15s. 3d
Dorchester	Clay	28s. 11d	17s. 0d	23s. 7d	20s. 6d	14s. 7d
Forest Hill	Clay	23s. 8d	12s. 3d	14s. 5d	20s. 9d	11s. 8d
Garsington	Clay	30s. 8d	15s. 7d ¹⁰⁷		14s. 5d	23s. 0d
Noke	Clay	28s. 4d	13s. 0d	17s. 7d	17s. 6d	11s. 5d
Nuneham C.	Clay	38s. 8d	16s. 0d	25s. 7d	14s. 7d	11s. 5d
St. Audley	Clay	26s. 9d	13s. 6d	32s. 0d	23s. 0d	16s. 8d
Witney	Clay	16s. 4d	17s. 0d	24s. 7d	18s. 9d	15s. 0d
Yarnton	Clay	45s. 4d	30s. 6d	32s. 7d	20s. 6d	21s. 2d
Adderbury	Redlands	26s. 6d	13s. 2d	26s. 6d	18s. 3d	15s. 0d
Claydon	Redlands	26s. 2d	26s. 5d	33s. 9d	19s. 5d	20s. 0d
St. Aston	Redlands	20s. 0d	13s. 7d	18s. 0d	12s. 7d	11s. 7d
S. Newington	Redlands	40s. 5d	27s. 6d	31s. 9d	27s. 3d	18s. 5d
Leaffield	Limestone	19s. 4d	17s. 0d			
Souldern	Limestone	17s. 10d	14s. 0d	21s. 5d	29s. 9d	15s. 0d
W. Barton	Limestone	30s. 5d	16s. 5d	23s. 0d	21s. 3d	19s. 11d
A. Rowant	Chilterns	53s. 10d	22s. 0d	28s. 5d	30s. 3d	25s. 9d
Britwell Salome	Chilterns	42s. 0d	22s. 0d	37s. 9d	15s. 9d	22s. 5d
Shiplake	Chilterns	39s. 6d	18s. 0d	26s. 5d	30s. 9d	25s. 5d
Average ¹⁰⁸		33s. 5d	18s. 7d	26s. 2d	21s. 7d	17s. 3d

Sources: See Table 3.7

Table 3.9. Regional per capita poor relief expenditure, 1800-1, 1802-3, 1812-13, 1820-1 and 1828-9

Year	Clay	Redlands	Cotswolds	Chilterns
1800-1	34s. 6d ¹⁰⁹	28s. 3d	22s. 6d	45s. 1d
1802-3	17s. 5d	20s. 2d	15s. 8d	20s. 7d
1812-13	24s. 3d	27s. 6d	22s. 3d	30s. 10d
1820-1	19s. 6d	19s. 4d	25s. 6d	25s. 5d
1828-9	15s. 7d	16s. 3d	17s. 5d	24s. 6d

Sources: See Table 3.7

¹⁰⁵ I have used the 1801 census returns to provide the population totals for 1802-3, PP 1801 (II).
¹⁰⁶ I have used the 1811 census returns to provide the population totals for 1812-13, PP 1812 (XI).
¹⁰⁷ Garsington did not provide a return to the 1801 census. I have therefore used the 1811 return of 492 persons to calculate this statistic, *ibid*.
¹⁰⁸ This statistic excludes Garsington and Leaffield for which complete data sets are unavailable.
¹⁰⁹ This figure was inflated by the abnormally high expenditure at Culham during 1800-1. If this figure was removed the average expenditure would fall to 30s. which is closer to that of the Redlands region. This, of course, begs the question of why poor relief expenditure per head was so high in Culham.

These conclusions are supported by Figure 3.5 which shows variations in per capita poor relief expenditure in 1802-3, according to the Parliamentary Report of 1803-4. Particularly noticeable are the parishes of high expenditure per head strung along the lines of the Chilterns escarpment and Cherwell Valley as it cuts through the Redland and Cotswolds regions. However, it also shows the extent to which local circumstances could interrupt these general patterns with isolated pockets of high expenditure around Witney and Eynsham, and at Ambrosden.

Who were the poor?

The typical weekly pension list in the Redlands parish of Claydon in April 1798 consisted of payments to eleven individuals, of whom seven were widows, two were single mothers and their bastards and two were elderly men.¹¹⁰ Of the seven widows, one received 1s. per week, while the other six were paid 2s. 6d each. As the bread price began to rise the allowance paid to the six widows increased to 3s. on 15 December 1799 and then to 3s. 6d on 19 January 1800.

However, a marked change also took place in the composition of these lists as the bread price continued to climb. On 9 February 1800, a new group of claimants consisting of four adult men were each paid 'for six day's work', the sums received varying between 5s and 7s. each. These payments, which continued until 16 March, resumed after the harvest on 23 September. On 24 January 1801, a separate 'account of the roundsmen' appeared in the overseers' accounts which contained weekly lists of payments to seven individuals.¹¹¹ By the end of February, however, the number of roundsmen had fallen to three and such payments stopped at the end of April. They

¹¹⁰ OA.Par.Claydon,b.5

¹¹¹ *ibid.*

resumed on 27 September 1801 and the number of labourers receiving such payments fluctuated between ten and twenty each week throughout the winter, stopping once again at the end of April. In the following winter, the number of roundsmen had fallen to two or three each week.

It was recorded in the overseers' accounts at Yarnton that 'at a general meeting of the inhabitants of the parish of Yarnton this 25th day of March 1799 all persons coming to the overseers to be employed on the round shall take a ticket from the overseer to the employer and to receive one from the employer for the payment of his or her money and for the said persons to come at proper hours or other ways according to those hours.'¹¹² Roundsman expenditure in this parish fell from £56 (out of £331) in 1799-1800 to £28 (out of £486) in 1800-1.¹¹³

A separate account was kept in Noke's overseers' accounts in 1799-1800 for payments made for spinning.¹¹⁴ In total, £12.17.6 was paid for the purchase and spinning of flax. At Kidlington, two or three women were paid for spinning during the winter months while the overseers at Piddington paid seven women weekly sums of between 2s. 6d and 6s. each for spinning during the winter of 1800-1.¹¹⁵

The overseers' at Culham purchased huge quantities of wheat for the poor during the height of the scarcity in the spring of 1801.¹¹⁶ On 4 April 1801, a payment of £173.11.6 was made to Mr Blagrove for wheat and a further £136.15.6 was spent on 2 May 1801. At Noke, a separate account was kept 'for bread and wood'.¹¹⁷ Loaves were purchased at the start of each month during the winter of 1800-1. On 15

¹¹² OA.Par.Yarnton,b.9

¹¹³ *ibid.*

¹¹⁴ OA.Par.Noke,b.3

¹¹⁵ OA.K/II/a/2; OA.Piddington P.C.I/1

¹¹⁶ OA.Par.Culham,b.6

¹¹⁷ OA.Par.Noke,b.3

February 1801, £1.4.10 was spent on ‘bread for the children’.¹¹⁸ Eight loaves were distributed amongst the poor, costing £1.5.4, on 22 February and this form of relief continued until the end of May. On 24 March, cash payments were made to three individuals. The equivalent number of loaves was inserted against their names. Charles Summertown received 2s. 3d (one loaf), Thomas Simmons 6s. 9d (3 loaves) and John Barley 9s. (4 loaves).

Payments to labourers with families were made according to an allowance scale at Souldern in November 1799. A separate column in the accounts recorded the ‘number of children’ in each recipient’s family and the scale shown in Table 3.10 has been derived from these payments.

Table 3.10. Allowance scale at Souldern, 2 November 1799

Number of Children	Weekly Allowance
3	2s. 6d
4	3s. 6d
5	5s. 0d

Source: OA.Par.Souldern,b.9

The generosity of provision according to this scale can be contrasted with the magistrates’ scale of January 1800. Assuming that the basic labourers’ wage (for a man, wife and child) remained unchanged, the magistrates’ scale paid a larger cash sum per additional child. Thus, according to the magistrates’ scale a labourer with four children received an additional 5s. to provide for his second, third and fourth children. According to the scale issued on 2 November 1799, however, he would only have received an additional 3s. 6d, and an additional 1s. 6d for his fifth child compared to 2s. under the current magistrates’ scale.

¹¹⁸ *ibid.*

However, the price of a half-peck loaf at Oxford also increased, rising from 1s. 10d in November 1799 to 2s. in January 1800. According to the magistrates, the scale should be calculated in order that ‘each individual be able to procure a half-peck loaf’ and this is reflected in the level of allowances. In the case of the earlier scale, however, a labourer was paid less than the price of a half-peck loaf per additional child. The magistrates’ scale was therefore more generous than the earlier scale although it is impossible to determine whether the earlier scale had been their work too.

A half-peck loaf at Oxford cost 1s. 3d in January 1795, when the first county-wide Justices’ scale was issued. It had risen to 2s. by January 1800 when the magistrates’ scale was issued in Ploughley Hundred. Table 3.11 shows the value of these two scales in terms of the quantity of half-peck loaves which could be purchased per member of the labourers’ family.

Table 3.11. Comparison of Justices’ allowance scales, 1795 and 1800

Number in family	Justices’ Scale, January 1795		Magistrates’ Scale, January 1800	
	Weekly allowance in cash	Weekly allowance in loaves per person	Weekly allowance in cash	Weekly allowance in loaves per person
Man, wife and child	7s. 0d	1.87	7s. 0d	1.16
Man, wife and 2 children	7s. 0d	1.40	8s. 6d	1.06
Man, wife and 3 children	8s. 0d	1.28	10s. 0d	1.00
Man, wife and 4 children	9s. 0d	1.20	12s. 0d	1.00
Man, wife and 5 children	10s. 0d	1.14	14s. 0d	1.00
Bread Price		1s. 3d		2s.

Sources: OA.QSM.I/5 Epiphany Sessions; OA.Par.Souldern,b.9

This shows that the Justices’ Scale of 1795 was more generous than the scale adopted by the magistrates in Ploughley Hundred in January 1800. The size of this difference decreased with family size. The 1795 scale therefore guaranteed each member of a labourers’ family more than the cost of a half-peck loaf each and in the case of a family consisting of a man, wife and child, guaranteed almost two loaves each.

Table 3.12 shows an allowance scale pasted in the back of Steeple Aston’s overseers’ accounts dating from 1809-10. The number of loaves which could be purchased per family member according to this scale fell with the addition of each child until the third, after which each additional child received an amount equivalent to 80-88% of a half-peck loaf of Standard Wheaten Bread. The allowances for larger families were therefore substantially less generous than the Justices’ scales of 1795 and 1800. However, widows received more generous allowances, worth 1.68 loaves per week in the case of those widows aged above 60 years.

Table 3.12. Allowance scale at Steeple Aston, 1809-10

Number in family	Weekly allowance in cash	Weekly allowance in loaves per person
Man and wife	6s. 0d	1.44
Man, wife and child	7s. 0d	1.12
Man, wife and 2 children	8s. 0d	0.96
Man, wife and 3 children	9s. 0d	0.86
Man, wife and 4 children	11s. 0d	0.88
Man, wife and 5 children	12s. 6d	0.86
Man, wife and 6 children	14s. 0d	0.84
Widows	3s. 0d	1.44
Widows above 60 years	3s. 6d	1.68
Bread Price	2s. 1d	

Source: OA.Par.Steeple Aston,e.2

That the level of generosity could change even within the space of a few weeks is illustrated by two allowance scales issued by magistrates at Banbury in 1812. At a Justices’ meeting held in The Red Lion at Banbury on 17 October 1812 the allowance scale shown in Table 3.13 was issued.

Table 3.13. Justices’ allowance scale at Banbury, 17 October 1812

Number of children	Weekly allowance in cash	Weekly allowance in loaves per additional child
3	2s. 0d	0.80
4	4s. 6d	0.90
5	6s. 9d	0.90
6	9s. 6d	0.95
Bread Price	2s. 6d	

Source: OA.OA/9/10,item c

The allowance scale was altered on 12 November 1812 by which time the price of a loaf had risen to 2s. 9d. It was also ordered that this scale, shown in Table 3.14, should be used to calculate ‘the allowances to poor persons on account of their families in the hundreds of Banbury and Bloxham.’¹¹⁹

Table 3.14. Justices’ allowance scale at Banbury, 12 November 1812

Number of children	Weekly allowance in cash	Weekly allowance in loaves per additional child
2	2s. 10d	1.03
3	5s. 6d	1.00
4	7s. 11d	0.96
5	10s. 10d	0.98
Bread Price	2s. 9d	

Source: OA.OA/9/10/item c

These allowance scales show that the amount of bread which a labourer could purchase with his parish allowance could vary quite markedly. The Justices’ Scale of

¹¹⁹ OA.OA/9/10,itemC

1795 was more generous than the magistrates' scale of 1800, both of which were much more generous than the scales at Steeple Aston in 1809-10 and in Banbury and Bloxham Hundreds in 1812. The level of allowances, in terms of the amount of bread which could be purchased per member of the recipient's family, also varied according to the number in one's family, generally becoming less generous with an increase in family size. Large families were likely to include several small children who would consume less than their parents and older brothers and sisters. The allowance scales took this into account, paying amounts varying with the particular subsistence requirements of each additional child rather than according to an unvarying rule. Malthus' thesis that allowances encouraged breeding did not consider that the amount paid per additional child might only just cover the cost of feeding it.

Poor relief expenditure, 1793-1815: Conclusion

The examination in Chapter 2 of the parish material contained in the parliamentary reports provided some indication of the shifting geography of poor relief expenditure in rural Oxfordshire during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. It showed marked regional contrasts between the high spending Chilterns and Redlands parishes and the relatively low-spending parishes on the Clay Vales and Cotswolds. While identifying these variations, such a study provided little insight into what moulded them. The overseers' accounts, vestry minutes and other Poor Law sources considered in this chapter have put some flesh onto that skeleton and provided a fuller picture of the nature of poor relief in the eighteenth century and the diversity of responses to the subsistence crises of the mid-1790s and 1800-2.

It is possible to piece together a great deal of evidence from parish sources which suggest a fundamental discontinuity in poor relief policy and practice during the

1790s. The lists of disbursements which had hitherto been dominated by the aged, and infirm, widows, sick and single mothers and their bastards became populated by increasing numbers of able-bodied labourers and their families. At the same time, however, a wide variety of methods were adopted to deal with them, ranging from the provision of subsidised bread, rice and potatoes to the development of systematic allowance scales.

These allowance scales, though not an entirely new innovation in the mid-1790s, became a much more visible part of the mechanism of the Poor Laws during this period. They served to guarantee labourers' subsistence requirements in the face of stagnating wages and rising prices while, at the same time, de-personalising the process of poor relief. Yet, while removing much of the element of personal contact from this process, associated with inquiries into individual circumstances and character, they also brought the county magistrates into a much more direct involvement with the regulation of the condition of the poor.

It is very difficult to draw any firm conclusions from such a diverse body of evidence. When compared with Figure 3.2, Figure 3.6 suggests that the roundsman system became much more prevalent between 1793 and 1815 than it had been in the previous period, while Figure 3.7, which shows per capita poor relief expenditure in 1812-13, again exhibits a marked contrast between the high spending parishes of the Chilterns and Cherwell Valley and the rest of the county. However, in trying to identify regional contrasts one is in danger of moving away from the context within which the relief of the poor was set. Figure 3.7 also shows large differences in per capita expenditure between neighbouring parishes as well as those in different parts of the shire.

The vestry minutes of the parish of Yarnton can bring us back to earth. At a meeting held on 3 May 1812, Thomas Hall applied for a greater allowance from the parish 'in consequence of the high price of bread.'¹²⁰ He was granted 8s. per week but returned on 5 July 'urging the high price of bread and the badness of the weather which prevented him working by the great [by the piece].'¹²¹ Hall demanded an extra 4s. but, the vestry minutes continue, 'the gentlemen present thought 2s. was enough.'¹²² They agreed, however, to allow him 3s. 'with an understanding that he was to report to the meeting next vestry, whether this was or was not enough.'¹²³ This incident does not fit in with the cold generalised economic rationality attributed by Boyer, amongst others, to the administration of the Poor Laws in this period.

¹²⁰ OA.Par.Yarnton,d.3

¹²¹ *ibid.*

¹²² *ibid.*

¹²³ *ibid.*

Poor relief and the parish: Oxfordshire, 1812-13 to 1834-5

The post-Napoleonic War agricultural depression

The favourable period for agriculture ended with Napoleon's defeat in 1815. The high corn and meat of corn prices between 1793 and 1815 had yielded profits despite large rent, rate and tax increases.¹ The collapse of this prosperity began in 1812-13 when a good harvest was associated with falling prices and cries of 'agricultural distress'. So long as prices held up the state of the labouring population was masked by the general prosperity of the times. According to the Hammonds, however, once these prices collapsed, 'the facts of the labourers' condition were disclosed.'²

B.A.Holderness has recently remarked that 1812-13 was the pivotal year in grain prices and a land-mark in agrarian history.³ The average national wheat price reached the historic peak of 126s. 6d in the spring of 1812-13,⁴ nearly three times the level of prices in the immediate pre-war years.⁵ A second successive good harvest, in conjunction with the promise of renewed imports, drove the wheat price down from 112s. in August 1813 to 75s. 8d in December 1813 and then to 66s. 5d in July 1814.⁶

¹ J.D.Chambers & G.E.Mingay, *Revolution*, 118, presented evidence from the returns to the Board of Agriculture which showed that the cost of cultivating a 100 acres farm almost doubled between 1790 and 1813. According to J.Burnett, *Hands*, 20, farmers' profits averaged between 9 and 14 per cent a year during the French Wars.

² J.L. & B. Hammond, *Village*, 149

³ B.A.Holderness, *Prices*, 93

⁴ *ibid.*, 93

⁵ The average national wheat price increased from 46s. 6d between 1771-92, to 80s. 9d between 1793-1815, before falling to 62s. 1d between 1815-36, P.Deane & B.R.Mitchell (eds.), *Abstract*, 756.

⁶ *ibid.*

At Oxford, the price of a half-peck loaf fell from an average of 2s. 8d in 1812-13, to 2s. 1d in 1813-14 and to 1s. 8d in 1814-15.

The government, responding both to the promise of a further collapse in prices after the bountiful harvest of 1813-14 and to mass petitioning by the landed interest, set about collecting evidence from merchants, land agents and agricultural experts such as Arthur Young. They all pointed towards 80s. per Quarter as the lowest wheat price which could yield a reasonable return to farmers.⁷ In the early months of 1815, John Fane Esq., Chairman of the Oxfordshire Agricultural Society, and MP for the County of Oxford, presented a petition to the House of Commons signed by three hundred noblemen, gentlemen and yeomen of the county.⁸ It stated that ‘the effects of the depressed state of the agricultural interest are already felt by the labouring classes, a great proportion whereof are unemployed.’⁹ The combination of low yields and low prices following the harvest of 1814-15 threatened even greater problems. The average bread price at Oxford fell to 1s. 5d in 1815-16.

The government answered the farmers’ cries by re-structuring the Corn Laws, replacing a scale of allowances with a hard and fast rule, and therefore deviating from previous methods of agrarian protection. Although the Corn Laws of 1815 allowed foreign corn to be imported and warehoused duty free at any time, it could only be sold when the home price reached 80s. per Quarter.¹⁰ Foreign barley could be sold when its domestic price reached 40s. per Quarter and oats when it reached 27s. per Quarter.¹¹

⁷ B.Hilton, *Corn*, 11-15

⁸ *JOJ*, 25 February 1815

⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁰ 55 Geo.III, c.26 (1815)

¹¹ *ibid.*

However, the principle of a single price level below which sales of imports were prohibited and above which they were unrestricted soon proved to be inadequate. Imports from the continent were slow to respond to the poor domestic harvests in 1816 and 1817, and the average bread price at Oxford rose to 1s. 11d in 1816-17 and to 2s. 1d in 1817-18. Moreover, the ample supply of domestic grain, following the bountiful harvests between 1818 and 1821, drove the home wheat price below 80s. per Quarter.¹² The average price of bread at Oxford fell to 1s. 7d in 1819-20, before dropping to 1s. 5d in 1821-2 and then to 1s. 2d in the following year.

Although the price of bread increased slightly during the mid-1820s, rising to an average of 1s. 6d in both 1824-5 and 1825-6, and again between 1828-9 and 1831-2, its price in the last decade before the passage of the Poor Law Amendment Act in 1834 averaged 1s. 4d per annum, compared to an average of 1s. 8d per annum in the first decade of the nineteenth century and almost 2s. in the second decade. The fall in bread prices proved to be a double-edged sword. While reducing the cost of the poor's subsistence, it also threatened to undermine the incomes of farmers, who were both the principal employers and ratepayers. However, the effect of this price fall operated differentially according to farm size and yield. In theory, at least, the fortunes of both the farming and labouring populations would have varied geographically with the nature of the regional and local farming systems.

Poor relief expenditure, 1812-13 to 1823-4

Although the trend of poor relief expenditure continued to fluctuate with the price of bread at the hundred and regional level, peaking throughout Oxfordshire in 1817-18, Table 4.1 shows that in individual parishes there was much greater variation in the

¹² P.Deane & B.R.Mitchell, *Abstract*, 756

years when the peaks were recorded. This reflects the extent to which local circumstances moulded the geography of poor relief expenditure.

Table 4.1. Poor relief expenditure by parish, 1812-13 to 1819-20

Parish	Region	1812-13 £.s.d	1813-14 £.s.d	1814-15 £.s.d	1815-16 £.s.d	1816-17 £.s.d	1817-18 £.s.d	1818-19 £.s.d	1819-20 £.s.d
Culham	Clay	721.14.0	670.2.0	568.6.0	554.9.0				
Dorchester	Clay	1,025.7.0	900.19.0	851.19.0	843.2.0	830.9.0	1,015.4.0	1,042.1.0	1,055.5.0
Forest Hill	Clay	120.4.0	188.15.0	122.6.0	151.7.0				
Horspath	Clay		125.12.0	169.19.0	231.7.0	224.17.0	328.2.0	314.17.0	302.7.0
Northmoor	Clay	414.2.0	633.14.0	526.16.0	678.17.0	980.2.0			
Nuneham Court.	Clay	283.12.0	256.14.0	161.2.0	217.0.0	349.8.0	318.19.0	374.9.0	296.10.0
Sandford	Clay	276.0.0	247.11.0	182.17.0	184.16.0	215.4.0	280.10.0	243.18.0	179.18.0
Stanton St. John	Clay	728.3.0	496.3.0	402.18.0	605.9.0	641.9.0	565.0.0	579.9.0	556.14.0
Stratton Audley	Clay						429.11.0	363.10.0	474.1.0
Witney	Clay	2,209.9.0	2,340.7.0	2,371.1.0	2,075.6.0	2,736.5.0	3,067.6.0	3,518.2.0	3,197.1.0
Yarnton	Clay	386.6.0	382.18.0	398.19.0	366.4.0	392.5.0	418.7.0	400.8.0	373.8.0
Adderbury	Redlands	574.3.0	953.12.0	778.19.0	731.14.0	1,035.1.0	943.2.0	1,177.1.0	1,033.7.0
Barford St. John	Redlands	195.2.0	137.10.0	83.6.0	139.1.0	220.12.0	176.7.0	154.1.0	184.9.0
Barf. St. Michael	Redlands	526.8.0	476.4.0	419.6.0	383.2.0	403.3.0	378.11.0	511.18.0	372.2.0
Claydon	Redlands	339.4.0	263.5.0	240.16.0	227.15.0	310.0.0	242.17.0	258.14.0	263.1.0
Cropredy	Redlands	579.9.5	603.18.9	544.4.8	630.13.1	793.8.8	772.2.7	759.11.6	771.1.3
South Newington	Redlands	554.12.0	545.7.0	376.14.0					
Steeple Aston	Redlands	311.18.0	322.10.0	206.8.0	334.12.0	287.8.0	272.4.0	279.18.0	329.9.0
Swalcliffe	Redlands						642.7.0	639.8.0	560.14.0
Tackley	Redlands	421.5.0	410.16.0	319.2.0	396.7.0	466.6.0			
Tadmarton	Redlands	778.16.0	509.14.0	486.0.0	675.11.0	659.14.0			
Wiggington	Redlands	327.9.0	324.13.0	278.0.0	311.1.0	548.17.0	402.12.0	632.16.0	405.7.0
Burford	Limestone	1,326.1.0	1,530.4.0			1,210.5.0	1,311.7.0	1,372.1.0	1,379.3.0
Great Tew	Limestone	772.12.0	797.5.0	584.16.0	618.2.0	463.11.3	515.1.0	504.8.0	534.1.0
Salford	Limestone	493.8.0	412.2.0	407.17.0	360.17.0	422.12.0	415.17.0	546.14.0	446.6.0
Sandf. St. Martin	Limestone	603.8.0	784.4.0	556.14.0	598.15.0	611.10.0	499.4.0		
Souldern	Limestone	528.17.0	422.12.0						
Spelsbury	Limestone	765.4.3	770.7.0	565.16.3	740.10.5		888.6.0	825.18.3	844.8.8
Stoke Lyne	Limestone	660.7.1	736.0.3	535.7.3	433.2.9	526.18.5	509.0.4	650.17.0	571.10.3
Swinbrook	Limestone	146.9.0	114.5.0	190.18.0	105.0.0	147.16.3	145.11.0	187.2.0	177.2.0
Westcote Barton	Limestone	238.19.0	231.13.0	226.16.0			252.5.0	292.2.0	298.3.0
Aston Rowant	Chilterns	1,056.0.0							
Mapledurham	Chilterns	1,387.1.0	1,023.4.0	625.6.0	596.18.0	930.2.0	877.5.0	664.13.0	839.18.0
Pyrton	Chilterns	1,187.7.6	1,259.9.6	1,060.3.3	877.13.0	1,106.1.5	993.3.5	1,087.5.6	945.10.7
South Stoke	Chilterns					207.9.0	308.1.0	322.1.3	279.6.0
Whitchurch	Chilterns						936.12.0	951.12.0	886.2.0
Average ¹³		676.10.0	641.16.0	551.4.0	524.4.0	651.2.0	652.11.0	693.19.0	665.6.0
Bread Price		2s. 8d	2s. 1d	1s. 8d	1s. 5d	1s. 11d	2s. 1d	1s. 11d	1s. 7d

Sources: OA.Par.Culham,b.6; OA.Par.Dorchester,b.8; OA.Par.Forest Hill,b.3; OA.Par.Horspath,b.5; OA.Par.Northmoor,c.2; OA.Par.Nuneham Courtenay,b.2, b.5; OA.Par.Sandford-on-Thames,b.6,b.7; OA.Par.Stanton St. John,b.3,b.4; OA.Par.Stratton Audley,b.2; OA.Par.Witney,b.14; OA.Par.Yarnton,b.10; OA.Par.Adderbury,b.7; OA.Par.Barford St. John,b.4; OA.Par.Barford St.Michael,b.7; OA.Par.Claydon,b.5,b.6; OA.Par.Cropredy,b.11,b.12; OA.Par.South Newington,b.12; OA.Par.Steeple Aston,b.7; OA.Par.Swalcliffe,c.2; OA.Par.Tackley,b.11; OA.Par.Tadmarton,b.4,b.5; OA.Par.Wiggington,b.8,b.9; OA.Par.Burford,b.12; OA.Par.Great Tew,e.4,b.2; OA.Par.Salford,b.8; OA.Par.Sandford St. Martin,b.15; OA.Par.Souldern,b.10; OA.Par.Spelsbury,b.7; OA.Misc.Cor.I/1, Misc.Cor.I/2; OA.Par.Swinbrook,b.5; OA.Par.Westcote Barton,b.5,b.6; OA.Par.Aston Rowant.c.11; OA.Par.Mapledurham,b.4; OA.Par.Pyrton,c.6,c.7; OA.Par.South Stoke,b.12; OA.Par.Whitchurch,c.6

Of those parishes with complete sets of overseers’ accounts covering the period between 1812-13 and 1819-20, annual poor relief expenditure peaked in 1812-13 at Barford St. Michael (Redlands), Claydon (Redlands) and Mapledurham (Chilterns); in 1813-14 at Great Tew (Limestone), Pyrton (Chilterns) and Stoke Lyne (Limestone); in

¹³ This statistic excludes data from Culham, Forest Hill, Horspath, Northmoor, Stratton Audley, South Newington, Swalcliffe, Tackley, Tadmarton, Burford, Sandford St. Martin, Souldern, Spelsbury, Westcote Barton, Aston Rowant, South Stoke and Whitchurch, which are incomplete

1814-15 at Swinbrook (Limestone); in 1815-16 at Steeple Aston (Redlands); in 1816-17 at Barford St. John (Redlands) and Cropredy (Redlands); in 1817-18 at Sandford-on-Thames (Clay) and Yarnton (Clay); in 1818-19 at Nuneham Courtenay (Clay), Witney (Clay), Adderbury (Redlands), Wiggington (Redlands), and Salford (Limestone), and in 1819-20 at Dorchester (Clay). Although peak expenditure was concentrated at the start of the decade on the Cotswold Limestone and Chilterns and at the end of the decade on the Clay Vales and Redlands, there were several notable exceptions to these patterns.

Changing attitudes towards poor relief

In the face of continued high poor relief expenditure and agricultural distress, official attitudes towards the able-bodied poor were hardening in Oxfordshire. In his speech at the General Election of 1818, John Atkyns Wright, the Chairman of the Quarter Sessions and MP for the County of Oxford, stated his intention to devote a great deal of time and effort 'to the removal of moral evil and alleviation of the heavy and importunate burthen which the present system of the Poor Laws imposes upon almost every class in the community.'¹⁴

There is also evidence of a change in attitude at the parish level. At the Easter Sessions of 1817, Atkyns Wright had remarked that 'the appeals in parish settlement cases very much excel their usual numbers.'¹⁵ The parish vestry at Yarnton announced its intention 'to prevent as far as possible any new settlements from taking place by service or otherwise in order to halt the increase in poor relief expenditure.'¹⁶ At a meeting of the occupiers at Bampton it was resolved 'to hedge ourselves under a

¹⁴ *JOJ*, 20 June 1818

¹⁵ *JOJ*, 19 April 1817

penalty of £5 for each offence not to employ any labourers either men or women in farming service who are not a parishioner of Bampton.’¹⁷ This greater stringency in the provision of poor relief was also associated with the adoption in some parishes of the Select Vestry Acts of 1818 (58 Geo.III, c.69) and 1819 (59 Geo.III, c.12).

Administrative reform at the parish level

Attempts had been made to streamline the administrative mechanisms of the Poor Laws since the late eighteenth century. Gilbert’s Act of 1782 (22 Geo.III, c.83), for example, enabled groups of parishes to combine into Poor Law Unions in order to establish a common workhouse to be managed by a Board of Guardians. The adoption of this Act was left to the discretion of each parish. However, post-war poverty, unemployment and the fiscal exhaustion of ratepayers encouraged a major upheaval of the structure of local government in some parishes after 1815.

On 23 December 1818, members of the vestry at Bampton moved to adopt Gilbert’s Act in order to incorporate the parish into a workhouse union.¹⁸ Although the parishes around Bampton already sent their poor to its workhouse, an important consequence was the streamlining of the administrative structure by establishing a Board of Guardians to manage the workhouse and other aspects of relief. William Rogers Pearce was appointed as the Guardian of the Poor for the space of three years at an annual salary of £130.¹⁹

¹⁶ OA.Par.Yarnton,b.10

¹⁷ OA.Par.Bampton,c.8

¹⁸ OA.Par.Bampton,c.8

¹⁹ Gilbert’s Act was also adopted by the Witney vestry on 17 November 1807. A subsequent vestry meeting was held on 30 June 1808 to consider whether a new poorhouse was required. It was decided that the existing workhouse ‘may be made completely fit for all the purposes of the intended new erection and that therefore such new erections are unnecessary and will (if carried into erection) be a useless waste of the parish money’, OA.Par.Witney,b.14.

The vestry at Bampton also seized the opportunity to streamline the administrative mechanism offered by the Select Vestry Acts. These Acts together authorised the inhabitants of any parish, in a vestry assembled, to elect not more than twenty or less than five substantial householders, who together with the minister, churchwardens and overseers, after having been appointed by a magistrate, were to form a Select Vestry of the parish. Each Select Vestry was instructed to meet every fourteen days to inquire into and determine the proper objects of relief. One vote was to be given according to £50 rate assessed, and one for every £25 above that sum, up to a maximum of six votes. The adoption of a Select Vestry, like that of Gilbert's Act, was left to the discretion of each parish.

The vestry at Bampton gave notice of an election to a Select Vestry on 10 December 1820 and thirteen ratepayers were duly elected.²⁰ However, at least as important as the concentration of power in the hands of the Select Vestry was a parallel movement towards the professionalisation of parish administration. The Bampton vestry held on 26 March 1817 concluded that 'the office of overseer has become extremely burthensome and it is expedient that an assistant overseer be appointed.'²¹ Thomas Robinson was subsequently appointed in this role at an annual salary of £50 'to cover all expenses.'

The authors of the 1834 Poor Law Report concluded that the adoption of Select Vestries and assistant overseers 'may generally be considered a symptom of desire on the part of the ratepayers for improvement.'²² After the election of a Select Vestry at South Newington on 10 January 1821, it was resolved that meetings should be held more regularly at 2pm on the first Wednesday in the month and 'that minutes of the

²⁰ OA.Par.Bampton,c.8

²¹ *ibid.*

Proceedings and Resolutions of every vestry shall be entered in a book to be provided for that purpose.’²³ This suggests that prior to 1821, regular meetings were not held and minutes were not kept.²⁴

Nineteen sets of vestry minutes survive in Oxfordshire during this period, sixteen of which belong to Select Vestries. The average population of these sixteen parishes in 1821 was 1,061, more than twice the county average of 510.²⁵ Seven had populations of over 1,000 in 1821 and thirteen over 600. Although the adoption of Select Vestries has been seen as an attempt to adopt an improved system of relief management, less than one-third of Oxfordshire parishes adopted either Select Vestries or assistant overseers, and there is evidence that they were abandoned by some parishes during the early 1830s.

In the year ending 25 March 1821, Select Vestries had been adopted in 42 Oxfordshire parishes and assistant overseers in 30.²⁶ In the following year, the respective totals increased to 51 and 37.²⁷ Question 7 of the questionnaire sent out by the 1824 Select Committee on Labourers’ Wages asked, ‘Have Select Vestries or assistant overseers been established in your neighbourhood?’²⁸ Question 8 inquired, ‘If so, what effects have they produced?’²⁹ Eight of the ten districts covered in

²² S.G. & E.O.A. Checkland (eds.), *Report*, 190

²³ OA.Par.South Newington,d.2

²⁴ Until 1819, vestries were not obliged by law to keep minutes of their meetings and although minute books for earlier periods do survive for a small number of parishes a good many vestries only began to keep minutes in a systematic manner after they were obliged to so with the adoption of 58 Geo.III, c.69. The lack of earlier records may in part reflect the pattern of archival survival but is also a reflection of the governing style of most parishes which was personal rather than bureaucratic.

²⁵ PP 1822 (XV); OA.Par.Bampton,c.8; OA.Par.Burford,c.8; OA.Par.Cuddesdon,d.1; OA.Par.Deddington,b.22; OA.Par.Dorchester,e.1; OA.Par.Elsfield,e.1; OA.Par.Enstone,e.10; OA.Par.Eynsham,e.1; OA.PAR.171/2/A1/1 (Great Milton); OA.Par.South Newington,d.2; OA.Par.Spelsbury,e.2; OA.PAR.248/2/A1/1 (Standlake); OA.Par.Stanton St. John,e.7; OA.Par.Taynton,b.5; OA.Par.Warborough,e.3; OA.Woot.P.C.I/i/1 (Wootton)

²⁶ PP 1822 (V)

²⁷ *ibid.*

²⁸ PP 1825 (XIX)

²⁹ *ibid.*

Oxfordshire replied that their adoption had been ‘beneficial’.³⁰ The Woodstock respondent believed their effect to be ‘doubtful’, while the respondent for Mollington district did not reply to this question.³¹ The replies to Question 7, however, show that Select Vestries were not widespread in Oxfordshire at this time. Select Vestries were ‘not general’ in the eastern division of Bampton Hundred or in Bicester Hundred.³² There was only one in the whole of Binfield and Langtree Hundreds and there were ‘a few in places’ in the remaining districts.³³

In the year ending 25 March 1830, 56 parishes had adopted Select Vestries and 62 employed assistant overseers.³⁴ Their numbers subsequently fell, however, in the following year to 42 and 50 respectively.³⁵ These figures pose the question of whether the experiences of parishes which had adopted a Select Vestry, and which are much more comprehensively documented, were representative of trends in Oxfordshire as a whole.

Peter Dunkley suggested that ‘even where a Select Vestry was established under the Act of 1818 magistrates often remained unhampered by their activities.’³⁶ Although it required at least two magistrates to void a Select Vestry decision, authority was given to just one magistrate to order relief in cases of urgent need, the definition of which was left to the magistrate. Most Oxfordshire replies contained in the *Rural Queries* section of the 1834 Poor Law Report explicitly state or at least imply that they were subject to the interference of the magistracy in their

³⁰ *ibid.*

³¹ *ibid.*

³² *ibid.*

³³ *ibid.*

³⁴ PP 1831 (XI)

³⁵ PP 1832 (XLIV)

³⁶ P.Dunkley, *Paternalism*, 34

administration of poor relief.³⁷ Twenty three parishes replied to Question 43, which asked 'Is relief or allowances given in consequence of the advice or order of the magistrates, or under the opinion that the magistrates would make an order for it if application were made to them?'³⁸ Nineteen replied that some degree of magisterial intervention did take place.

Attitudes towards this interference are also revealed in replies to Question 44 which asked, 'What do you think would be the effect, immediate and ultimately, of making the decision of the vestry or select vestry in matters of relief final?'³⁹ Of the fifteen replies to this question, ten maintained that it would have an adverse effect on Poor Law administration. John Lechmere J.P., replying for Steeple Aston, concluded that it would have a 'very bad effect.'⁴⁰ He added that in his parish, the vestries were few and far between and when they were held the venue tended to the public house, which obstructed business. Walter Strickland J.P., respondent for the parish of Ducklington, replied that it would not be safe to make the decision of the Select Vestry final and that the magistracy should not be deprived of its power to order relief.⁴¹

Seven of the ten respondents who expressed support for the continued involvement of magistrates were themselves magistrates. Only one, the respondent for Goring, was an overseer. Support for the removal of the powers of the magistracy in Poor Law matters were received from Chadlington, Headington, Pyrton, West Shutford and Watlington. The three respondents whose occupations were recorded were all overseers (Samuel Keyte at Chadlington, Thomas Wiggins at Pyrton and Thomas

³⁷ PP 1834 (XXXIV)

³⁸ *ibid.*

³⁹ *ibid.*

⁴⁰ *ibid.*, Evidence of John Lechmere

Barnes at Watlington). West Shutford was the only parish of the five which had not already adopted a Select Vestry and assistant overseer. Their objections to magisterial interference rested on the belief that magistrates did not pay sufficient attention to the character of applicants or the circumstances of distress.

The parishes in which a Select Vestry had been adopted maintained that this system of relief administration had proved beneficial in many ways. A Select Vestry had been adopted at Chadlington a few years earlier and had been followed by the end of the roundsman system, the paying of greater attention to the character of the applicant and the causes of their distress and a reduction in poor rates. A Select Vestry met every other Monday to settle all parish business and there had not been a difference of opinion for several years. At both Pyrton and Watlington relief was generally ordered by the Select Vestry and not by the magistrates. The situation at Pyrton, so it was reported, 'cannot be bettered', while at Watlington the respondent concluded that 'it is our opinion that most J.P.s are aware of the impropriety of interference with the select vestry.'⁴²

Most replies to the question of whether the power of the magistrates ought to be curtailed seem to support the involvement of magistrates. This is hardly surprising bearing in mind that many of them were written by magistrates who, it appears, wanted to maintain their existing influence and responsibilities. This is confirmed in the correspondence between Oxfordshire magistrates and the Poor Law Commissioners in the winter of 1834-5, concerning the extent of their powers under the new system.

⁴¹ *ibid.*, Evidence of Walter Strickland

⁴² *ibid.*, Evidence of Thomas Wiggins, Evidence of Thomas Barnes

W.H.Ashurst J.P. blamed the present state of the Poor Laws on 'the want of means among the farmers generally of giving employment to the Poor.'⁴³ This, he continued, was due to the low grain price which 'does not repay them to put themselves to any expense in the better cultivation of the land.'⁴⁴ Under such circumstances, the magistrates' ability to interfere in the provision of poor relief was essential to prevent overseers from 'drawing the strings too tight with respect to their allowances to the Poor.' Robert Phillimore J.P. stated that 'it will be quite impossible to live in this county if the magistrates are not armed with a discretionary power of granting relief under certain circumstances.'⁴⁵

The tendency of magistrates to interfere in the administration of the parish was confirmed at Cuddesdon, where a note appended to the 1824 Poor Rate Return observed that:

'a select vestry has been appointed in this parish and after an experience of four years, the overseer has no hesitation in stating his firm conviction of the utility of this appointment. At the same time, he cannot refrain from remarking that much more good would have arisen from the appointment, had not the magistrates continually and in defiance of the Act of Parliament, interfered and checked the good effects arising from the knowledge which the vestry had of the character and means of the applicant for relief.'⁴⁶

The ratepayers at South Newington also came into conflict with the neighbouring magistrates during the early 1820s. The Select Vestry held on 7 December 1821 objected to a circular sent by magistrates at Deddington to all parishes in their district.⁴⁷ It had laid down a scale of relief which all parish overseers were required to observe. The Select Vestry maintained, however, that 'the magistrates have not the power to require the observance of any such general order but only to decide in cases

⁴³ PRO MH12/9732, W.H.Ashurst to Commissioners, 10 October 1834

⁴⁴ *ibid.*

⁴⁵ PRO MH12/9753, Robert Phillimore to Commissioners, 10 October 1834

⁴⁶ OA.Par.Cuddesdon,d.1

of individual appeal.’⁴⁸ Compliance with this order, it continued, was ‘likely to produce much evil.’⁴⁹ There followed a Malthusian condemnation of fixed allowance scales resting upon the adverse moral effects of the equalisation of the income of industrious and idle labourers and its tendency to encourage early marriage and population growth. Unfortunately, the Select Vestry minutes do not record the outcome of this conflagration.

Although the adoption of Select Vestries and Assistant Overseers did not by themselves improve the administration of the Poor Laws and reduce the cost of poor relief, the Select Vestry minutes include numerous instances in which relief was refused to individuals on account of their character and personal circumstances. For example, an application by John Smith to the Select Vestry at Warborough on 19 November 1822 ‘for work’ was refused because he owned a house and garden.⁵⁰ Thomas Dover applied for relief to the Great Milton Select Vestry on 29 November 1824 and was told that he ‘was not to be allowed anything on account of his property.’⁵¹ Poor relief was also refused to several applicants because they had left their previous employment without a satisfactory explanation. Simon Tully and John Goodmayes, both labourers at Warborough, applied to the Select Vestry on 16 January 1822 for their sons’ money to be made up ‘with what they had earned on the road.’⁵² The Select Vestry decided that the boys had been idle and therefore stopped their allowances. At a Select Vestry held at Cuddesdon on 5 July 1823, it was agreed that

⁴⁷ OA.Par.South Newington,d.2

⁴⁸ *ibid.*

⁴⁹ *ibid.*

⁵⁰ OA.Par.Warborough,e.3

⁵¹ OA.PAR.171/2/A1/1

⁵² OA.Par.Warborough,e.3

‘no further relief be given to Mark West who has defrauded the parish by representing himself unable to work at the same time he was working for other persons.’⁵³

Select Vestry minutes also show a growing disillusionment with existing forms of labour allocation, particularly the roundsman system. This is also evident in *Jackson's Oxford Journal*. Although letters and articles on the distressed state of the labouring poor had been written during the Napoleonic War years, these tended to focus upon the high price of provisions as the foundation of distress. The surges and slumps in the number and ferocity of complaints followed fluctuations in bread prices, both peaking in 1795-6, 1800-1 and 1812-13. The administration of the Poor Laws then remained free from criticism until after 1815.

The next attack was contained in a letter to the editor from ‘a constant reader’ published on 6 December 1817.⁵⁴ It contained details of an order passed by magistrates in a neighbouring county which had reduced the burden of poor relief expenditure and the moral evils inherent in the existing mode of administration. The magistrates in this unnamed county no longer permitted the practice ‘which has prevailed in late years of sending applicants on their ROUNDS.’⁵⁵ It had been directed by the County Bench that from 15 November 1817 all hearty, able, active, healthy men must seek work and not parish relief. If a labourer failed to find work the overseer must find them work either by dividing the number of labourers amongst the occupiers of the land or by employing them on the roads. Labourers employed in such a fashion were to receive the wages of independent labourers minus 2d per day.

A second letter, from an anonymous Oxfordshire magistrate, on 26 December 1818, was entitled ‘Practical and Permanent Regulations for the Management of

⁵³ OA.Par.Cuddesdon,d.1

⁵⁴ *JOJ*, 6 December 1817

County Parishes.’⁵⁶ It suggested that regular weekly relief should be reserved for the old, blind, lame, impotent or other persons not able to work. Occasional relief should be given to the sick, casual poor and persons with large families. Every farmer must also be obliged to take as many men as could be employed in the general labour and improvement of his farm. Allowances-in-aid-of-wages and regular weekly allowances on account of large families should be prohibited and as few persons as possible sent on the round. He concluded that if this plan were enforced ‘it will soon be found that four parishes out of every five in the County of Oxford house not more able-bodied labourers than may be usefully and profitably employed.’⁵⁷

The same magistrate wrote another letter to the newspaper, published in the 2 January 1819 edition.⁵⁸ He maintained that the need for labour during the French Wars had ‘demanded a proportionate increase of population.’⁵⁹ The rising waters of demand, having subsided at the end of the Wars, ‘have left the persons aground.’⁶⁰ This situation, he continued, ‘would soon cure itself but for the Poor Laws.’⁶¹ Thus, ‘the indiscriminate supply granted to every couple that chose to propagate a number of their species before they have exerted sufficient industry to support themselves ...brings misery onto themselves and increases the burden on their industrious and careful neighbours.’⁶² The twin pillars of Malthus’ condemnation of the Poor Laws had therefore entered the debate on its effects in rural Oxfordshire.

These concerns culminated in an address by W.H.Ashurst at the Michaelmas Sessions of 1824, reported in *Jackson’s Oxford Journal*. It stated that:

⁵⁵ *ibid.*

⁵⁶ *JOJ*, 26 December 1818

⁵⁷ *ibid.*

⁵⁸ *JOJ*, 2 January 1819

⁵⁹ *ibid.*

⁶⁰ *ibid.*

⁶¹ *ibid.*

‘...as he had frequently had occasion to refer to the mischievous practice of employing ROUNDSMEN, which still prevailed in many parishes, he now again returned to the subject, in consequence of the recommendations of the Committee of the House of Commons which sat during the last Session of Parliament on the state of the labouring classes of the country, and who strongly recommend to magistrates and county gentlemen to discontinue this practice, as being highly prejudicial to the interests of the employers and subversive of the good principles of the labourers.’⁶³

Ashurst recommended to ‘the gentlemen in the class of life of those he was then addressing to get rid of this injurious system’, concluding that he ‘spoke not only with his own sentiments, but those of the whole of the magistrates of the county.’⁶⁴

The growing disillusionment with the roundsman system and the need to find better methods of employing the labouring poor litter the pages of the surviving vestry and Select Vestry minutes. The adverse effect upon the industry of labourers was frequently commented upon. The Cuddesdon Select Vestry held on 2 September 1822 noted a complaint amongst farmers concerning ‘the inability of labourers on the rounds to keep their hours.’⁶⁵ Many had brought it to an almost common practice to take two hours for dinner which, it deemed, to be ‘unfair to the master and productive of ‘evil consequences.’⁶⁶ Although the Select Vestry resolved to prevent this tendency, a later minute, dated 3 March 1823, remarked upon continued complaints about the idleness of roundsmen and also of men appointed to work at the parish stone pit and on the parish roads. It was therefore decided to suspend such work and, instead, pay the men a loaf and 3d per head each week, in addition to a weekly rent allowance of 1s.

The South Newington Select Vestry also decided to abandon the roundsman system in the early 1820s. A minute dated 10 January 1821 records that ‘those labourers who

⁶² *ibid.*

⁶³ *JOJ*, 23 October 1824

⁶⁴ *ibid.*

⁶⁵ *OA.Par.Cuddesdon,d.1*

have not been allotted to any farmer according to the late agreement shall be employed by the surveyor on the roads and in the quarry and shall be paid according to their work by the overseer.’⁶⁷ Despite these attempts, the roundsman system continued to be used and a further resolution was passed on 14 April 1823 ‘to try for a month not to pay men on the rounds from the poor’s book, and if they cannot get employed, the overseer is to send them on the road.’⁶⁸

The success of these attempts at South Newington to prevent the payment of wages out of rates is reflected in a couple of ‘observations’ appended to the accounts sent by the parish overseer to the House of Commons in the years ending 25 March 1823 and 25 March 1824.⁶⁹ In the financial year 1822-3, the parish overseers remarked that ‘the churchwardens and overseers think it proper to mention that of the above sum of £374.5.11 [expended on the poor] a small portion has been paid to the poor as the wages of labour, it is not possible to state the exact sum, but it does not exceed £50.’⁷⁰ In the following year, annual poor relief expenditure had fallen to £285.4.7, while the sum paid out of the rates on the wages of labour was ‘not more than £2.’⁷¹ The roundsman system was also abandoned at Wootton in the early 1820 and surplus labourers were, instead, employed on the parish roads and set to work on tasks such as spinning and lace-making.⁷² Surplus labourers at Cuddesdon were employed in the Wheatley stone pit and their pay was regulated according to the scale of allowances shown in Table 4.2.⁷³

⁶⁶ *ibid.*

⁶⁷ OA.Par.South Newington,d.2

⁶⁸ *ibid.*

⁶⁹ *ibid.*

⁷⁰ *ibid.*

⁷¹ *ibid.*

⁷² OA.Woot.P.C.I/i/1

⁷³ OA.Par.Cuddesdon,d.1

Table 4.2. Rate of pay at Cuddesdon for stone-digging, 13 November 1824

Number in family	Rate of pay per yard of stone	Yards to be dug per week	Weekly pay in cash	Weekly pay in loaves per person
Man, wife and child	4d	3	6s. 0d	1.33
Man, wife and 2 children	5d	3	7s. 6d	1.25
Man, wife and 3 children	6d	3	9s. 0d	1.20
Single Man	3d	3	4s. 6d	3.00
Bread Price		1s. 6d		

Source: OA.Par.Cuddesdon,d.1

Although each labourer was expected to complete the same amount of work per week, the amounts which they were paid differed according to the size of their families. The difference between the amount earned through digging stone and each allowance was made up out of the rates. At South Newington, however, a Select Vestry held on 7 February 1821 resolved that ‘the men who are employed to dig stones work by the piece.’⁷⁴ Similarly, a Select Vestry held at Dorchester on 29 November 1822 ‘agreed to employ the paupers at present out of employ to pick stones at 2s. per load.’⁷⁵ Where labourers were paid according to a piece rate, weekly incomes would be determined by the amount of work completed rather than the size of their families. Married labourers, aided by their wives and children, would be likely to complete more work in a given period and therefore command larger sums than their single counterparts.

⁷⁴ OA.Par.South Newington,d.2

⁷⁵ OA.Par.Dorchester,e.1

Labour allocation in the parish

While surplus labourers were employed on the parish roads and stone pits in some parishes, in others complex systems of labour allocation were devised. The nature of these systems differed markedly, with fundamental repercussions on the level of poor relief expenditure in a parish. In some parishes, wages were paid by the overseer, driving up poor relief expenditure, while in others, they were paid directly by the farmer.

It was agreed at a parish vestry held at Milton-under-Wychwood on 1 August 1817 to contract the maintenance of the poor out to Thomas Hunt.⁷⁶ In addition, it was also determined that ‘all able-bodied men and boys belonging to the parish who have not three children who shall want employment shall be employed by the occupiers of the lands at Milton rateably according to the farmer by the yardland at reasonable wages.’⁷⁷

A similar system of labour allocation was adopted at Finmere, a highly impoverished parish in Ploughley Hundred, on 22 October 1817.⁷⁸ The overseer proposed that occupiers of properties assessed above £80 or thereabouts should take among them certain labourers on the parish list to be employed throughout the winter months to Lady Day old style, one for each £80 assessed. The wages of labourers allocated in such a manner were to be paid by the farmers.

The allocation of labourers on this basis was renewed on 31 August 1818 until New May Day.⁷⁹ It was also observed that ‘there are certain labourers disabled by eye or other infirmities’ and that it was the opinion of the vestry that such individuals

⁷⁶ OA.Mil.VII/10

⁷⁷ *ibid.*

⁷⁸ OA.Par.Finmere,e.1

⁷⁹ *ibid.*

‘should continue on their rounds when in want of work.’⁸⁰ Any labourers who had not been allocated on 21 October 1817 and who had turned to the parish for support were to be employed either on the parish roads or in the Marquis of Buckingham’s woods. The question of the allocation of boys was also considered and it was subsequently decided, at a meeting held on 18 September 1818, that of the twelve boys who appeared most likely to be on the overseers’ hands, four were to be relieved at their parent’s homes if necessary, and the other eight were to be sent on their rounds.⁸¹ The vestry also recommended that ‘if anything appears to the overseer by which the employment of the said boys can be made constant or otherwise better ordered, it is left open to him to be altered at his discretion.’⁸²

The allocation of labourers amongst the farmers at Finmere continued into the early 1820s. Mr White, the parish overseer, presented a list of thirty three married labourers, six older men and twenty three boys to the vestry on 12 September 1820.⁸³ The married labourers were divided amongst the occupiers at the rate of one per £50 assessed. Thirteen of the boys, the ones most likely to appear on the overseers’ books, were also to be allocated amongst the farmers and were to be paid 2s. each per week. The remaining ten boys were to receive 1s. per week to stay at home. In the following November, twenty five labourers were allocated amongst the farmers for the quiet winter months, while fifty three labourers were allocated in the following year.⁸⁴ Of these, it was agreed to take forty two on a constant basis, to be divided at the rate of one man to every £40 assessed.

⁸⁰ *ibid.*

⁸¹ *ibid.*

⁸² *ibid.*

⁸³ *ibid.*

⁸⁴ *ibid.*

In the 'winter-half' of the following year, surplus labourers were allocated at the rate of one man per £42 assessed and one strong boy per £52. The total assessment of the parish was £1,318 and there were forty six married labourers with and without families, twenty five 'strong boys', twenty four 'little boys' and four 'old men' to be allocated. The 'little boys' and 'old men', in addition to 12 married labourers were left unallocated and were to be employed by the overseer on the parish roads or as roundsmen.

A series of vestry meetings were held at Bampton during the winter of 1817-18 to consider 'the best method of employing the labouring poor.'⁸⁵ On 28 October 1818, it was decided to rate all the labourers in the parish at a certain wage and to allocate them amongst the farmers according to their contribution to the poor rate. All men not employed in this fashion were to be sent on the round, while a certain number of old and infirm labourers were selected to work on the parish roads. At a Select Vestry held on 22 December 1822, it was stated that 'several persons refuse to employ their share of parish labourers.'⁸⁶ However, at a meeting held seven days later 'to adopt some plan for the better employment of the poor', it was concluded that 'no other plan is more eligible than the existing one.'⁸⁷ If certain farmers continued to refuse to employ their share, the surplus labourers were to be sent round to those who would employ them. A similar system of labour allocation was also adopted in the adjacent parish of Standlake in the early 1820s. Here, twenty labourers were allocated by ballot 'equally and justly' on 10 December 1821.⁸⁸

⁸⁵ OA.Par.Bampton,c.8

⁸⁶ *ibid.*

⁸⁷ *ibid.*

⁸⁸ OA.PAR.248/2/A1/1

The allowance system

The surviving overseers' accounts and vestry minutes show that poor relief payments according to a standardised allowance scale continued to be made in many parishes in Oxfordshire at this time. In some instances, explicit reference was made to the regulation of allowances according to the price of bread. Thus, a 'Bread Allowance' was mentioned at Stratton Audley in 1817-18,⁸⁹ while the overseers at Swyncombe referred to the payment of 'Bread Money' in 1822-3 and 1823-4.⁹⁰ A Select Vestry held at Dorchester on 27 December 1821 agreed 'to reduce the weekly list as the overseers were directed in proportion to the price of bread.'⁹¹ This also suggests that the provision of poor relief at Dorchester was being regulated by the magistracy.

The Cuddesdon Select Vestry observed on 8 January 1821 that bread was being sold at 1s. 1d per loaf.⁹² It was therefore 'agreed to fix the sum for bread money at this price.'⁹³ A half-peck loaf at Oxford cost 1s. 4d, and a meeting on 21 February, received a complaint from the poor that 'although the bread was cheap, it was not good.'⁹⁴ The vestry was 'of a contrary opinion' and refused to take notice of this complaint.⁹⁵ At a Select Vestry held at Warborough on 25 February 1824, it was ordered that 'William Gammon having one child going out to work his pay to be reduced the price of a gallon loaf per week', also suggesting that a Bread Scale was in use.⁹⁶

Although it was not explicitly stated that a Bread Scale was in use, the Deddington Select Vestry held on 26 December 1821 observed that the fall in the price of

⁸⁹ OA.Par.Stratton Audley,b.2

⁹⁰ OA.Par.Swyncombe,b.10

⁹¹ OA.Par.Dorchester,e.1

⁹² OA.Par.Cuddesdon,d.1

⁹³ *ibid.*

⁹⁴ *ibid.*

⁹⁵ *ibid.*

provisions meant that the allowance paid to a man and wife could be reduced to 6s. per week.⁹⁷ This, it was maintained, was 'considered to be equal to 8s. which was previously paid when provisions were at a higher rate.'⁹⁸ There is also evidence that the administration of the Poor Laws in Bampton Hundred was subject to the interference of the magistrates. At a vestry meeting held at Bampton on 20 October 1815, it was agreed to supply bread to the poor at reduced rates.⁹⁹ A committee was established who, it was announced, were 'empowered to regulate the disbursement and sale of it in such manner as is usual in surrounding parishes where a similar plan of supplying the poor is applied and under the sanction of the magistrates.'¹⁰⁰

Opposition to the magistrates' scale, which was seen to be insensitive to falling bread prices, became increasingly vocal at Bampton during the early 1820s. It was therefore decided at a Select Vestry held on 29 September 1821 to adopt a new scale of allowances.¹⁰¹ According to the Bampton Bread Scale of 1821, the poor were divided into five classes. The first class contained labouring men in poorly remunerative employment and the temporarily sick; the second class included unemployed men, women and children over 12 years of age; the third class included children aged between 8 and 12 years; the fourth class, children between 4 and 8 years; and the fifth class, children under 4 years. Members of the first class were to receive each week an amount equivalent to three quartern loaves and a clothing allowance of 4d per week, in addition to a variable premium for having been employed. The second class were to receive the same food and clothing allowance, but

⁹⁶ OA.Par.Warborough,e.3

⁹⁷ OA.Par.Deddington,b.22

⁹⁸ *ibid.*

⁹⁹ OA.Par.Bampton,c.8

¹⁰⁰ *ibid.*

¹⁰¹ *ibid.*

no premium, while the third, fourth and fifth classes received 85%, 75% and 65% of the second class rate respectively. The parish officers calculated that this scale was 14% cheaper than the magistrates.¹⁰²

In other instances, while it was not stated in explicit terms that allowances were regulated according to the price of provisions, the bread price was scribbled in the margin of the overseers' accounts each week suggesting that it was used to regulate the size of allowances. This was the case at Forest Hill between 7 April 1815 and 29 January 1816;¹⁰³ Horspath between 17 January 1817 and 19 July 1821;¹⁰⁴ Stratton Audley between 18 February 1814 and 26 October 1832¹⁰⁵ and South Stoke between 7 October 1816 and 9 February 1824.¹⁰⁶

Table 4.3. Allowance scale at Finmere, 28 December 1821

Number in family	Weekly allowance in cash	Weekly allowance in loaves per person
Man and wife	5s. 6d	1.83
Man, wife and 2 children	7s. 6d	1.25
Man, wife and 3 children	9s. 0d	1.20
Man, wife and 4 children	10s. 6d	1.16
Man, wife and 5 children	12s. 0d	1.14
Bread Price		1s. 6d

Source: OA.Par.Finmere,e.1

At Finmere, the allowance scale shown in Table 4.3 was adopted by the parish vestry on 28 December 1821.¹⁰⁷ The allowance of 1s. 6d per additional child starting with the third was the same price as a half-peck loaf of standard wheaten bread at Oxford, suggesting that the scale was regulated by the price of bread. Table 4.4 shows

¹⁰² *ibid.*
¹⁰³ OA.Par.Forest Hill,b.3
¹⁰⁴ OA.Par.Horspath,b.5
¹⁰⁵ OA.Par.Stratton Audley,b.2
¹⁰⁶ OA.Par.South Stoke,b.12
¹⁰⁷ OA.Par.Finmere,e.1

a series of allowance scales adopted by the Standlake Select Vestry in the early 1820s.¹⁰⁸

Table 4.4. Allowance scales at Standlake, 23 October 1820 to 3 January 1824

Number in family	23 October 1820		21 December 1821		3 January 1824	
	Weekly allowance in cash	Weekly allowance in loaves per person	Weekly allowance in cash	Weekly allowance in loaves per person	Weekly allowance in cash	Weekly allowance in loaves per person
Man and wife	6s. 0d	2.10	5s. 0d	1.67	5s. 6d	2.06
Man, wife and child	7s. 6d	1.76	6s. 3d	1.39	6s. 9d	1.69
Man, wife and 2 children	9s. 0d	1.59	7s. 6d	1.25	8s. 0d	1.50
Man, wife and 3 children	10s. 6d	1.48	8s. 9d	1.17	9s. 3d	1.39
Bread Price	1s. 5d		1s. 6d		1s. 4d	

Source: OA.PAR.248/2/A1/1

Although the cash allowance paid to each additional child on 23 October 1820 was slightly higher than the cost of a loaf, the allowance paid per additional child according to the later scales was slightly lower than the bread price. Real incomes, calculated in terms of the number of loaves which could be purchased per person, were therefore reduced. A labourer with a wife and two children received an allowance equivalent to 1.59 loaves per person on 23 October 1820, 1.25 loaves on 21 December 1821 and 1.50 loaves on 3 January 1824. The lowest allowances, in real terms, were paid when the price of bread was at its highest.

The Standlake allowance scale of 21 December 1821 was also slightly less generous than the one adopted at Finmere a week later. While a man and wife could purchase 1.83 loaves with their allowance at Finmere, they would only receive 1.67 loaves at Standlake. A family consisting of a man, wife and two children received an

¹⁰⁸ OA.PAR.248/2/A1/1

allowance equivalent to 1.25 loaves per person in both parishes, but the allowance to labourers with more than two children was slightly smaller at Standlake.

Poor relief expenditure, 1812-13 to 1823-4: Summary

Totals of annual poor relief expenditure taken on their own can be a very misleading guide to the nature and extent of unemployment and poverty in a parish. It is not automatically the case that low rates of relief meant low rates of what we might think of as unemployment. Similarly, high poor relief expenditure in a parish may reflect more generous allowance payments, and therefore higher real incomes amongst its poor, than in a parish where small allowances are paid and annual poor relief expenditure is low. To come to terms with variations in poor relief expenditure it is necessary to determine the precise form of relief adopted.

Table 4.5. The effects of the system of employment on the poor relief burden

	Parish A	Parish B	Parish C
Total wage bill	£100	£100	£100
Overseer	£50	£100	£0
Farmer	£50	£0	£100
Poor relief expenditure	£50	£100	£0

Table 4.5 shows the way in which poor relief expenditure could vary in three parishes, each with the same winter labour surplus, but dealing with it in different ways. Each of the three parishes has the same winter labour surplus, requiring a subsistence income (wage) of £100. In parish A, the surplus labourers are employed as roundsmen with the parish footing half of the wage bill and the farmers the other half. In this instance, poor relief expenditure amounts to £50. In the case of parish B, however, the surplus labourers are allocated amongst the farmers in proportion to their

acreage but the wage bill is paid entirely by the overseers. Here, poor relief expenditure amounts to £100. In parish C, while labourers are also allocated amongst the farmers according to their acreage, the farmers are expected to pay the bill, and therefore poor relief expenditure amounts to £0.

The decrease in poor relief expenditure, shown in Chapter 2, which set in throughout rural Oxfordshire during the early 1820s may therefore simply reflect a shift in the system of relief, towards the allocation of labourers amongst farmers who were expected to foot the bill directly, rather than a reduction in the problems of rural unemployment and low wages. The extent of this shift in poor relief practices, and therefore the pattern of expenditure, may have varied geographically. High per capita poor relief expenditure in the Redlands and Chilterns regions may therefore reflect the continued use of the roundsman system rather than greater seasonal unemployment, low wages or poverty. This seems to be confirmed by a comparison of Figures 4.1 and 4.2.

This may also help to explain why complaints about the declining morality and industry of the labouring population continued to mount during the early 1820s, even though poor relief expenditure fell. It may have been the case that although labourers were allocated amongst farmers during the winter months, their wages paid by the farmers, the level of these wages continued to be fixed by the parish vestry according to the number of mouths to feed and the price of bread rather than the quantity or quality of work performed. Although poor relief expenditure might fall in such circumstances, the grounds for Malthusian criticisms still remained.

Such conclusions, however, say very little about the actual size of labourers' real incomes. Table 4.6 shows that parish allowances, measured in terms of the number of loaves which could be purchased per person, varied both spatially and temporally.

Table 4.6. Allowances for a man, wife and 2 children in Oxfordshire

Place	Date	Weekly allowance in cash	Bread price	Weekly allowance in loaves per person
Oxfordshire	January 1795	7s. 0d	1s. 3d	1.40
Ploughley 100	January 1800	8s. 6d	2s. 0d	1.06
Standlake	23 October 1820	9s. 0d	1s. 5d	1.59
Standlake	21 December 1821	7s. 6d	1s. 6d	1.25
Finmere	28 December 1821	7s. 6d	1s. 6d	1.25
Standlake	3 January 1824	8s. 0d	1s. 4d	1.50
Cuddesdon	13 November 1824	7s. 6d	1s. 6d	1.25

Sources: OA.QSM.I/5, Epiphany 1795; OA.Par.Souldern,b.9; OA.PAR.248/2/A1/1;
OA.Par.Finmere,e.1; OA.Par.Cuddesdon,d.1

While showing that labourers’ allowances could vary markedly in real terms, these calculations do not take into account other types of relief provided by the parish overseer. The provision of fuel, food, clothing and housing by the parish could potentially override these variations in real incomes. It may have been the case that although a labourer received a small cash allowance, his rent was paid by the parish. Such calculations can only be made by a detailed examination of the lists of disbursements contained in the overseers’ accounts.

Poor relief expenditure, 1824-5 to 1834-5

In a series of letters entitled ‘The Evils of the Poor Laws’ published in *Jackson’s Oxford Journal* in 1832 and 1833, the Revd. John Jordan J.P., curate at Church Handborough, observed the operation of the Poor Laws in his own and neighbouring parishes. He concluded that the system of outdoor relief in its kaleidoscope of forms had the universal effect of pauperising the labouring poor wherever it operated.¹⁰⁹ The ultimate expression of this could be seen in his own parish where, he observed,

¹⁰⁹ *JOJ*, 24 March 1832

‘through six months at least, we have to provide labour for not less than 50 individuals ...and for a period of about six weeks, from 130 to 140 men, women and boys are turned out daily on four miles of road, nominally to keep it in repair, but really to walk it in sloth.’¹¹⁰

Jordan laid the blame for the maladministration of the Poor Laws squarely on the shoulders of the allowance system. This, he maintained, had been adopted by his brother magistrates thirty or forty years before ‘as temporary relief during a period of extreme necessity.’¹¹¹ Although he regarded this form of relief as a humane measure when first adopted, ‘it should never have become, as it is now, permanent though illegal.’¹¹² Jordan concluded that ‘the magistrates who first necessarily devised it for the relief of the labourers should also have revoked it when the necessity for it had passed away.’¹¹³ From this single measure, he concluded, ‘had resulted more distress to the labourer, and more injury to the community at large, than from any other.’¹¹⁴ It had removed the check on idleness and, by fixing the labourers’ allowance in proportion to the size of his family, had removed the check on population.¹¹⁵

These conclusions were confirmed by an editorial in *Jackson’s Oxford Journal* on 19 April 1834, which referred to the ‘depressing influence of the Poor Laws on the energies of the County.’¹¹⁶ Although the editorial recognised that the crisis predicted by the 1817 Poor Law Report ‘had not arisen in any decided form’, it concluded that the system of outdoor relief had undermined the morality and industry of the labouring population and had caused widespread misery and despondency throughout

¹¹⁰ *ibid.*

¹¹¹ *ibid.*

¹¹² *ibid.*

¹¹³ *ibid.*

¹¹⁴ *ibid.*

¹¹⁵ At Church Handborough, ‘about twenty five married men received relief for the support of their families in the winter, PP 1834 (XXXI), Evidence of Revd. John Jordan.

Oxfordshire. However, while maintaining that the 1834 Poor Law Report had ‘concentrated these differences into a focus ...the effects of the Poor Laws as a national system have been fully developed’, the editorial did acknowledge that the mode of administration of the Poor Laws in Oxfordshire was diversified, ‘with variations not only in different districts, but to a certain extent in almost every parish.’¹¹⁷

The allowance system

According to Edward Simeon J.P., in his return to the 1831 House of Lords’ Select Committee on the Poor Laws, allowance payments to able-bodied labourers and their dependents at Whitchurch, in the extreme south of the county, had in the past been regulated according to a scale established by the local magistrates at petty sessions.¹¹⁸ This scale, which was termed ‘Bread Money’, had recently been abandoned with the aim of keeping the power of giving relief as much as possible in the hands of the overseer, ‘who is of course’, Simeon continued, ‘liable to be summoned before the magistrates if he does not do what is right.’¹¹⁹ He also observed that ‘although we [the magistrates] do not acknowledge the rule of bread money, we are guided a good deal by the price of bread.’¹²⁰ Simeon also noted that similar guidelines regulated poor relief in the nearby parish of Swyncombe.

There is also evidence that the payment of ‘Bread Money’ had been abandoned elsewhere in the county. The Cuddesdon Select Vestry agreed at a meeting held on 21 November 1833 that ‘the rule which had been sometime in operation of allowing 1s.

¹¹⁶ *JOJ*, 19 April 1834

¹¹⁷ *ibid.*

¹¹⁸ PP 1831 (VIII), Evidence of Edward Simeon J.P.

¹¹⁹ *ibid.*

6d per head for every child above three in lieu of the loaf but which had been gradually given up should finally be laid aside.’¹²¹ It was also resolved that any allowance in future to a labourer with three children ‘should be made to depend altogether on what the vestry saw fit to decide in each case so as to leave themselves of liberty to refuse allowances altogether if the proposal fits or to make it to whatever amount the circumstances of the case might seem proper.’¹²² In a letter received by the Poor Law Commissioners on 20 December 1834, George Dennison, the curate at Cuddesdon, stated that ‘by striking off the old rule of head money according to the number of family, poor rates have been reduced from 8s. to 6s. in the £.’¹²³ He also added, however, that the Select Vestry was at a loss how to deal with the poor in a parish ‘overstocked with labour and with little means of finding parish employment.’¹²⁴

Although these examples suggest that some parishes were having a much greater say in the administration of the Poor Laws within their bounds in the late 1820s and early 1830s, there is also evidence of the continued involvement of local magistrates at petty sessions. Revd. Thomas Bishop of Oriel College, in a letter received by the Poor Law Commissioners on 4 December 1830, called their attention to a document which had recently come into his hands. This, he maintained, contained a scale of allowances issued by two magistrates in the north of the county. The document consisted of an order issued by Daniel Stuart J.P. of Wickham Park, near Banbury, and Charles Wyatt J.P. of Broughton Park, near Banbury, to regulate labourers’ incomes according to the scale shown in Table 4.7.

¹²⁰ *ibid.*

¹²¹ OA.Par.Cuddesdon,d.1

¹²² *ibid.*

¹²³ PRO MH12/9658, George Dennison to Commissioners, 20 December 1834

Table 4.7. Allowance scale in Banbury and Bloxham Hundreds, 4 December 1830

Number in family	Weekly allowance	Number in family	Weekly allowance
Single Man	6s. 0d	Man and Wife	8s. 0d
Single Woman	3s. 6d	Man, Wife and Child	9s. 0d
Boys up to 12 years at school	1s. 0d	Man, Wife and 2 Children	10s. 0d
Boys up to 12 years at work	2s. 6d	Man, Wife and 3 Children	11s. 6d
Boys (12-15) at work	2s. 6d	Man, Wife and 4 Children	13s. 0d
Boys (15-18) at work	3s. 6d	Man, Wife and 5 Children	14s. 6d
Boys (18-20) at work	5s. 0d	Man, Wife and 6 Children	16s. 0d

Source: PRO HO52/9, Thomas Bishop to Home Secretary, 4 December 1830

This circular had been sent by a tenant to Bishop’s brother who was a proprietor of an estate in the parish of Swalcliffe near Banbury. The tenant, John Anderton, who served as an overseer of the poor in that parish, stated that he had seen the circular in the hands of more than one overseer and that it had been sent to all the overseers within the district for which these two magistrates operated. Bishop concluded that ‘the practice I know is common, I fear almost universal.’¹²⁵ He also maintained that such a scale ‘must be regarded as fixing the price of labour’ and was therefore illegal.¹²⁶ Each case, he continued, should be judged on its own merits rather than being determined by some arbitrary scale fixed by the magistrates.

Daniel Stuart replied to this accusation in a letter received by the Home Secretary on 16 December 1830. He stated that:

‘I have not heard of any rate of wages being established. A scale of allowances to paupers applying for relief has been recommended by the magistrates to the overseers of the poor to guide them, but not to bind them to a compliance with it. Such a scale has long existed here and elsewhere. At this season of the year it is usually revised and regulated according to the price of bread. That was done on the 4th of December last year, and this year on the 5th of December.’¹²⁷

¹²⁴ *ibid.*
¹²⁵ *ibid.*
¹²⁶ *ibid.*
¹²⁷ PRO HO52/9, Daniel Stuart J.P. to Home Secretary, 16 December 1830

There is evidence, however, that wage rates were fixed by the parish vestry in some instances. On 14 October 1829, the Standlake Select Vestry ordered that ‘able-bodied men be allowed to earn 8s. per week.’¹²⁸ It was also ordered that ‘such as having families and requiring relief to be paid by the overseers.’¹²⁹ At Stanton St. John, men’s wages were increased by the Select Vestry from 8s. per week to 9s. per week on 24 January although an explanation is not provided for this rise.¹³⁰ It was also resolved at a Select Vestry held on 28 June 1830 that ‘the earnings of the women shall be considered a part of the sum total of a family’s wages in the same way as the men’s earnings.’¹³¹

Table 4.8 contains a series of allowance scales established by the Standlake Select Vestry during the late 1820s and early 1830s. It shows that real incomes were highest during periods of lower prices. Or, put another way, that allowances did not increase in line with prices.

The term ‘Head Money’ was used to describe payments to labourers with families at Claydon in the late 1820s and early 1830s.¹³² The number of children in each family was inserted against the labourer’s name in the overseers’ accounts and it is therefore possible to derive the allowance scales according to which payments were made. These are shown in Table 4.9. Payments were only made to labourers with three or more children which suggests that the wages paid to labourers with fewer children were deemed sufficient for their support. It also shows that while the level of

¹²⁸ OA.PAR.248/2/A1/1

¹²⁹ *ibid.*

¹³⁰ OA.Par.Standlake,e.7

¹³¹ *ibid.*

¹³² OA.Par.Claydon,b.6

allowances generally followed the rise and fall in bread prices, they did not necessarily move in direct proportion.

Table 4.8. Allowance scales at Standlake, 8 October 1828 to 17 October 1834

	8 October 1828		6 April 1831		7 May 1834		17 October 1834	
	Weekly pay in cash	Weekly pay in loaves per person	Weekly pay in cash	Weekly pay in loaves per person	Weekly pay in cash	Weekly pay in loaves per person	Weekly pay in cash	Weekly pay in loaves per person
Man & wife	6s. 0d	1.80	6s. 0d	1.89	5s. 0d	2.14	5s. 0d	2.50
Man, wife & child	7s. 8d	1.53	7s. 6d	1.58	6s. 2d	1.76	6s. 0d	2.00
Man, wife & 2 children	9s. 4d	1.40	9s. 0d	1.42	7s. 4d	1.57	7s. 0d	1.75
Man, wife & 3 children	11s. 0d	1.32	10s. 6d	1.33	8s. 6d	1.46	8s. 0d	1.60
Man, wife & 4 children	12s. 8d	1.27	11s. 0d	1.26	9s. 8d	1.38	9s. 0d	1.50
Single men							3s. 0d	3.00
Single women							2s. 6d	2.50
Bread Price	1s. 8d		1s. 7d		1s. 2d		1s. 0d	

Source: OA.PAR.248/2/A1/1

Table 4.9. Family allowances at Claydon, 6 November 1824 to 23 April 1831

Number of children	6 Nov. 1824	10 Jan. 1829	15 April 1829	6 Nov. 1830	4 Dec. 1830	23 April 1831	15 Oct. 1831
2							
3	0s. 10d	1s. 0d	0s. 6d	1s. 0d	1s. 6d	2s. 2d	1s. 0d
4	2s. 0d	2s. 6d	2s. 0d	2s. 0d	2s. 6d	3s. 4d	2s. 0d
5	3s. 2d			3s. 0d	3s. 6d	4s. 6d	3s. 0d
Bread price	1s. 6d	1s. 8d	1s. 7d	1s. 6d	1s. 6d	1s. 7d	1s. 6d

Source: OA.Par.Claydon,b.6

According to the allowance scale adopted on 15 April 1829, a married labourer with four children received an additional 1s. 6d for his fourth child, equivalent to a half-peck loaf. On 4 December 1830, however, when the bread price was also 1s. 6d, he would only receive an additional 1s. for the fourth child. A few months later, on 23 April 1831, when the bread price was 1s. 7d, he would have received 1s. 2d.

The parish overseers at Adderbury, in the neighbouring hundred of Bloxham, began to set their accounts in a more detailed and systematic fashion when they began a new book on April 1829.¹³³ The payment of ‘Head Money’ was recorded in a separate column and Table 4.10 shows that the allowances paid at Adderbury were more generous than the ones paid at Claydon.

Table 4.10. Family allowance scales at Adderbury and Claydon

Number of children	28 March 1830	30 December 1830	18 September 1831	30 July 1831	30 July 1832
Adderbury					
3	1s. 0d	1s. 6d	1s. 6d	1s. 0d	
4	2s. 6d	3s. 0d	3s. 0d	2s. 0d	1s. 0d
5	4s. 0d	4s. 6d	4s. 6d	3s. 0d	2s. 0d
6	5s. 6d				
Claydon					
3		1s. 6d	1s. 0d		
4		2s. 6d	2s. 0d		
5		3s. 6d	3s. 0d		
6					
Bread Price	1s. 6d	1s. 6d	1s. 6d	1s. 5.5d	1s. 5.5d

Sources: OA.Par.Adderbury,b.9; OA.Par.Claydon,b.6

¹³³ OA.Par.Adderbury,b.9

Although payments to labourers with families at Claydon were listed as ‘Head Money’, a list of allowances paid to labourers in constant employment, shown in Table 4.11, was also inserted in the overseers’ accounts on 15 October 1831.¹³⁴

Table 4.11. Allowances-in-aid-of-wages at Claydon, 15 October 1831

Number in family	Weekly pay in cash	Weekly pay in loaves per person
Man, wife and 3 children	10s. 0d	1.33
Man, wife and 4 children	11s. 0d	1.22
Man, wife and 5 children	12s. 0d	1.14
Bread price		1s. 6d

Source: OA.Par.Claydon,b.6

Payments began with the third child, suggesting that the wages paid to labourers with smaller families were sufficient for their maintenance. This suggests that the absence of scales depicting allowances-in-aid-of-wages may therefore simply reflect a change in relief policy, moving towards the fixing of wage rates by the vestry and their supplement by family allowance payments, rather than any fundamental alteration in the conditions of employment and real incomes of the labouring poor. Thus, Richard Hall in his Report on Bicester Union observed that:

‘In several, it is the parish that fixes the rate of wages: it is first determined how much a man is to receive according to the circumstances of his family, and then the farmers, at an annual meeting, compete with each other as to what portion of that sum the employer shares, the rest being made up “off the Book”.’¹³⁵

Labour allocation

In a letter received by George Nichols Esq. on 10 July 1835, Richard Hall stated that ‘in many parishes, especially in Oxfordshire, I have seen the roundsman and ticket systems adopted, as the best means of conveying to the pauper that amount of income

¹³⁴ OA.Par.Claydon,b.6
¹³⁵ PRO MH12/9614, Richard Hall to Commissioners, 4 July 1835

which the parish is determined to be his due.’¹³⁶ However, an examination of the replies to the *Rural Queries*, taken in conjunction with evidence from overseers’ accounts, vestry minutes and the correspondence of the Poor Law Commissioners, suggests that the decline of the roundsman system, which had been in evidence in some parts of the county in the early 1820s, continued during the late 1820s and early 1830s.

Figure 4.3 shows that the parishes in which the roundsman system continued to be practised were concentrated in the Redlands region in the north of the county, with a few isolated instances elsewhere. According to Edward Gilson, in his report on the Banbury Union, ‘The district is a very distressed one - the parishes for the most part are highly pauperised ...few districts require the immediate attention of the Board more than the vicinity of Banbury.’¹³⁷ He also observed that Banbury and Bloxham Hundreds ‘are more highly rates as compared to their population than any other part of the County.’¹³⁸ This conclusion is confirmed by Figure 4.4.

Parishes which definitely did not send labourers ‘on their rounds’ were strung out along the central vale and along the foot of the Chiltern dip-slope, adjacent to the Thames in the south. Per capita poor relief expenditure in these parishes was amongst the lowest in the county. Richard Hall, in his Report on the Woodstock Union, remarked, ‘I might add that the farmers in most places have come to an arrangement among themselves to divide the labourers, and thus keep them off the parish and where this good understanding does not exist, and the roundsman system is adopted ...the sum expended is swelled to the usual amount.’¹³⁹ A comparison of Figure 4.3

¹³⁶ PRO MH32/34, Richard Hall to George Nichols Esq., 10 July 1835

¹³⁷ PRO MH12/9577, Edward Gilson to Commissioners, 4 March 1835

¹³⁸ *ibid.*

¹³⁹ PRO MH12/9614, Richard Hall to Commissioners, 20 June 1835

with Figure 4.2 shows that some parishes which had used the roundsman system in the first two decades of the nineteenth century had abandoned it by the end of the third. Several parishes in the Redlands region abandoned roundsman payments in the late 1820s and early 1830s in a quest to reduce their poor relief burdens and to restore their labourers to industrious ways.

Okeden, in his report to the Poor Law Commissioners compiled in 1832, had remarked that one-third of the labourers at Duns Tew were in receipt of poor relief and that some of them were employed as roundsmen.¹⁴⁰ However, in a letter received by the Poor Law Commissioners from the Select Vestry of that parish on 15 October 1834, it was stated that it was now the case that ‘the baneful practice of roundsmen has been discontinued.’¹⁴¹ Okeden had also described the operation of the roundsman system at Deddington as follows:

‘during the seven winter months, about sixty men apply every morning to the overseer for work or pay. he ranges them under a shed in the garden. If a farmer or anyone else wants a man, he sends to the yard for one, and pays half the day’s wages; the rest is paid by the parish. At the close of the day the unemployed are paid the wages of a day, minus two pence.’¹⁴²

Yet, in a letter received by the Poor Law Commissioners on 23 December 1834, Samuel Field, Clerk to the magistrates and Select Vestry at Deddington, maintained that the roundsman system which ‘prevailed here to a great extent’ was abandoned four years previously and replaced by a system of labour allocation in proportion to the acreage occupied.¹⁴³ However, he also noted that ‘the baneful effects of the roundsman system are seen to this day in the unwillingness of many farmers to take

¹⁴⁰ PP 1834 (XXVIII), 2

¹⁴¹ PRO MH12/9775, Duns Tew Select Vestry to Commissioners, 15 October 1834

¹⁴² PP 1834 (XXVIII), 2

¹⁴³ PRO MH12/9775, Samuel Field to Commissioners, 23 December 1834

and employ their proper proportion of the labouring men and the injury it did to the men themselves as industrious labourers is not yet eradicated.’¹⁴⁴

Field also remarked that while, in general, the farmers ‘are willing to take their fair proportion of men according to their farms, there are some obstinate ones amongst them who will not do so, and their refusal to take them causes others to throw theirs on the overseers.’¹⁴⁵ Thus, the overseers had ‘40-50 idle men on their hands, who with their families are maintained out of the poor rates.’¹⁴⁶ He therefore demanded that the Commissioners adopt some measure to compel the farmers to take their proper share of labourers but was told, in reply, that there was no law under which such an obligation was to be made compulsory.

In a letter to the Poor Law Commissioners, Charles Henderson, a large landowner in the parishes of Leafield, Langley, Ascott-under Wychwood, Milton-under-Wychwood, Finstock, Crawley and other parishes which he observed to be ‘heavily burthened with a pauper population’, described the administration of the Poor Laws in an area focused upon Wychwood Forest, in the west of the county.¹⁴⁷ He maintained that the management of parochial affairs in this region was ‘confined solely to overseers, there being neither select vestries, nor Guardians of the Poor, nor workhouses used for any other purpose than of housing such pauper families as are unable to pay rents or obtain residents elsewhere.’¹⁴⁸ Henderson continued:

‘The time of the year has now approached where the paupers of these parishes are (if at all) necessarily thrown upon their parish for labour or relief, though I am pleased to say that the applications are here most generally made for labour only. This however is not easy to be found at all times within some of these parishes, and even when

¹⁴⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁴⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁴⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁴⁷ PRO MH12/9753, Charles Henderson to Commissioners, 17 November 1834

¹⁴⁸ *ibid.*

obtained the wages of one man are not always adequate to the maintenance of a large family.’¹⁴⁹

He also added, however, that in the parish of Ascott-under-Wychwood ‘over which I have a rather more effective control than over some of the other parishes’, able-bodied men and boys were allotted annually amongst the farmers according to their acreage ‘and they are bound to pay them adequate wages, such being the conditions on which the farms are taken.’¹⁵⁰ He concluded that by this arrangement, ‘labourers are constantly employed, the poor rates are kept down, and the lands better cultivated.’¹⁵¹ Henderson also remarked that in some of the parishes in which he owned land he had allocated allotments to the labouring poor ‘the benefits of which to the labourer in a moral as well as a physical point of view are daily becoming apparent.’¹⁵² Many families in these parishes, he continued, ‘can now kill yearly their one or 2 fat pigs, who were a heavy burthen upon the parish.’¹⁵³

At the annual meeting to appoint overseers held at Yarnton on 4 April 1831, it was unanimously resolved that:

‘in order to relieve the Book of large sums of money heretofore paid and entered as money paid by the yardland and also to relieve the overseer of very great trouble ...it is resolved that from this day every holder in the parish of Yarnton shall take his proper proportion (as that proportion is presently fixed) of the labourers out of work - that proportion being one day for one yardland - it is farther resolved that when a labourer be sent to a holder of land, he shall be paid for his day’s labour according to the usual rate of labourer’s wages in the parish of Yarnton.’¹⁵⁴

Although there was no evidence of payments to labourers sent on their rounds in 1831-2, £29.13.2 was paid in this manner in the following year.¹⁵⁵

¹⁴⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁵⁰ *ibid.*

¹⁵¹ *ibid.*

¹⁵² *ibid.*

¹⁵³ *ibid.*

¹⁵⁴ OA.Par.Yarnton,b.10

¹⁵⁵ *ibid.*

Several parishes therefore wrote to the Poor Law Commissioners during the winter of 1834-5 to inquire whether they had the legal power to compel farmers to take their allocated share of labourers. The Select Vestry at Swerford, a small parish on the Cotswolds, had voted on 12 October 1834 to allot surplus labourers amongst the farmers of the parish at the rate of one labourer to each 50 acres occupied.¹⁵⁸ One member of the Select Vestry who rented a large farm on poor land objected and proposed instead that men be allotted in proportion to the poor rate assessment, which would take the value of the land into account. The objector, who occupied a farm of 418 acres, continued to refuse to employ and pay the eight men allotted to him. The Poor Law Commissioners again replied that they did not possess the power to compel farmers to employ their allocation of labour.

The Select Vestry at Tetsworth, a parish near Thame consisting chiefly of meadow and pasture, informed the Poor Law Commissioners that it had ‘a very considerable surplus of labour’ and ‘not knowing what to do with so much surplus labour we have adopted the system of sending the men and boys on their rounds.’¹⁵⁹ It was also remarked, however, that ‘being very desirous, if possible, to employ the whole of the able-bodied men and boys, we have come to the resolution of making an apportionment of the whole parish amongst the ratepayers in proportion to the amount of their respective rates.’¹⁶⁰ Thirty four men were to be allotted at the rate of one man per £60 assessed.

However, the letter also stated that two or three ratepayers ‘though respectable and wealthy, refuse to take or pay any man according to this scheme’ and ‘unless you can give us authority for carrying our plan into execution, we fear that half of our men and

¹⁵⁸ PRO MH12/9637, W.W.Whallery to Commissioners, 12 November 1834

¹⁵⁹ PRO MH12/9732, Tetsworth Select Vestry to Commissioners, 21 November 1834

boys will be out of work during the winter, for the large ratepayers and landholders, by this scheme, are undertaking to employ much more labour than they have occasion for.’¹⁶¹ Again, the Poor Law Commissioners replied that they did not possess the power to force the adoption of this system of relief.¹⁶²

A letter sent by Richard Hall, the overseer in the Redlands parish of Wiggington, described a desperate situation in which nearly all of the able-bodied labourers of the parish were ‘idling on the roads or doing next to nothing merely because we have two or three obstinate occupiers in our parish who will not take any men’.¹⁶³ He also suggested that ‘very many of the parishes in our vicinity are in the same situation.’¹⁶⁴ Parishes in which this system of labour allocation did not function smoothly were therefore likely to have higher poor relief expenditure than those in which farmers accepted their allocations.

Several parishes had tried to overcome these problems by adopting the even more complex Labour Rate system based upon the Cropredy Plan devised by W.H.Chamberlain in 1818.¹⁶⁵ The Stanton St. John Select Vestry agreed to adopt a labour rate on 4 January 1833.¹⁶⁶ A rate was to be collected in the same manner as the poor rate, but it was to be discharged either in labour or money at the option of each individual. The overseers were to draw up a ‘list of all male parishioners who earn their subsistence by daily labour’ and divide them into three classes according to their supposed strength and ability to work.¹⁶⁷ Members of the first class were to be paid 1s. 2d per day; the second 8d per day and the third 6d. All the allowances to labour were

¹⁶⁰ *ibid.*

¹⁶¹ *ibid.*

¹⁶² *ibid.*

¹⁶³ PRO MH12/9577, Richard Hall to Commissioners, 8 January 1835

¹⁶⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁶⁵ W.H.Chamberlain, *Plan*

¹⁶⁶ OA.Par.Stanton St. John,e.7

to be made according to this list and all claims for credit upon account of labour were to be made by means of a return once a fortnight to the overseer stating the name of the parishioners employed and the number of days or portions of days employed. Where no allowance for labour was claimed, the rate was to be discharged in money. The adoption of this system received the approval of the magistrates acting for the divisions of Dorchester, Bullingdon and Thame at petty sessions.

The amount paid to a labourer was therefore determined by membership of one of these three classes. Although, in theory, members in different classes were paid according to their strength and ability, wages could not be increased by greater exertion. Incomes were fixed according to membership of a particular class rather than by the actual quantity or quality of work completed. At Deddington, where a labour rate was adopted for a few months during the winter of 1832-3, no attempt was made to link income with strength and industry.¹⁶⁸ The allowance paid to a labourer under this system was determined by the marital status of a labourer and the number of children which he had to support. An able-bodied labourer with a wife and two children was guaranteed 8s. per week, while a single man would receive only 4s. per week. This was increased to 5s. per week on 3 November 1832 'by order of the majority of magistrates for the northern division of the hundred of Wootton assembled at petty sessions.'¹⁶⁹ Aided by his family, of course, a married labourer would be able to complete more work in a given period than his single counterpart and could therefore earn his higher pay.

An agreement to adopt a labour rate adopted at Eynsham on 5 November 1832 stated that able-bodied married labourers were to be paid 9s. per week and single men

¹⁶⁷ *ibid.*

¹⁶⁸ OA.Par.Deddington,b.22

7s.¹⁷⁰ However, it also stated that lads (15 -20 years) should be paid 6s.; boys (10-15 years) 3s. and women and girls (over 10 years) 3s., suggesting that labourers were counted individually rather than as members of a family labour group. It was implied in this case that married labourers were to be paid more than their single counterparts for the same amount of work. By 1833, 34 Oxfordshire parishes had adopted the labour rate system.¹⁷¹

Other parish employment

The allocation of labourers amongst the farmers of the parish, according to a variety of systems, reflects the predominance of agriculture throughout the county. In several parishes, however, work for surplus labourers was provided directly by the parish in a variety of tasks including stone-breaking, digging gravel and repairing the parish roads. These added directly to poor relief expenditure.

The assistant overseer at Burford was also appointed the surveyor of the highways at a Select Vestry held on 8 October 1827, in the hope that 'he might have an opportunity of regularly employing the poor who may be working for the parish.'¹⁷² It was further resolved at a Select Vestry held on 19 November 1827 that 'the persons applying to the parish for labour during the winter should be employed under Mr Linwell in cleansing and repairing the ways of the town.'¹⁷³

The Select Vestry at Thame had, it maintained in a letter to the Poor Law Commissioners, tried various schemes to induce farmers to employ labourers but

¹⁶⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁷⁰ OA.Par.Eynsham,e.1

¹⁷¹ PP 1833 (XXXIII)

¹⁷² OA.Par.Burford,c.35

¹⁷³ *ibid.*

without success.¹⁷⁴ Yet, it also noted that ‘most if not all of them will readily acknowledge that three men and two boys might generally be employed on every hundred acres.’¹⁷⁵ It also observed that ‘if we could get the farmers to employ anything like what they ought, our poor rates would be very much lowered.’¹⁷⁶ In the early months of 1835, one hundred and fifty labourers were employed by the parish digging stones and repairing roads, even though the Select Vestry recognised that ‘the work might be done by thirty men.’¹⁷⁷

At Wootton, several labourers were employed on the parish roads each week throughout the winter of 1825-6.¹⁷⁸ These payments disappeared from the overseers’ accounts in early June before reappearing again in late September. On 20 October 1825, the parish paid seven men and three boys for breaking stones on the turnpike roads, paying them between 1s. 4d and 8s. each. By mid January 1826, between 15 and 20 labourers were employed in this manner each week, rising to a peak of 30 in March.

The overseers at Wootton began to keep their accounts in a more detailed and systematic fashion at the start of April 1828.¹⁷⁹ Monthly breakdowns of expenditure to several types of recipient were recorded in addition to lists of ‘extraordinary’ payments.¹⁸⁰ Figures 4.5 and 4.6 show the importance of payments to labourers employed on the parish roads during this period, particularly in guiding seasonal variations in poor relief expenditure. Imagine, however, the effect which the adoption

¹⁷⁴ PRO MH12/9732, Thame Select Vestry to Commissioners, 8 September 1834

¹⁷⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁷⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁷⁷ *ibid.*

¹⁷⁸ OA.Woot.P.C.IV/III/5

¹⁷⁹ OA.Woot.P.C.IV/III/8

¹⁸⁰ Each year was broken down into thirteen four-week periods, termed ‘monthly collections’ in the accounts, the first month starting in the first week after Easter and the last ending in Easter week.

of a labour allocation system, based upon farmers paying labourers' wages, would have had both on total poor relief expenditure and upon seasonal variations.

Poor relief expenditure, 1812-13 to 1834-5: Conclusion

While some clear regional differences in levels of poor relief expenditure and the chronology of change were identified in Chapter 2, such variations conceal considerable intra-regional variations both at the hundred and parish levels. Leading on from this, it must be acknowledged that the highest rates of poor relief expenditure do not necessarily equate with high rates of what we might think of as unemployment or poverty.

High poor relief expenditure might reflect the payment of wages out of the rates rather than the existence of surplus labourers. At the same time, a collapse in poor relief expenditure might follow from a change in policy, towards the allocation of surplus labourers amongst the farmers of the parish, who were responsible for the payment of their wages, rather than any fundamental change in economic conditions. The level of allowances could also vary markedly in real terms both between parishes and within the same parish over time. High poor relief expenditure might reflect either a small number of generous allowances or a large number of small allowances. The implications for the living standards of the poor in each case are fundamentally different.

Consideration of these aspects of the poor relief system are essential to an understanding of the condition of the rural poor during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. They help to explain, for instance, why it was that complaints about the condition of the poor and their idleness continued to mount during the 1820s and early 1830s, even though poor relief expenditure decreased. At the same time, the

massive increase in poor relief expenditure in the first two decades of the nineteenth century may simply reflect a shift in the way in which the wages of the poor were paid rather than any fundamental collapse in their level. A rise in poor relief expenditure on its own does not indicate any change in the financial circumstances of the rural poor. It may simply reflect whether or not the overseers were used as intermediaries between the expenditure on labour of farmers and the labourers who received it.

Although regional variations in poor relief expenditure have been identified, associated with variations in farming systems and the types of relief systems developed to deal with them, the system of poor relief was rooted in the parish. While the nature of the farming system was also a strong influence at the local level, other factors came into play, including the wealth and generosity of ratepayers and the activities of neighbouring magistrates. The provision of poor relief was therefore at the centre of the relationship between the poor, tenant farmers (ratepayers) and the gentry (magistracy). These groups shared both similarities and differences in their attitudes towards the Poor Laws. While the relief of the poor seems to have been governed by a shared outlook in the late eighteenth century and the first decade of the new century, the surviving overseers' accounts and vestry minutes suggest that by the early 1820s tensions and conflicts were bubbling to the surface.¹⁸¹ These records were kept by the ratepayers and therefore record their side of the story. However, the Poor Law Commissioners' correspondence dating from the winter of 1834-5 details an incident at Ramsden, a hamlet in Wychwood Forest, which sheds light on the motives and actions of all three sets of actors. It also shows that answers to questions relating

¹⁸¹ It may, of course, have been the case that tensions and conflicts had existed previously but that records detailing these incidents have not survived.

to the relief of the poor must go beyond the realm of economic rationality and into the worlds of paternalism and deference.

Tensions and conflicts in rural society: Ramsden in 1834-5

Revd. Robert Phillimore J.P., vicar for Shipton-under-Wychwood, and member alongside Lord Churchill and Lord Francis Spencer of the Bench of Justices at Ascott, informed the Poor Law Commissioners on 16 January 1835 of an incident which had recently occurred in the neighbouring hamlet of Ramsden.¹⁸² He detailed the activities of certain members of the Select Vestry, led by John Edwards a Ramsden farmer, who had cut the allowances of several paupers at a meeting held on 29 December 1834. According to Phillimore, Edwards was a source of constant trouble to the local magistrates and was constantly insolent, 'so much so that we have been obliged to turn him out of the room.'¹⁸³

The Select Vestry held on 29 December 1834 was arranged without the knowledge of Phillimore, Thomas Andrews (the parish overseer) or several of the leading ratepayers. At this meeting, chaired by John Edwards, the allowances paid to John Thornett (a labourer with a wife and five children) and Richard Milton (a labourer with a wife and six children) were both set at 3s. per week, while the allowance paid to Charles Hick (a labourer with a wife and two children) was set at 1s. per week. In an earlier letter received by the Commissioners on 15 November 1834, Phillimore had stated that 'it is clear that 8s. will not support seven persons.'¹⁸⁴ He therefore inquired of the Commissioners whether he, as a neighbouring magistrate, could order relief above the heads of the Select Vestry and therefore increase their allowances.

¹⁸² PRO MH12/9637, Robert Phillimore to Commissioners, 16 January 1835

¹⁸³ *ibid.*

concluding that 'the poor of Ramsden have received almost no charity and I believe that some of them would have starved had not that sort of relief been extended to them.'¹⁸⁵ Lord Churchill, the Lord of the Manor, had provided Phillimore with money with which to provide the poor of Ramsden with bread even though he did not own any property in the hamlet. Phillimore also expressed his belief that such low levels of relief might drive the poor 'to deeds of desperation' and that 'it is in such cases that the authority of a local magistrate may be of such great service.'¹⁸⁶

The Commissioners wrote to John Edwards for his side of the story and were informed that all three labourers had been employed by the overseers but, having been idle, were refused their full allowances.¹⁸⁷ He also maintained that a group of young men, led by Thornett, Milton and Hicks, had broken down the door of an earlier vestry meeting and demanded their full allowances. This meeting was abandoned until 29 December when none of the three had attended. He also added that Mr Andrews, the parish overseer, had not been selected by the Select Vestry. Their suggested candidate, John Fletcher, the owner of the local beershop, had been rejected by the local magistrates on account of his profession and the fact that he was rated at just 1s. per annum.

Edwards also added that Thornett, Milton and Hicks were 'very seldom off the parish from the finish of the harvest to the next haytime' and also that 'our poor have more privileges than many have - they have a large common where they get most of their fuel and have allotments of land on which they grow potatoes.'¹⁸⁸ In addition, the wives of Thornett, Milton and Hicks were all gloveresses, an additional source of

¹⁸⁴ PRO MH12/9637, Robert Phillimore to Commissioners, 15 November 1834

¹⁸⁵ PRO MH12/9637, Robert Phillimore to Commissioners, 16 January 1835

¹⁸⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁸⁷ PRO MH12/9753, John Edwards to Commissioners, 12 January 1835

income. He concluded that ‘we have not one family or even one individual bad off in our whole hamlet.’¹⁸⁹

Edward Gilson was therefore sent by the Commissioners to investigate. In a letter dated 25 February 1835, Gilson suggested that ‘all parties are somewhat to blame.’¹⁹⁰ He did, however, acknowledge that despite access to the commons and employment in gloving, the poor rates were ‘exceedingly heavy.’¹⁹¹ The population density exceeded one person per cultivated acre, and he continued, ‘notwithstanding this large amount of relief the condition of the poor is certainly one of great destitution.’¹⁹² The only solution was, he added, to bring the hamlet into the Witney Poor Law Union ‘by which means I have no doubt the sufferings of all persons will be alleviated and good feeling restored.’¹⁹³

Phillimore was therefore acting in the role of a paternalistic magistrate determined to maintain law and order as well as his own influence in local society. While remarking that he had ‘much the greater part of the burden of the complaints in the neighbourhood’,¹⁹⁴ he also observed that ‘it is in such cases that the authority of a local magistrate is of such great service in seeking justice done between two parties.’¹⁹⁵ He also stated his belief that the poor of Ramsden were well behaved and that during the disturbances of 1831, when threshing machines were destroyed in adjoining districts, ‘no kind of mischief or disturbance occurred in any part of this neighbourhood.’¹⁹⁶ He was also ‘quite sure that if the population of the parish are

¹⁸⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁸⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁹⁰ PRO MH12/9753, Edward Gilson to Commissioners, 25 February 1835

¹⁹¹ *ibid.*

¹⁹² *ibid.*

¹⁹³ *ibid.*

¹⁹⁴ PRO MH12/9637, Robert Phillimore to Commissioners, 16 January 1835

¹⁹⁵ PRO MH12/9637, Robert Phillimore to Commissioners, 19 January 1835

¹⁹⁶ *ibid.*

properly treated - that is to say you give them bread enough to eat, and use no provoking or unbearing language, you would perceive there is not a more laborious or loyal body of men in the kingdom.'¹⁹⁷

John Edwards, on the other hand, represented the hard-pressed ratepayers, faced by an apparently never-ending demand for poor relief. While acknowledging there to be many industrious sorts in the parish, he was unwilling to tolerate what he deemed to be the insolence and idleness of labourers like John Thornett. The labourers, themselves, were convinced of their right to relief and were willing to use threats and aggressive gestures to guarantee it.

The geography of poor relief expenditure was therefore subject to a multitude of factors. Although these trace patterns on an over-arching regional framework, it has been demonstrated that narrowly local variation was fundamental to the operation of the Poor Laws. An understanding of the implications of high (or low) poor relief expenditure, in terms of its relation to the agrarian economy and the living standards of the rural poor, can only be fully derived from a consideration of parish-based sources, such as overseers' accounts and vestry minutes. The next two chapters will demonstrate how these variations can shed light on the relationship between the geographies of law, society and the physical environment.

¹⁹⁷ *ibid.*

Occasional payments and social welfare

Sources and methodology

Although some clear regional differences in levels of poor relief expenditure and the chronology of change have been demonstrated, it is also evident that local circumstance was fundamental to the operation of the Poor Laws. The study which follows examines the provision of poor relief in four parishes (Cropredy, Pyrton, Spelsbury and Stoke Lyne) during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. This will shed more light onto the forces moulding the geography of expenditure, whilst recognising the importance of the parish as a unit of local government.

The parishes were selected on the basis of their geographical location and the comprehensiveness of their Poor Law records. Figure 5.1 shows that they were located in different hundreds in different parts of Oxfordshire. Cropredy, a Redlands parish in Banbury Hundred, lies in the Cherwell Valley; Pyrton, from which the hundred takes its name, stretches twelve miles diagonally across the Chilterns in the south east of the County and onto the adjoining Clay Vales to the north west; Spelsbury is situated in Chadlington Hundred on the Cotswold Uplands, while Stoke Lyne, also a Limestone parish, is located in Ploughley Hundred, four miles north west of Bicester.

Each of the regions in which the four parishes are situated were associated with a particular farming system, and were subject to the authority of separate groups of magistrates operating at the divisional level. Whether local variations in poor relief

policy and practice were subsumed beneath or independent of these regional characteristics is a key element of this study.

The principal limiting factor in choosing parishes was the availability of long series of Poor Law records, particularly overseers' accounts, which form the chief data source. Although overseers' accounts exist for 62 Oxfordshire parishes, very few cover the entire period between 1790-1 and 1834-5, chosen to include the subsistence crises in the mid-1790s, 1800-2 and 1812-13, and the years leading up to the passage of the Poor Law Amendment Act in 1834.

Overseers' accounts covering the financial years 1793-4 to 1835-6 are available for Cropredy;¹ 1787-8 to 1835-6 at Pyrton;² 1773-4 to 1785-6, 1800-1 to 1819-20, 1822-3 to 1823-4 and 1827-8 to 1835-6 at Spelsbury,³ and from 1731-2 to 1756-7 and 1760-1 to 1835-6 at Stoke Lyne.⁴ In addition, vestry minutes covering the period 1777-1816 are available at Pyrton⁵ and Select Vestry minutes covering 1822-8 at Spelsbury.⁶ A multitude of other Poor Law papers, including documents relating to the Laws of Settlement, bastardy cases and overseers' correspondence, are also available for these parishes.

The way in which the overseers' accounts were compiled differs between the parishes, but all contain lists of disbursements each week. For each parish, annual disbursements (i.e. total relief) were abstracted for the years 1790-1 to 1834-5 (where available) and broken down into categories of expenditure. The names of recipients in

¹ OA.Par.Cropredy,b.9 (1793-1801, b.10 (1801-8), b.11 (1808-14), b.12 (1814-20), b.13 (1820-7), b.14 (1827-36)

² OA.Par.Pyrton,c.4 (1787-1808), c.5, (1808-15), c.7 (1815-24), c.8 (1824-34); c.9 (1834-5)

³ OA.Par.Spelsbury,b.5 (1777-83); b.6 (1801-9); b.7 (1809-20); f.1 (1822-3); f.2 (1823-4); f.3 (1827-30); f.4 (1830-3); f.5 (1833-5)

⁴ Bod.Top.Oxon,c.337 (1731-57); OA.Misc.Dew.II/1 (1760-75), Misc.Dew.II/2 (1775-89), Misc.Dew.II/3 (1789-1800), Misc.Cor.I/1 (1800-16), Misc.Cor.I/2 (1816-24), Misc.Cor.I/3 (1824-31), Misc.Cor.I/4 (1831-5)

⁵ OA.Par.Pyrton,e.4 (1777-1816)

each category, and the date and size of each payment were also recorded whenever a payment was made. The four sets of overseers' accounts contain lists of over 200,000 such payments, each of which had to be categorised and suitably recorded. This made the data collection a laborious process, but allows the immense quantity (and quality) of material available to be used, providing comparable day-by-day breakdowns of poor relief expenditure in each parish during the period under consideration. These payments were recorded in four-weekly (monthly) totals in the manner shown in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1. Example of disbursements data sheet

Year	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R
1																		
2																		
3																		
4																		
5																		
6																		
7																		
8																		
9																		
10																		
11																		
12																		
13																		
Annual total																		

A

Out of work

B

Family allowances

C

Roundsman

D

Labour Rate

E

Other parish work

F

Old men and widows

G

Single women

H

Sick

I

Nursing

J

Rents

K

Clothing

L

Medical expenses

M

Births

N

Deaths

O

Administration

P

County Rate

Q

Other Bills

R

Extraordinary

The parochial financial year ran from Easter to Easter. Because Easter does not fall at a fixed date each year, but varies through March and April, the same month listed as 1...n after Easter in the overseers' accounts may contain four weeks of disbursements in one year and five the next. Changes in the level of expenditure in the same month between years could be due to variations in the number of weeks it contained in the accounts rather than any other cause. The number of weeks in each financial year could also vary as the date of Easter shifted.

⁶ OA.Par.Spelsbury.c.2 (1822-8)

To establish comparability between months and years, payments were broken down into four weekly blocks. The first block (month) began in the first week of April each year and the thirteenth ended in the last week of March. All four study parishes settled annual bills at the end of the financial year. In some instances, this fell during April. To avoid placing two years' worth of bills in the same year, payments of this sort made in April were included in the thirteenth month of the previous year. Although I refer to the normal calendar months in the text, I have included the numbered four week month after April 1st to which they refer in brackets.

The collection of such large volumes of data was made more difficult by the problems raised at the start of Chapter 3. However, when combined with other material on the Poor Laws, relating to the types of policies adopted and the reasons for their adoption, and with information on the social and economic background of each parish, they provide an incomparable insight into the provision of poor relief and its role in rural society. Particular emphasis will be placed upon whether the geography of poor relief expenditure can be used to measure variations in the nature and scale of poverty, both between parishes and within a parish over time.

The four parishes: society and economy

Although the four parishes chosen for this study were all essentially agricultural, they varied markedly in many of their social and economic characteristics. In terms of acreage, Pyrton (4,847 acres) was the largest and Cropredy (1,926 acres) the smallest, with Stoke Lyne (3,901 acres) and Spelsbury (4,304 acres) in between. Table 5.2 shows that their demographic histories in the first three decades of the nineteenth century also exhibited both similarities and differences. Pyrton had the largest population throughout the period. The densest population was at Cropredy, where

total population was only slightly smaller than at Pyrton and Spelsbury in 1801, but the acreage was much lower. The largest absolute and relative increase was at Stoke Lyne: from 67% of Pyrton's total in 1801 to 81.5% in 1831, despite a rise of 134 persons at Pyrton in the same period. Population density increased at Stoke Lyne from 0.085 persons per acre in 1801 to 0.14 in 1831.

Table 5.2. Population change, 1801-31

Parish	1801	1811	1821	1831	Pop. density (persons per acre) in 1801	Pop. increase (1801- 1831)
Cropredy	470	474	548	548	0.240	24.5%
Pyrton	527	695	622	661	0.110	22.4%
Spelsbury	509	553	610	609	0.120	19.6%
Stoke Lyne	334	394	509	539	0.085	61.0%

Sources: PP 1801 (II), 1812 (XI), 1822 (XV) and 1831 (XVIII)

While the population of Cropredy was concentrated in a nucleated village, Pyrton, Spelsbury and Stoke Lyne all consisted of several settlements. Pyrton was divided into the mother village itself, and the hamlets of Clare, Goldor and Standhill. The liberty of Assendon, which comprised a distant detached portion of the parish at the foot of the dip slope, adjacent to the Thames at Henley, was separated from the rest of the parish by the heavily wooded liberty of Christmas Common. Out of the parish population of 527 in 1801, 26 persons lived at Standhill, 50 at Clare, 158 at Assendon and 293 at Goldor and Pyrton.⁷ Spelsbury contained the hamlets of Dean, Ditchley, Fulwell and Taston, as well as Spelsbury itself. Stoke Lyne included the hamlets of Bainton and Fewcot, in addition to the mother village. In 1821, 300 persons lived at Stoke Lyne, 148 at Fewcot and 58 at Bainton.⁸

⁷ PP 1801 (II)

⁸ PP 1822 (XV)

There were also differences in the extent to which agriculture dominated their respective economies. While Pyrton, Spelsbury and Stoke Lyne were almost wholly agricultural parishes, a much larger number of labourers were employed outside this sector at Cropredy. In 1831, of the 141 adult males aged 20 years or over at Pyrton, 112 (79%) were employed in agriculture;⁹ at Spelsbury, of 132 adult males, 100 (75.8%) were employed in this sector,¹⁰ and 58 (87%) of the 67 adult males at Stoke Lyne.¹¹ At Cropredy, however, only 76 (62%) of the 122 adult males in the parish were employed in agriculture. The remaining 46 (38%) were employed in retail trades and handicrafts.¹² This reflected its proximity to the plush-weaving centre of Banbury, which was organised on a putting-out basis, and to the Oxford Canal. A wharf was set up at Cropredy from the outset, and by 1784 a company wharfinger was established.¹³ In 1830, the gross tolls taken at Cropredy were £1,175 - over one quarter of the sum taken at Banbury.¹⁴ It may also help to account for the high population density, encouraging diversification away from agriculture in which employment opportunities were limited. There is some evidence of lace-making at both Pyrton and Stoke Lyne, a task primarily completed by women.¹⁵

Although agriculture was dominant in all four parishes, there was great variety in farming types, farm size and concentration of property ownership. Parliamentary enclosure came early to Cropredy, affecting the whole parish in 1775 when 1,546 acres were allotted by 14 Geo.III, c.23 (Priv.).¹⁶ At Spelsbury, although the hamlet of

⁹ PP 1831 (XVIII)

¹⁰ *ibid.*

¹¹ *ibid.*

¹² *ibid.*

¹³ *V.C.H.*, Vol.10, 168

¹⁴ *ibid.*, 160

¹⁵ PP 1834 (XXX), Evidence of Thomas Wiggins; *V.C.H.*, Vol.6, 320

¹⁶ OA.QSD.A.85

Dean was enclosed by 19 Geo.III, c.62 (Priv.) in 1779,¹⁷ the rest of the parish had to wait until 1803 when it was enclosed by 42 Geo.III, c.81 (Priv.).¹⁸ Although the open-fields at Fewcot remained intact until parliamentary enclosure by 42 Geo.III, c.27 (Priv.) in 1794,¹⁹ this Act only dealt with 1,711 acres out of a total of almost 4,000 acres in the whole parish. Bainton had been enclosed by agreement in the seventeenth century, while parts of Stoke Lyne's open-field system had also been enclosed in a piecemeal fashion before 1794.²⁰ The 1,711 acres enclosed by Act included 900 acres of common pasture, known as Bayard's Green, and 100 acres of cow commons.²¹ Although Pyrton was enclosed by 12 Vic., c.7 PG (1849) in 1851,²² only 637 out of nearly 5,000 acres in the whole parish remained unenclosed at that time. This suggests that the distinction between *unenclosed* parishes and those *enclosed* by Act of Parliament was not as clear-cut as, for example, Arthur Young suggested. This also casts doubts upon the relationship between parliamentary enclosure and poor relief expenditure developed by Boyer and Snell.²³

Cropredy was at the centre of the pastoral Redlands district and there is evidence that emphasis swung further towards animal husbandry after enclosure. According to Arthur Young, the area under wheat fell by 100 acres after enclosure, while 800 acres of wasteland were also brought under cultivation, also likely to have been converted to pasture at this time of relatively low grain prices and prior to the construction of the Oxford Canal.²⁴

¹⁷ OA.QSD.A.88

¹⁸ OA.QSD.A.B

¹⁹ OA.QSD.A.116

²⁰ V.C.H., Vol.6, 320; *ibid.*

²¹ OA.QSD.A.116

²² OA.QSD.A.45

²³ G.R.Boyer, *English*; K.D.M.Snell, *Annals*

²⁴ A.Young, *Oxfordshire*, 87

There is evidence that at Spelsbury, although situated in the heart of the sheep-and-corn region of the Cotswolds, emphasis had swung over to arable farming by the early nineteenth century. Of the 2,016 acres allotted on enclosure in 1803, 1,383 acres were awarded to the Dillon Estate, 383 acres to Christ Church College and 158 acres to the vicarage.²⁵ In 1817, the Dillon Estate covered 2,660 acres in the parish, of which 2,388 acres were arable and only 272 acres pasture.²⁶

Fewer details concerning cropping are available at Stoke Lyne. It was located on the Limestone Uplands, typically characterised by sheep and corn husbandry. Although it was also only a few miles from Bicester, a centre of milk and cheese production, Arthur Young noted in 1813 that there were few dairies in the parish.²⁷ Bayard's Green was traditionally used for sheep grazing, while the 700 acres enclosed in the open-fields at Fewcot in 1794 were arable.²⁸ At the Tithe Commutation in 1843, the hamlet of Bainton contained 537 acres of arable and 188 acres of meadow and pasture.²⁹

Much more evidence is available for Pyrton, suggesting that farms were either arable or pastoral depending upon which settlement one considers. A 'Plan of Goldor and Pyrton' in 1809 recorded 142 acres of pasture, 135 acres of meadow, 177 acres of feeding commons, 436 acres of enclosed arable and 340 acres of open-field arable.³⁰ However, Thomas Wiggins' reply to the *Rural Queries* stated that of the 4,500 acres in the parish, there were 2,037 acres of arable, 500 acres of woodland, 150 acres of commons and 1,813 acres of pasture.³¹ At the Tithe Commutation in 1847, of the

²⁵ OA.QSD.A.B

²⁶ OA.Dil.I/i/7a

²⁷ A.Young, *Oxfordshire*, 91

²⁸ OA.QSD.A.116

²⁹ PRO IR.18/7612

³⁰ OA.Par.Pyrton,b.9

³¹ PP 1834 (XXX), Evidence of Thomas Wiggins

3,574 acres subject to tithes in the parish, there were 1,973 acres of arable, 54 acres of woodland, 223 acres of roads and wastes and 1,309 acres of pasture.³² A further 513 acres of woodland at Assendon and 108 acres of glebe were exempt from tithes. At Standhill, where Tithes had been commuted in 1839, there were 54 acres of arable and 463 acres of pasture.³³

Details on farm size are also limited. The Redlands region in which Cropredy was situated was traditionally characterised by small farms. The enclosure award of 982 acres made to Sir William Boothby, the Lord of the Manor, was subsequently divided into seven farms.³⁴ However, the Manor Estate was sold off and broken up in 1788 following a financial crisis within the Boothby family.³⁵ Purchasers included Brasenose College, and the families of Anker, Eagles and Elkington. Other awards on enclosure included 253 acres to the Bishop of Oxford, 190 acres to Brasenose College, 43 acres to the vicar and seventeen other allotments of between 18 acres and two poles each.³⁶

At Pyrton, Thomas Wiggins noted in 1834 that there were 'few landowners' in the parish and that farms were 'generally large'.³⁷ At the Tithe Commutation in 1847, the entire cultivated acreage of Clare (796 acres) was owned by the Earl of Macclesfield and divided into several farms of between 99 and 243 acres each.³⁸ Goldor was also owned by the Earl of Macclesfield and farmed in one 590 acre unit.³⁹ In Pyrton itself, however, where a residue of open-fields remained, there were 11 properties of less than 5 acres each, five of between 5 and 50 acres each, the Earl of Macclesfield's

³² PRO IR.18/7774; OA.311 Pyrton 1850

³³ OA.354 Standhill 1840

³⁴ *V.C.H.*, Vol.10, 166

³⁵ *ibid.*, 166

³⁶ OA.QSD.A.85

³⁷ PP 1834 (XXX), Evidence of Thomas Wiggins

³⁸ OA.311 Pyrton 1850

property of 102 acres and Hugh Hammersley's two farms of 505 acres and 478 acres.⁴⁰

The Dillon Estate at Spelsbury, which covered 2,660 acres in 1817, was divided into 12 farms, including one of less than 100 acres, five of between 100 and 200 acres each, and six of over 200 acres each.⁴¹ In 1786, the Manor Estate at Stoke Lyne, which covered half the parish, was divided into just five farms and the other half of the parish was divided into eleven farms, each over 100 acres.⁴² By 1816, the Manor Estate consisted of only five farms and of just two in 1832.⁴³

Summary

The four study parishes therefore exhibit both marked similarities and differences in their social and economic structures. While reflecting the regions in which they were set to some extent, they were also characterised by local peculiarities both in terms of the nature of their farming systems and the distribution of ownership. Landownership at both Pyrton and Spelsbury was concentrated in the hands of one individual; the Earl of Macclesfield at Pyrton and Lord Dillon at Spelsbury. Both had Estates in these parishes, which might be expected to have had some influence on local politics and the administration of poor relief.

The geography of poor relief expenditure, 1790-1 to 1834-5

Although the parliamentary returns suggest that total poor relief expenditure peaked both nationally and regionally in 1817-18, the overseers' accounts of the four parishes

³⁹ *ibid.*

⁴⁰ *ibid.*

⁴¹ OA.Dil.I/i/7a

⁴² V.C.H., Vol.6, 320

under consideration point to 1800-2 as the peak period. At Cropredy and Stoke Lyne, relief payments were highest in 1800-1 (£836 and £680 respectively), while at Pyrton and Spelsbury peaks were recorded in the following year (£1440 and £943 respectively).⁴⁴ Figure 5.2 suggests that other marked increases in expenditure occurred in all four parishes in 1795-6, 1810-13 and 1817-20.

Pyrton witnessed the highest peaks in expenditure during the periods of high prices and, as illustrated in Table 5.3, also spent nearly twice as much overall on the relief of its poor between 1801-2 and 1834-5. These totals exclude items of expenditure not directly related to the relief of the poor, including payments towards the County Rate and Marshalsea Money, militia charges and church renovation. However, such payments were met out of the poor rate and must therefore be included when considering the burden on the ratepayers.

Table 5.3. Total poor relief expenditure, 1801-2 to 1834-5

Parish	Total Poor Relief Expenditure, 1801-2 to 1834-5
Cropredy	£17, 929 10s. 0d
Pyrton	£31, 793 10s. 0d
Spelsbury	£18, 058 19s. 0d
Stoke Lyne	£13, 893 0s. 0d

Sources: OA.Cropredy,b.9,b.10,b.11,b.12,b.13,b.14; OA.Par.Pyrton,c.4,c.5,c.7,c.8,c.9; OA.Par.Spelsbury,b.6,b.7,f.1,f.2,f.3,f.4,f.5; OA.Misc.Cor.I/1,Misc.I/2,Misc.I/3,Misc.I/4

Poor relief expenditure at Pyrton, which fluctuated around the £500 mark during the 1790s, remained above £800 per annum after the scarcity of 1800-2 was over. In the other three parishes expenditure returned to its pre-crisis levels in the immediate

⁴³ *ibid.*, 320
⁴⁴ The liberty of Assendon, in Pyrton parish, was separately administered for Poor Law purposes and is therefore excluded from this study because overseers' accounts are not available.

years after 1800-2.⁴⁵ At the end of the decade, however, annual disbursements began to increase in every parish.

The heights scaled by poor relief expenditure between 1810-11 and 1812-13 were £200-£300 lower in each parish than the levels reached during the scarcity of 1800-2. It fell back after 1812-13, before rising during the middle part of the decade to peak between 1817 and 1820. The peak recorded at Pyrton in 1818-19 (£1106.11.5) was a few £s lower than those attained in 1810-11 (£1115.1.5) and 1812-13 (£1114.10.3). This was also the case at Stoke Lyne, where the sum in 1819-20 (£722.2.1) was £11 lower than the previous peak in 1812-13. At Cropredy, on the other hand, the peak in 1818-19 (£699.8.9) was £70 higher than that in 1810-11, while that of £888.6.0 at Spelsbury in 1817-18 was £120 greater than the heights reached in 1813-14. The surges and slumps in poor relief expenditure in the four study parishes did not always coincide with each other or with regional, county and national trends.

Following its collapse in the early 1820s, poor relief expenditure at Cropredy, Pyrton and Stoke Lyne resumed its upward direction after 1822-3, returning to the levels reached in the 1810s by the end of the decade, before collapsing again in the early 1830s. Expenditure at Stoke Lyne, which had lagged behind Cropredy throughout the first two decades of the nineteenth century, fluctuated around a similar level after 1822-3. Spelsbury, on the other hand, witnessed a steep decline in relief expenditure in the early 1820s which, although shallowing out during the latter part of the decade, continued during the early 1830s. By 1834-5 poor relief expenditure had fallen from £756.17.0 in 1820-1 to only £271.2.6.

⁴⁵ The pre-crisis level of relief payments refers to the late 1790s, when expenditure had already been inflated by the high price levels of the mid-1790s. Totals of expenditure for the early 1790s are only available at Pyrton and Stoke Lyne. While the Stoke Lyne total fluctuated between £100-150, relief expenditure at Pyrton was already above £400.

Poor relief expenditure and the bread price

Figure 5.3 suggests a connection between the trends of bread price and poor relief expenditure during the first two decades of the nineteenth century, though much weaker than those demonstrated between expenditure and bread price at the regional, county and national levels. The peaks and troughs in relief expenditure at the parish level did follow the surges and slumps in the price of bread, although expenditure in all four parishes lagged slightly behind the level of bread prices before 1818-19. Between 1817-18 and 1822-3, shifts in the level of expenditure outstripped prices at Cropredy, Spelsbury and Stoke Lyne. At Pyrton, despite its larger absolute relief burden, poor relief continued to lag behind increases in the bread price.

The trends of relief expenditure which had followed each other and the price of bread during the first twenty years of the new century began to diverge during the early 1820s. While the bread price remained at a relatively stable, low level, expenditure at both Cropredy and Stoke Lyne increased markedly. Both subsequently collapsed, at Cropredy (1830-1), two years before Stoke Lyne (1832-3). The level of disbursements at Pyrton much more closely followed the trend of bread prices while Spelsbury diverged quite markedly, tumbling throughout the 1820s to around 60% of its 1802-3 level in the early 1830s.

Poor relief expenditure and population change

If the changing populations of each of the parishes are taken into account the differences become even more marked. Per capita poor relief expenditure collapsed at both Spelsbury and Stoke Lyne after the peak of 1801-2. Subsequent rapid population growth was outstripped by the increase in poor relief expenditure at Stoke Lyne where per capita expenditure rose from 15s. 9d in 1821-2 to 20s. a decade later. Per capita

relief expenditure at Spelsbury, which witnessed less rapid population growth than Stoke Lyne, had fallen to one third of its 1801-2 level by 1831-2, dropping from 37s. to 11s. 10d per head. Although Cropredy's population increased from 470 in 1801 to 548 in 1831, per capita expenditure fell only very slightly, from 28s. per head in 1801-2 to 24s. in 1831-2. Pyrton's poor relief burden becomes even more acute when one bears in mind the size of its population. In 1801, its population was only 72% of Spelsbury's and yet its relief burden was nearly twice as large.⁴⁶ Although per capita relief expenditure at Pyrton also fell dramatically after 1801-2, dropping from 72s. to 32s. 8d per head between 1801-2 and 1831-2, it still far outstripped its nearest rival at the end of the period. These changes are illustrated in Table 5.4.

Table 5.4. Per capita poor relief expenditure, 1800-1 to 1831-2

	Cropredy	Pyrton	Spelsbury	Stoke Lyne
1801-2	28s. 10d	72s. 0d	37s. 0d	31s. 1d
1811-12	25s. 0d	33s. 11d	21s. 0d	16s. 6d
1821-2	25s. 10d	32s. 8d	12s. 8d	15s. 9d
1831-2	24s. 3d	43s. 8d	11s. 10d	20s. 0d

Sources: See Table 5.3; PP 1801 (II); PP 1812 (XI); PP 1822 (XVI); PP 1831 (XVIII)

Poor relief expenditure, 1790-1 to 1834-5: Summary

Poor relief expenditure at Pyrton was much greater than in the other parishes, reaching an absolute peak nearly twice as high as its nearest rival during the crisis of 1800-2 and continually outstripping expenditure in the other study parishes over the next three decades. Although Stoke Lyne spent the least overall during the last 35 years of the Old Poor Law, its annual relief burden outstripped the more populous Spelsbury in the

⁴⁶ Although the 1801 and 1811 censuses record the separate populations of Pyrton and its constituent settlements, the 1821 and 1831 include all these in a single total. I have therefore included the

1820s and early 1830s and reached similar levels to Cropredy. Poor relief expenditure at Cropredy which had followed the fluctuations in Spelsbury's burden during the first two decades of the century diverged from it after 1822-3. While expenditure at Spelsbury fell after 1822-3, it continued to rise at Cropredy until the early 1830s, outstripping the bread price.

A consideration of poor relief expenditure on its own, even after allowing for population, does not say very much about the nature and extent of poverty in a parish and the burdens which it placed on those responsible for its relief. However, an examination of annual fluctuations does illuminate certain points. Firstly, it identifies the widespread crises of expenditure which occurred in 1795-6, 1800-2, 1810-13 and 1817-20. These periods of rising disbursements may have proved fundamental to shaping the experience of poverty and attitudes towards its relief. Secondly, the extent of these increases, and even the particular years in which they were most marked, varied between parishes. Thirdly, it may have been the case that the intensity of the crisis of relief expenditure varied from parish to parish within a particular year. Even these variations could have proved fundamental to shaping experiences and attitudes.

The geography of poor rates

Historians of the Old Poor Law very seldom consider the income side of the poor relief equation. Emphasis tends to be placed upon the fluctuating fortunes of the pauper population in the wake of social and economic structural change, measured in terms of the surges and slumps in relief expenditure. Yet, to consider one side of the equation (expenditure) without the other (income) is to fail to come to terms with the

population of Assendon and its poor relief expenditure (totals of which were inserted in Pyrton's overseers' accounts) in these statistics.

full impact of the Poor Laws and their role in local society.

According to 43 Eliz., c.2 (1601), the system of poor relief was to be funded through the levying of a rate upon 'every inhabitant parson, vicar and other, of every occupier of lands, houses, tithe impropriator or proprietor of tithes, coal mines or saleable underwoods, in the said parish.' This was, according to Nichols, the 'matured fruit' of the principle that property must be chargeable for the relief of poverty.⁴⁷ Each individual was to contribute according to their ability to pay. This imprecise principle led to endless arguments and there was a tendency to settle for some standardised basis of assessment. In many Midland parishes, the rate was calculated according to the number of yardlands each inhabitant occupied in the open fields.⁴⁸ This was a static system which did not take into account variations in the quality of land and also was not easily adapted to changing property values. Many parishes chose instead to use the rental value of property as the basis for their calculations, which overcame these problems.⁴⁹

A list was drawn up in 1795 which contained 'An account of the yardlands in Spelsbury as they are chargeable to the rates.'⁵⁰ The poor rate was raised on a unit measurement of 6s. per yardland, each rate raising £37. 7. 6. In the crisis year of 1801-2 there were twenty two such levies.⁵¹ The poor rate was calculated according to the rental value of property in the other three parishes. To simply state, however, that a parish with a higher rateable value had a greater poor relief burden is incorrect. The amount raised by the poor rates was a function both of the size of each levy and the number of levies during the year.

⁴⁷ Sir G. Nichols, *History* Vol.I, 207

⁴⁸ G.R.Oxley, *England*, 47

⁴⁹ *ibid.*, 47

⁵⁰ OA.Dil.II/d/t1a

Although the evidence from the overseers' accounts and separate poor rate account books shows that the poor rate was the main source of revenue in all four parishes, the overseers also received income from other sources.⁵² At Pyrton in 1808-9, of the total income of £1277.17.2, £1193.2.10 (93.3%) came from the poor rates.⁵³ A further £38.5.3 was carried forward from the previous year, £5.5.0 from Revd. Buckle 'for the orchard', £7.0.0 from the Earl of Macclesfield 'for Frank Ansell's annuity', £1.10.0 from Thomas Oakley 'for rent', £3.3.0 from Mr Hamp 'for a close on Pyrton Hill', £4.0.0 'from Radbourne for the support of his child' and £16.0.0 'from Brazer for his child'.⁵⁴

At Cropredy, Daniel Penn paid £4.18.0 towards the maintenance of his child in 1808-9 and William Ward paid £3.19.0 for his child.⁵⁵ Penn was judged to be the father of a female bastard child born to Charlotte Edwards, also of Cropredy, on 20 December 1807.⁵⁶ He was ordered to pay the weekly sum of 1s. 9d towards its maintenance. William Ward, who lived at Fanborough in Warwickshire, was judged to be the father of Sarah Smith's child, born on 19 September 1807, and was ordered to pay 2s. per week.⁵⁷

As Figure 5.4 shows, the proportion of total income derived from the poor rates varied between 80 and 100%. At both Spelsbury and Stoke Lyne, the vast majority of income came from this source. The reply of Thomas Wiggins, the assistant overseer at

⁵¹ OA.Par.Spelsbury,b.6

⁵² There could, of course, be charities for the poor, administered separately from poor relief. In Oxfordshire as a whole, 3.4% of all expenditure on the poor between 1812-13 and 1814-15 derived from charitable sources, PP 1818 (XIX). In Cropredy, £10.0.0 was raised in this manner each year (1.7% of total expenditure in 1812-13), £36.13.0 (3.1%) at Pyrton, £10.10.0 (1.4%) at Spelsbury, and £2.0.0 (0.3%) at Stoke Lyne.

⁵³ OA.Par.Pyrton,c.5

⁵⁴ *ibid.*

⁵⁵ OA.Par.Cropredy,b.11

⁵⁶ OA.Par.Cropredy,c.10

⁵⁷ *ibid.*

Pyrton, to the *Rural Queries* suggests that poor rates were levied according to need.⁵⁸ In reply to Question 34 he noted that 'the poor rates are levied at the discretion of the overseer and select vestry and as often as the expenses of the parish may require ...when the overseer considers a rate is necessary he brings it before the vestry, when a rate is ordered to be made.'⁵⁹ Income and expenditure were kept closely in step with any small balances being carried forward year-to-year. He also noted in response to Question 34 that 'the poor rate is guided by a valuation of the different proportion of the parish, which valuation is made by proper persons for that purpose.'⁶⁰

As the poor relief burden began to increase in the 1790s and early 1800s, parishes responded by levying larger and more frequent rates. Nine 6d in the £ rates were levied at Cropredy in 1799-1800, raising £386.8.6.⁶¹ In the following year, ten 1s. in the £ rates raised £858.13.6.⁶² Each 1s. in the £ rate raised £85.17.4.⁶³ The parish continued to use the 1s. levy with occasional 6d levies if the 1s. rate was too large for the parish's needs.⁶⁴ The overseers at Stoke Lyne adopted a 1s. levy in 1806-7, raising £145.0.0 with each rate.⁶⁵ In the following year, the annual expenditure of £373.7.8 exceeded income by £81.15.1 and the overseers, William Salmon and Henry Williams, were left 'out of pocket'.⁶⁶ An additional rate was therefore levied, raising £100.10.9.

The size and number of levies required during a year depended not only on the needs of the poor but also on the property assessment of the parish. The rateable value

⁵⁸ PP 1834 (XXXII), Evidence of Thomas Wiggins

⁵⁹ *ibid.*

⁶⁰ *ibid.*

⁶¹ OA.Par.Cropredy,b.9

⁶² *ibid.*

⁶³ *ibid.*

⁶⁴ OA.Par.Cropredy,b.9,b.10,b.11,b.12,b.13,b.14

⁶⁵ OA.Misc.I/1

⁶⁶ *ibid.*

of Stoke Lyne was assessed at £2,900 in 1827,⁶⁷ while Cropredy was assessed at £1,714 in 1814.⁶⁸ The higher rateable value at Stoke Lyne probably explains why the overseers did not increase the poor rate to 1s. in the £ until 1806-7.⁶⁹ A 6d in the £ levy at Stoke Lyne raised nearly as much as 1s. in the £ at Cropredy. In 1809-10, the overseers at Stoke Lyne only levied two 1s. in the £ rates in the whole year.⁷⁰ However, in each of the high expenditure years, 1812-13, 1813-14 and 1830-1, they levied five rates.⁷¹

The collection of the poor rate became more complicated at Cropredy in 1819-20 when W.H.Chamberlain, the overseer of the parish, adopted his Labour Rate plan.⁷² Despite a slight fall in expenditure from £695.14.9 in 1818-19 to £690.15.1 in 1819-20, four 2s. and nine 1s. in the £ rates were levied compared to eight 1s. in the £ rates in the previous year.⁷³ However, six 1s. in the £ rates were returned to the ratepayers in 1819-20 in exchange for the wages which they paid to labourers who would otherwise have been unemployed.⁷⁴

At Spelsbury, twenty two single rates were levied in 1801-2 and twenty four in the following year.⁷⁵ In 1803-4, probably to overcome the administrative inconvenience of having to collect such a large number of rates, the overseers levied six double rates and one single rate.⁷⁶ In 1812-13, eleven double rates were levied bringing in the same amount as the twenty two single rates levied in 1801-2.⁷⁷

⁶⁷ OA.Misc.Cor.I/1

⁶⁸ OA.Par.Cropredy,b.15

⁶⁹ OA.Misc.Cor.I/1

⁷⁰ OA.Misc.Cor.I/1

⁷¹ *ibid.*; OA.Misc.Cor.1/3

⁷² OA.Par.Cropredy,b.12

⁷³ *ibid.*

⁷⁴ *ibid.*

⁷⁵ OA.Par.Spelsbury,b.6

⁷⁶ *ibid.*

⁷⁷ OA.Par.Spelsbury,b.7

The poor rate collected in the hamlet of Pyrton was recorded separately from the rate in the hamlets of Goldor, Clare and Standhill.⁷⁸ However, all were levied at the same number of shillings in the £ and were spent as a common fund on the relief of the poor. In 1790, a 6d in the £ rate at Pyrton raised £28. 6s. 0d, while a 6d in the £ rate at Goldor, Clare and Standhill raised £48. 8s. 0d.⁷⁹ The rateable value at Pyrton, which was assessed at £3,068 in 1795,⁸⁰ was slightly larger than at Stoke Lyne, despite its lower acreage (3,306 acres compared to 3,901 acres). Whether this is a fair reflection of relative wealth is difficult to decide. Until 1836 (6 & 7 Wm.IV, c.96), when a uniform system of rating was ordained according to a well-defined net annual value of each property, the poor rate assessment was notorious for being out of line with the actual landed wealth of a parish and its distribution.⁸¹

However, it must be acknowledged that even if the total wealth of a parish was undervalued, this did not necessarily affect relative values within the parish. Also, during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, re-valuations of parishes and the distribution of the poor rate were frequently carried out in order to get a fairer distribution of the greatly enhanced poor relief burden. Certain farmers' contributions were re-assessed at Pyrton in 1810-11, 'an alteration having lately taken place in the farm belonging to Mr Hammersley.'⁸² Pyrton, with its much greater relief expenditure, had to levy larger and more frequent poor rates even though its rateable value was higher than the other parishes. In 1795-6, when poor relief expenditure at Pyrton reached £703.5.6, compared to £381.11.9 at Cropredy and £274.6.9 at Stoke Lyne, the

⁷⁸ OA.Par.Pyrton,c.3

⁷⁹ *ibid.*

⁸⁰ *ibid.*

⁸¹ M.Neuman, *Berkshire*, 120

⁸² OA.Par.Pyrton,e.4

overseers levied three 1s. rates and one 2s. rate.⁸³

Figures 5.5 (a-d) illustrate that the payment of the bulk of the poor rates in each parish was concentrated in a relatively small number of hands, and that this concentration increased during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, although at different rates. The distribution of the poor relief burden amongst the ratepayers is very significant. A parish where there was a long tail of poor householders might have been less able or willing to pay high relief costs than a parish whose poor relief burden was carried by a few relatively wealthy ratepayers. Although the former parish might have had greater poverty than the latter, this could be disguised by a more tight-fisted policy whereby hard-pressed ratepayers tried to limit expenditure. Higher poor relief expenditure may simply reflect a more concentrated land holding bringing the possibility of greater liberality in disbursements, rather than greater poverty.

The number of ratepayers at Spelsbury fell from 46 in 1738 to 33 in 1795.⁸⁴ The proportion of the total rate paid by the ten largest ratepayers increased from 56.5% to 61.2%. These changes are illustrated in Figure 5.5 (c) which shows the shrinking of the long tail of very small ratepayers and the expanding bulge around the middle. The number of ratepayers in possession of half-yardland holdings, held by copyhold, fell from 12 to 6 between 1738 and 1795. A map of the village of Spelsbury produced for the Earl of Lichfield at the start of the eighteenth century shows the distribution of these holdings. A description which accompanies this map explains how several of them had come into the possession of the lord at the death of the copyholder.⁸⁵ It

⁸³ OA.Par.Pyrton,c.4

⁸⁴ OA.Dil.I/i/33e; OA.Dil.II/d/1a

⁸⁵ OA.Dil.II/a/1e

seems likely that these were subsequently consolidated into larger holdings.

It is possible to compare the composition of the bodies of ratepayers at Cropredy, Pyrton and Spelsbury in 1795. The largest ratepayer in each parish paid a remarkably consistent proportion of the total burden (13.5% at Cropredy, 13.6% at Pyrton and 13.2% at Spelsbury) but it must be remembered that the total relief burden at Pyrton at this time was at least twice as large as the burden of the other two parishes. Figures 5.5 (a-d) also show that differences begin to emerge once the contribution of the fifth largest ratepayer is taken into consideration. At Spelsbury, the five largest ratepayers contributed 37.9% of the poor rate; 45.1% at Cropredy and 56.1% at Pyrton. Cropredy also had a long tail of very small ratepayers in 1795. In all, there were 43 ratepayers in this parish compared to the 33 already mentioned at Spelsbury and the 25 at Pyrton. The top ten ratepayers at Pyrton contributed 88.8% of the total burden (top 20 paid 98.9%); at Cropredy the top ten paid 68.1% (top 20 paid 89.5%), while at Spelsbury, the least concentrated of the three parishes, the top ten paid only 61.2% (top twenty paid 87.2%). Thus, not only did Pyrton have a much heavier overall relief burden, but this burden was also concentrated among a much smaller number of relatively richer ratepayers.

This, of course, does not take into account the relative abilities of the farmers in each parish to pay their rates. As I have already mentioned, the total rateable value at Pyrton was larger than at Stoke Lyne despite its smaller acreage. At the turn of the nineteenth century, Pyrton could boast farmers who were amongst the best in the county. Thomas Cozens who farmed his own property at Goldor was much admired by Arthur Young, who found him extremely intelligent, except on the matter of crop

rotations.⁸⁶ However, there does seem to have been some unrest in the parish concerning the distribution of the poor rate burden. A vestry minute dated 2 December 1786 recorded 'that Mr Woodbridge and Mr Ludlow [two farmers in the parish] be summoned before a magistrate to show causes why they do not pay their poor rates.'⁸⁷

At a vestry meeting held a decade later on 13 August 1797 it was noted that:

'...the Poor Rate as made be allowed in the state it is now and that in case Mr Paul Blackall, Mr Thomas Cozens and others do not come forward to settle their respective poor rates as agreeable to the Rate made on the majority of the other inhabitants, a new evaluation is agreed and shall be made throughout the whole parish of the lands chargeable to the poor rates. And it is further ordered that a vestry will be held at the Hare and Hounds in Watlington on Saturday the 20th day of this month at 2 o'clock in the afternoon to appoint proper persons to make the new valuations of all lands, woodland and houses in the parish liable to be charged to the poor rates.'⁸⁸

Mr Thomas Toovey was paid £1.2.6 by the overseers on 2 December 1797 'for measuring land at Goldor'.⁸⁹

The dispute over the distribution of poor rates at Pyrton continued into the new century. It was resolved at a vestry meeting held on 13 July 1801 that 'we whose names are subscribed have agreed to and with each other that the whole of the Parish of Pyrton shall be surveyed and a valuation made of the same in order to make a regular and just poor rate and Richard Davis and William Bushnell be appointed to make the survey and quality the land.'⁹⁰ It was agreed at a subsequent Vestry held on 28 April 1802 that 'the poor rates for the said parish shall be altered agreeable to the estimate given by the said Mr Bushnell and Mr Davis.'⁹¹ Mr Bushnell was paid £27.0.0 'for surveying part of the parish in dispute' on 4 March 1804, and a further

⁸⁶ A.Young, *Oxfordshire*, 119

⁸⁷ OA.Par.Pyrton,e.4

⁸⁸ *ibid.*

⁸⁹ OA.Par.Pyrton,c.4

⁹⁰ *ibid.*

⁹¹ OA.Par.Pyrton,e.4

£61.2.6 one week later.⁹² William Davenport was paid £100 for making a further survey of the parish on 19 December 1812.⁹³

The overseers at Cropredy paid 13s. 11d for a property assessment by Mr Sims, the parish attorney, on 12 January 1805.⁹⁴ Mr Sims was also paid several other unspecified sums which perhaps related to this problem.⁹⁵ Mr John Hopcraft was paid £10.10.0 on December 23 1825 'for valuing the parish of Cropredy' and 'The New Quality' was introduced on 6 January 1826, according to which a 6d rate raised £80.10.0.⁹⁶ According to the old valuation, a rate of 1s. in the £ raised £91.8.5.⁹⁷ While the number of ratepayers at Cropredy declined from 43 in 1795 to 35 in 1814, the number of ratepayers at Pyrton also fell from 25 in 1795 to 18 in 1810, before rising to 20 by 1830. A poor rate assessment at Stoke Lyne, dated 27 April 1827, shows that there were only twenty ratepayers in the parish at that time.⁹⁸ The relief burden, though much lower overall at Stoke Lyne, was more concentrated than at Pyrton where the top five ratepayers paid 59.9% of the poor rate and the top ten paid 90.9%. At Stoke Lyne the respective proportions were 67.1% and 93.3%.

The distribution of poor rates: Summary

The composition of the ratepaying body therefore varied between parishes and changed over time. The far larger relief burden at Pyrton was also borne by a smaller body of ratepayers than at Cropredy and Spelsbury. The small number of ratepayers at Stoke Lyne had to bear a burden which in total was less than half the size of the

⁹² OA.Par.Pyrton,c.4

⁹³ OA.Par.Pyrton,c.5

⁹⁴ OA.Par.Cropredy,b.10

⁹⁵ *ibid.*

⁹⁶ OA.Par.Cropredy,b.13

⁹⁷ OA.Par.Cropredy,b.15

⁹⁸ OA.Misc.Cor. I/2

overall burden at Pyrton between 1787-8 and 1834-5. This leads on to the question of whether the ratepayers at Pyrton tried to reduce this burden by cutting the real value of relief payments or by refusing applicants' demands for relief. It may, however, have been the case that the small body of relatively wealthy ratepayers at Pyrton were more liberal in their relief than the many small hard-pressed ratepayers in certain parishes in other parts of the county. An examination of the backgrounds of those responsible for the administration of poor relief in each of the four parishes will shed some light onto these issues, by providing an insight into the decision-making process which shaped the provision of poor relief.

The administration of the parish

Two overseers served annually in each parish with the exception of Pyrton, where only one overseer served between 1808-9 and 1816-17 and in 1824-5. Where two overseers operated, they frequently divided the year between them, each officer taking responsibility for six months.⁹⁹ The identity of the overseers can be determined by references to them in the lists of disbursements. In addition, the following year's overseers were nominated at the Easter Vestry and their names inserted in the accounts for validation by the Justices. Table 5.5 shows that in each parish, several individuals served as overseer on a number of occasions.

Most overseers were 'substantial householders', and in each parish the longest serving of them were amongst the largest ratepayers. At Pyrton, Joseph Badcock (who paid 11.0% of the poor rate in 1795¹⁰⁰) served nine times; Paul Blackall (13.7%) served eight times, Thomas Reeves (10.2%) seven times, Henry Woodbridge (10.2%),

⁹⁹ E.M.Hempson, *Treatment*, 237, also noted this tendency developing in Cambridgeshire during the early eighteenth century.

who served every other year between 1797-8 and 1810-11, six times and Simon Green (5.4%) five times. Between them they paid 50.5% of the total poor rate in 1795 and served as overseer thirty two times (41% of the total number of overseers between 1788-9 and 1834-5). Another twenty four individuals each served on fewer than five occasions, twelve just once.

Table 5.5. Number of years served as overseer of the poor

Parish	Years ¹⁰¹	Number of different overseers	1 ¹⁰²	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Cropredy	33	26	11	3	5	4	1	1	1	0	0
Pyrton	44	29	12	8	1	3	1	1	1	1	1
Spelsbury	12	15	9	6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Stoke Lyne	42	26	8	7	3	5	0	0	1	0	2

Sources: See Table 5.3

While in some instances several generations of the same family served as parish overseer, in other cases individuals who moved into the parish came to occupy the office. C.H.Lichfield first appeared in the list of ratepayers at Pyrton in 1830 when he paid 20.3% of the total relief burden.¹⁰³ He served as parish overseer in 1828-9 and 1834-5. Susannah Woodbridge was the only woman to serve as overseer in the four parishes, serving once at Pyrton in 1797-8.

At Cropredy, twenty six individuals served at least once as overseer, the most frequent being William Arnold, who paid 6.5% of the poor rate in 1814¹⁰⁴ and served seven times. Thomas Andrews, who only paid 4.5% of the poor rate, served six times.

¹⁰⁰ OA.Par.Pyrton,c.3
¹⁰¹ These figures refer to the years for which the identity of the overseer can be determined: Cropredy (1794-5 to 1809-10,1814-15, 1816-17 to 1819-20, 1822-3 to 1828-9, 1830-1 to 1834-5); Pyrton (1790-1 to 1791-2, 1792-3 to 1817-18, 1819-20 to 1834-5); Spelsbury (1801-2 to 1807-8, 1809-10, 1811-12, 1813-14, 1817-18) and Stoke Lyne (1791-2, 1793-4 to 1799-1800, 1801-2 and 1803-4 to 1835-6)
¹⁰² These figures refer to the number of years served by each overseer.
¹⁰³ OA.Par.Pyrton, c.3
¹⁰⁴ OA.Par.Cropredy,b.15

John Eagles, who paid 10.5% of the poor rate in 1795¹⁰⁵ only served twice as overseer during this period. He was succeeded by his son, William, who served five times. The Anker family, whose contribution of 2.4% of the poor rate in 1795 had increased to 7.4% by 1814, were represented on five occasions; Samuel (four times) was succeeded by his son, William, once. The Chamberlains, William and his son, John, served five times as overseer. Their share of the total poor rate rose from 13.6% in 1795 to 20.4% in 1814.

The dominance of the office of overseer at Cropredy and Pyrton by the larger ratepayers seems to have been repeated at Stoke Lyne and Spelsbury. At Stoke Lyne, Edward Jackman (10.2% of the total poor rate in 1827¹⁰⁶) served as overseer on an annual basis between 1795-6 and 1801-2 and also in 1804-5, while Henry Williams served nine times, although he is not mentioned in the poor rate of 1827. In total, twenty six individuals served as overseer at Stoke Lyne in 41 years, slightly fewer than at Pyrton (29) where three more years are covered.

The parish vestry

Although the parish overseers were ultimately responsible to the magistracy, the vestry did have some say in their appointment and supervision. The overseers came from the ranks of the parish vestry, being nominated at the Easter meeting. The composition of this annual vestry can be determined because its members, having examined the account book and nominated the new parish officers, signed the overseers' accounts. Table 5.6 shows that the majority of vestry member served only for a short time, while a few individuals, principally the larger ratepayers who also

¹⁰⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ OA.Misc.Cor.I/1

served as overseer on the most occasions, served for longer.

Table 5.6. The composition of the parish vestry

Parish	1 ¹⁰⁷	2	3	4	5-10	10-15	15-20	20-25	25+	No. of Names
Cropredy	12	0	5	2	6	5	0	2	0	32
Pyrton	8	4	5	3	10	5	1	3	1	40
Spelsbury	9	3	3	3	4	2	0	0	0	24
Stoke Lyne	12	9	9	1	9	2	1	2	1	46

Sources: See Table 5.3

At Pyrton, Joseph Badcock examined the overseers accounts in 39 years out of a possible 48, while Paul Blackall and Thomas Wiggins’ signatures appear on 21 and 22 occasions respectively. At a vestry meeting held on 20 August 1778 it was resolved ‘that the overseers were to meet once a month on a Saturday at Watlington to close and audit their accounts and to hear and determine all complaints of the poor and other matters relating to the Parish of Pyrton and that the overseers be allowed 5s. to be expended at each meeting.’¹⁰⁸ The vestry minutes include orders to increase and decrease weekly pensions, to provide items of clothing and to appoint a parish apothecary and surgeon.¹⁰⁹ They also include resolutions to employ surplus labourers and evidence of disagreements with neighbouring magistrates over a variety of issues.¹¹⁰

Administrative reforms: Contracts, Select Vestries and assistant overseers

As I have shown, rising poor relief expenditure in the years immediately after 1815 encouraged some Oxfordshire parishes to experiment with alternative systems of

¹⁰⁷ These figures refer to the total number of years served by each member of the vestry and the number of people to which this is applicable. The ‘number of names’ refers to the total number of different signatures in each set of accounts.

¹⁰⁸ OA.Par.Pyrton, e.4.

¹⁰⁹ *ibid.*

¹¹⁰ *ibid.*

administration. Although all four parishes entered into annual contracts with doctors, only Spelsbury farmed out the relief of its entire poor, in the years shown in Table 5.7. The parish switched between maintaining its own poor and contracting them out throughout the early nineteenth century, suggesting that it was not convinced of the advantages of either system.

Table 5.7. The parish contract at Spelsbury

Name of Contractor	Length of Contract	Terms of Contract
William Fletcher	10 May 1803 to 6 April 1805	£28. 0s. 0d per month
William Harper	8 Dec. 1807 to 3 Oct. 1808	£34. 3s. 0d per month
Mr Everitt	4 Feb. 1809 to 10 Aug. 1810	£34. 4s. 0d per month
?	7 April 1817 to 11 March 1820	£43. 0s. 0d per month
Thomas Herbert	18 Aug. 1822 to 26 Mar. 1823	£24 to £64 per month
Thomas Herbert	1 Nov. 1823 to 29 Mar. 1824	£43. 0s. 0d per month
William Coulling	13 Aug. 1825 to 25 Sept. 1826	£26. 5s. 0d per month

Sources: OA.Par.Spelsbury,b.6,b.7,f.1,f.2

The growing burden of poor relief expenditure in the years immediately after 1815 also encouraged some parishes to adopt more professional methods of relief management. These, it was hoped, would allow the parish to apply some discrimination in its granting of poor relief. Select Vestries were adopted at Cropredy, Pyrton and Spelsbury, while both Pyrton and Spelsbury also appointed assistant overseers.

The employment of a vestry clerk at Pyrton to keep the overseers' accounts meant that they were kept in a much more systematic fashion than in the other three parishes. Richard Garrard was first paid £4.4.0 to keep the parish accounts on 19 March 1799.¹¹¹ He continued in this role until he was replaced by John Neighbour in 1813-

¹¹¹ OA.Par.Pyrton,c.3

14.¹¹² Neighbour was employed as 'deputy overseer' and was paid an annual salary of between £18 and £26, retaining the position until the end of 1823-4.¹¹³ He was also paid £3.3.0 on 6 August 1814 'for entering the Assendon accounts verbatim in the Pyrton Book for two years.'¹¹⁴ Although the overseers themselves were paid £10.0.0 per annum between 1825-6 and 1827-8 for keeping the accounts, Thomas Wiggins was employed as 'assistant overseer' at an annual salary of £20.0.0 in 1828-9.¹¹⁵

Thomas Herbert was appointed assistant overseer at Spelsbury by the Select Vestry on 28 March 1822 for one year at a salary of £10.0.0, 'for which sum he is to undertake the business of his office without further remuneration.'¹¹⁶ In addition, the Select Vestry also appointed Thomas Browne Evans to 'be responsible for the faithful and due execution of his office by the said Thomas Herbert.'¹¹⁷ Although Herbert's contract was renewed the following March, the Select Vestry agreed at a meeting held on 26 March 1825 that 'the advertisement for an assistant overseer in *Jackson's Oxford Journal*' be paid.¹¹⁸ John Coulling was subsequently nominated as assistant overseer at an annual salary of £12.10.0.¹¹⁹ He was also promised an additional payment of £2.10.0 in return for his good conduct in the first half of the year and another payment of £2.10.0 for similar conduct in the second half. Coulling was re-appointed on the same terms on 27 March 1826 but it was announced on 9 October that Mr Samuel Hyde was to undertake the office at the annual salary of £15.0.0 and the same terms for the workhouse people.¹²⁰ He was replaced by Mr John Keyte on 27

¹¹² *ibid.*, c.5

¹¹³ *ibid.*

¹¹⁴ OA.Par.Pyrton,c.5

¹¹⁵ OA.Par.,c.7,c.8

¹¹⁶ OA.Par.Spelsbury,e.2

¹¹⁷ *ibid.*

¹¹⁸ *ibid.*

¹¹⁹ *ibid.*

¹²⁰ *ibid.*

September 1827.¹²¹ There is no evidence of payments to an assistant overseer at Cropredy and Stoke Lyne.

The first Select Vestry was held at Spelsbury on 14 January 1822, when it was resolved that a general meeting of the vestry would be held each year to examine the overseers' accounts, choose the churchwardens and overseers, inspect the proceedings of the Select Vestry and choose the new Select Vestry.¹²² At a general vestry held on 10 March 1823, Revd. George Turner was elected as Chairman of the Select Vestry.¹²³ Other members of the Select Vestry for the forthcoming year included Robert Harris and James Pratt (the two churchwardens), Richard Evans, T.B.Evans, Richard Harling, William Tenant, Edward Kimble, Mr Hyatt, Mr Gardner, Robert Harris junior, Edward Claridge and Ellis Fowler, several of whom had previously served as parish overseer.¹²⁴ The Select Vestry elected on 25 March 1827 included Revd. George Turner (chairman), James Pratt, Edward Claridge, Edward Kimble, Robert Harris, William Tenant, Robert Harris junior, Richard Claridge, Thomas Collins and Mr Hyatt.¹²⁵ In 1795, there had been 33 ratepayers in the parish.¹²⁶

The adoption of a Select Vestry at both Cropredy and Pyrton is evident in payments made towards the cost of holding such meetings contained in their respective overseers' accounts. On 10 January 1824, 8s. 9d was 'paid at the first Select Vestry' at Pyrton.¹²⁷ At Cropredy, although the overseers continued to refer to 'the vestry' in their accounts, separate lists of the distribution of votes in the Select Vestry suggest that this form of administration had been adopted in 1819. Table 5.8 shows the

¹²¹ *ibid.*

¹²² OA.Par.Spelsbury,c.2

¹²³ *ibid.*

¹²⁴ *ibid.*

¹²⁵ *ibid.*

¹²⁶ OA.Dil.II/d/1a

¹²⁷ OA.Par.Pyrton,c.7

number of votes which each individual was allowed in the Select Vestry, if elected. It is difficult to measure the success of the Select Vestries in improving the efficiency and reducing the overall cost. However, in his response to Question 44 of the *Rural Queries*, Thomas Wiggins suggested that the administration of poor relief by the Select Vestry ‘can not be altered for the better.’¹²⁸

Table 5.8. Select Vestry voting at Cropredy

Name of Voter	No. of Votes (1819)	No. of Votes (1827)	% Contribution to 1814 Poor Rate
William Eagles	6	6	10.6%
W.H.Chamberlain	6	6	20.4%
Samuel Anker	5	6	7.4%
William Toms	4	6	6.9%
Richard Grisold	4	6	0%
Canal Company	4	6	0%
William Arnold	4	5	6.5%
Mrs Loveday	3	5	5.2%
George Adkins	3	5	5.5%
Thomas Andrews	3	3	4.4%
Edward Elkington	2	2	3.4%
Thomas Arnold	2	2	0%
Thomas Grisold	0	4	0%
All the rest	1 each	1 each	

Sources: OA.JXVI.a.13.Pellatt.xv/v12; OA.Par.Cropredy,b.14,b.15

The adoption of paid assistant overseers caused a rise in the cost of poor law administration, but the overseers' accounts show that despite criticism by the 1834 Poor Law Report this was a cheap system to administer: less than 10% of relief costs in each parish throughout most of the period. The highest expenditure on administration was at Cropredy, Pyrton and Spelsbury during the 1820s and early 1830s, partly due to the adoption of paid assistant overseers at Pyrton and Spelsbury.

¹²⁸ PP 1834 (XXXIII), Evidence of Thomas Wiggins

In addition, in certain years large fees were paid to cover legal expenses and the peaks and troughs in administrative costs frequently follow the fluctuations in these fees. Table 5.9 shows the largest of these payments made at Cropredy and Pyrton.

Table 5.9. Legal expenses at Cropredy and Pyrton

Parish	Date	Recipient	Payment
Cropredy	20 July 1794	Mr North	£9.18.0
	20 March 1802	Mr Dury	£12.7.6
	6 April 1803	Mr Dury	£47.18.1
	25 March 1817	Mr Sims	£23.8.0
	6 May 1821	Mr Sims	£52.10.0
	6 Sept. 1821	Mr Sims	£50.0.0
	31 March 1825	Mr Sims	£12.7.4
	31 Dec. 1829	Mr Sims	£20.0.0
	5 August 1830	Mr Sims	£20.0.0
	21 June 1832	Mr Sims	£40.0.0
	5 Sept. 1832	Mr Sims	£21.17.1
Pyrton	5 Jan. 1822	Mr G.P.Cooke	£15.0.0
	29 March 1822	Mr G.P.Cooke	£7.17.0

Sources: OA.Par.Cropredy,b.9,b.10,b.12,b.13,b.14; OA.Par.Pyrton,c.7

The overseers at Pyrton were engaged in a protracted dispute over the settlement of Thomas Broadway with the parish of Turville in Buckinghamshire in 1833-4 which cost £31.19.1, out of a total of £91.15.9 spent on administration.¹²⁹ He had served as a servant-in-husbandry for a year and the overseers at Pyrton tried to establish that the farm on which he served was located outside the parish. Expenses included the payment of lawyers' fees, the purchase of a copy of a preamble of the parish made in 1790 and a copy of a valuation of the parish made in 1812.¹³⁰ A further

¹²⁹ OA.Par.Pyrton,c.8
¹³⁰ *ibid.*

£18.9.0 was spent in 1833-4 'to cover George Eyre's Bill in the case of Fletcher against the parish of Lewknor.'¹³¹

Although expenditure on the administration of the Poor Laws peaked at £166.4.0 (23.2% of total relief expenditure) at Cropredy in 1821-2, this included bills amounting to £102.7.0 paid to Mr Sims, the parish attorney.¹³² He was paid £52.7.0 'on William Dunn's account' on 23 April 1822 and a further £50.0.0 'law expenses' on 21 September 1821.¹³³

In addition to the usual expenses incurred dealing with settlement examinations and removals, vestry meetings, other travel and the like, several payments were also made to fathers of bastards to encourage them to marry and therefore assume responsibility for their children. William Bicknell of Cropredy was given £1.15.0 to marry on 16 June 1798.¹³⁴ They also spent £14.12.2 retrieving Richard Hunt from Charlgrove after he had fled his wife and family in December 1809.¹³⁵ The overseers at Pyrton spent £3.13.3 'going after John Holland' in August 1800 and a further £2.12.6 on his marriage once he had been retrieved.¹³⁶ They also spent £1.6.0 on Ann Essex's 'wedding dinner' on 16 February 1801.¹³⁷ The Stoke Lyne overseers paid £6.1.6 to cover the expenses of marrying Fillis Hall on 20 March 1796,¹³⁸ and the overseers at Spelsbury spent £29.2.5 on 'persuading Elizabeth Harris to marry' on 20 December 1822.¹³⁹

¹³¹ *ibid.*

¹³² OA.Par.Cropredy,b.13

¹³³ *ibid.*

¹³⁴ OA.Par.Cropredy,b.9

¹³⁵ OA.Par.Cropredy,b.11

¹³⁶ OA.Par.Pyrton,c.4

¹³⁷ *ibid.*

¹³⁸ OA.Misc.Dew.II/3

¹³⁹ OA.Par.Spelsbury,f.1

The role of the magistracy

The overseers of the poor and parish vestry thus played a central role in the administration of the Poor Laws at the parish level. However, the extent to which they had a free hand in the management of poor relief was limited by the interference of the magistracy. The extent of this interference is difficult to gauge. Although the Poor Laws were open to local interpretation, magistrates acting at various levels could have a direct input into their operation. Their most frequent role in the administration of the Poor Laws involved adjudicating on settlement issues and the annual auditing of accounts. However, they were also responsible, collectively, individually or in pairs, for issuing direct orders to the overseers about the nature and extent of relief payments.

The distribution of individual magistrates across the county can be discovered from the signatures of magistrates who examined the overseers' accounts of every parish at the end of each financial year, and from a list of magistrates included in the Quarter Sessions Minutes of the Easter Sessions of 1826.¹⁴⁰ Figure 5.6 shows that local magistrates supervised Poor Law activities in each of the four parishes.

At Cropredy, William Holbech of Banbury signed the accounts on 28 occasions. Revd. John Ballard, the Vicar of Cropredy, signed them 17 times, while Mr Loveday's signature was recorded 13 times. Magisterial involvement in the administration of the Poor Laws in this part of the county was focused upon a monthly meeting held at Mollington. In total, the overseers visited Mollington on 169 separate occasions. Banbury was the meeting place for the divisional sessions and, as shown in Chapter 3, allowance scales were issued by the magistrates to be adopted throughout the

¹⁴⁰ OA.QSM.I/10, Easter 1826

hundreds of Banbury and Bloxham on 17 October and 14 November 1812.¹⁴¹ Banbury was visited on 69 occasions by the Cropredy overseers.

The identity of magistrates at Spelsbury can be identified in every year between 1800-1 and 1819-20, with the exceptions of 1805-6, 1809-10 and 1815-16. John Cobb of Charlbury was the most active magistrate. He signed the accounts on eleven occasions, Francis Pennystone of Chipping Norton four times. Robert Phillimore of Shipton-under-Wychwood examined the accounts in 1816-17 and 1817-18. The overseers' accounts also contain payments for several journeys made to Charlbury to fetch the allowance scale. Ten shillings were paid to the parish overseer on 11 October 1810 to cover his expenses 'for attending the meeting at Charlbury with John Coulling and others about the allowance.'¹⁴² A further 6s. were paid on 2 November 1811 'for the rule of allowances' while 3s. were spent on 20 November 1813 'setting the allowance of the paupers' at Charlbury.¹⁴³

The overseers at Spelsbury often journeyed to Charlbury. Chipping Norton was also a frequent destination and references to meetings with the magistrates there often follow lists of payments for journey expenses. After 1830-1, journeys to Charlbury ceased and the number of visits to Chipping Norton increased dramatically. Charlbury and Chipping Norton probably played a similar role in Chadlington Hundred to that of Mollington and Banbury in Banbury Hundred, with Charlbury ceasing to be a meeting place for the magistrates at the end of the period. It is also interesting to note that the overseers' accounts books of Cornwell, Leafield, Salford and Swinbrook were signed by the same magistrates.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴¹ OA.Par.Cropredy,c.9, items OA/9/5,OA/9/10

¹⁴² OA.Par.Spelsbury,b.7

¹⁴³ *ibid.*

¹⁴⁴ OA.Par.Leafield,b.2; OA.Par.Salford,b.8; OA.Par.Swinbrook,b.5

Bicester was the sole meeting place of the magistrates in Ploughley Hundred. It is not therefore surprising that this was the destination of the vast majority of journeys by the overseers of Stoke Lyne. The signatures of ten different magistrates were recorded in the account books between 1790-1 and 1834-5. Revd. W.H.Browne of Launton, near Bicester, signed the books on 32 occasions; William Greenhill on 10; Revd. John Knife of Charlton, near Bicester, on 8; A.H.Matthews, Revd. W.J.Palmer of Mixbury and John Stratton on five occasions each. The same magistrates were also active at Bletchingdon, Noke, Souldern, Stratton Audley and Weston-on-the-Green.¹⁴⁵

The parochial administration of the Poor Laws at Cropredy, Spelsbury and Stoke Lyne was therefore subject to the supervision of magistrates operating at a variety of levels. Whether the parish actually followed the instruction of the magistracy is open to question. Moreover, at Pyrton the number of journeys by the overseers to nearby Watlington, where the divisional magistrates sat, was remarkably small and, with one notable exception, there does not seem to have been very much magisterial involvement in the administration of poor relief. At a vestry meeting held on Easter Monday 1805, Thomas Stonor Esq. was appointed by the parish as overseer for the liberty of Assendon.¹⁴⁶ On the following Saturday, however, the Justices for the Division of Watlington ordered 'that the name of the said Mr Stonor be erased, and they appointed Richard Lawrence (of Assendon) overseer of Assendon against the unanimous wishes of the inhabitants of Pyrton.'¹⁴⁷ The Stonor family were staunch Roman Catholics which may explain the Justices' objections. The parish therefore turned to the Justices at the General Quarter Sessions at Oxford who refused to hear

¹⁴⁵ OA.Par.Bletchingdon,b.6; OA.Par.Noke,b.3; OA.Par.Souldern,b.10; OA.Par.Stratton Audley,b.2; OA.Par.Weston-on-the-Green,c.3

¹⁴⁶ OA.Par.Pyrton,e.4

¹⁴⁷ *ibid.*

their appeal.¹⁴⁸ It was ordered at a subsequent vestry held on 4 May 1805 that an attorney should be employed by the parish 'to draw up a case for the opinion off counsel, to ascertain whether the appeal which was refused by the Quarter Sessions can be removed into the Court of the King's Bench for the purposes of repealing the said appointment of the Justices.'¹⁴⁹ Although nothing more is heard of this case in the parish records, it is interesting to note that Thomas Stonor served as overseer at Assendon in 1806-7.

The Pyrton overseers' accounts were, like those of the other three parishes, subject to annual examination by two magistrates. Their identities can be determined in every year between 1787-8 and 1834-5, except 1824-5. John Fane, who lived in the nearby parish of Stokenchurch, signed the accounts on 22 occasions, the Earl of Macclesfield, who lived at nearby Shirburn Castle and owned land in the parish, signed them 18 times. Other notable magistrates active in the neighbourhood included J.H.Tilson of Tetsworth (11 times); William Lowndes Stone, also of Tetsworth (9 times); Revd.W.A.Musgrave of Chinnor (7 times); Richard Clarke (6 times), and John Fane Junior (3 times). Although the magistrates examined the accounts, according to Thomas Wiggins, in reply to Question 43 of the *Rural Queries*, relief at Pyrton was 'generally ordered by the Select Vestry and not made by the order of the magistrates.'¹⁵⁰ This is supported by the infrequency of journeys to Watlington, though it was so near to Pyrton, and many of the ordinary vestry meetings were held there, that expenses might not have been incurred.

There is also evidence that parish officers and members of the vestry stood up for themselves and refused to adopt the proposals put to them by the neighbouring

¹⁴⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁴⁹ *ibid.*

magistrates. Inserted in the overseers accounts belonging to Cropredy is an order issued by the magistrates William Holbech and John Ballard on 25 March 1818 that 'no payments for labour, no roundsmen or otherwise will in future be allowed in the overseers accounts.'¹⁵¹ The overseers seem to have ignored this order. While payments to 'month men' stopped on this date, roundsman payments, which had last been made in March 1828, resumed.¹⁵² Ballard and Holbech issued an additional order on 6 April 1833 which stated that 'it appears a considerable sum has been paid for the labour under the head of Roundsmen and boys. In future all such payments on this account will be struck out by the magistrates and charged to the outgoing overseers, to be paid on balance to the overseer for the ensuing year.'¹⁵³ The overseers continued to make such payments, however, despite the insertion of these orders into the accounts.¹⁵⁴

Who received what kinds of relief?

Despite the great variety of local circumstances and actors at play in the operation of the Poor Laws, the funds raised for the poor were distributed in only two principal ways: weekly, fortnightly or monthly 'pensions' were paid to selected poor inhabitants (although they were not necessarily intended to fully support the recipient), and 'occasional' relief was paid to meet intermittent needs, covering items such as rent, fuel and clothing, both of those in receipt of regular payments and those not on the pension lists.

¹⁵⁰ PP 1834 (XXXIII), Evidence of Thomas Wiggins

¹⁵¹ OA.Par.Cropredy,b.14

¹⁵² *ibid.*

¹⁵³ *ibid.*

¹⁵⁴ *ibid.*

As I have shown already, the administration of the Poor Laws could also be a costly business. In addition to lawyers' fees and the salaries of the assistant overseers, expenses were incurred in the day-to-day running of the system. These ranged from annual journeys to the Justices to get the accounts passed to the cost of a few pints of beer at the fortnightly vestry meeting. However, despite these expenses, Figures 5.7 (a-d) show that weekly 'pensions' dominated the accounts in all four parishes throughout the period, rarely falling below 70% of annual poor relief expenditure. While dominating the accounts, the level of pensions did vary from year-to-year, both in absolute and relative terms. While these fluctuations will be considered in more detail in the next chapter, it is clear from the graphs that 'occasional' payments were a much larger proportion of total expenditure at Pyrton than in the other three parishes, reflecting much larger expenditures on housing and medical care for its poor.

The provision of housing

Housing was a basic need and was most frequently removed from the general cover of pensions and provided by the parish as a separate item, avoiding the possibility that paupers could fail to save enough to pay their rent from their weekly pensions. Some parishes also bought or built houses for their poor. Thus, the overseers at Pyrton bought a cottage for John Lowe on 31 October 1796 at a cost of £11.11.0.¹⁵⁵ They also paid £20.0.0 to Richard Hathaway on 21 August 1821 for building cottages in the parish.¹⁵⁶ At Spelsbury, John Carey, who died at the age of 102 years in 1702,

¹⁵⁵ OA.Par.Pyrton,c.4

¹⁵⁶ OA.Par.Pyrton,c.7

bequeathed the sum of £10.10.0 to be paid annually to four poor people residing in the parish almshouses.¹⁵⁷

The amount of poor relief spent on cottage rents varied quite markedly between the four parishes. They increased from £5 per annum at Stoke Lyne during the early 1790s to £21.7.0 (7.7% of total relief expenditure) in 1795-6, but subsequently fell to £17.17.5 (6.4%) in 1796-7. Rents were paid at Michaelmas and at Easter, typically amounting to between £2.00 and £2.12.0 per annum. Total expenditure on rents fluctuated around this level until 1806-7 after which they fell to around £7-10 per annum. Five cottage rents were paid in the early 1790s, rising to twenty one rents in 1795-6.¹⁵⁸ Expenditure on rents peaked at Spelsbury in 1806-7 reaching £26.12.6 (5.2%) and again in 1819-20 when it reached £29.0.6 (13.8%). Typical rents varied between £1.10.0 and £2.2.0 per annum, slightly lower than at Stoke Lyne.

The overseers at Cropredy spent £15.9.6 (5.7%) on 18 cottage rents in 1793-4. Expenditure increased to £29.9.6 (7.6%) on 20 cottages in 1795-6 and subsequently rose to £35.14.3 (9.5%) in 1797-8 when 23 cottage rents were paid. Although it fell to £21.3.9 (5.8%) in 1798-9 and the number of rents paid fell to 18, expenditure on 38 rents rose sharply to £48.12.0 (10.8%) in 1799-1800 before peaking at £57.6.9 (8.5%) in 1801-2. Rent payments fluctuated around this level until 1829-30, before falling to below £40 per annum. Typical rents varied between £1.10.0 and £2.2.0 per annum.

The highest expenditure on cottage rents was recorded at Pyrton, where it had already reached £46.3.10 (10.6%) in 1791-2. Thomas Wiggins noted in reply to Question 17 of the *Rural Queries* that there were 'no cases in the parish where the

¹⁵⁷ OA.Dil.II/9/2 (i)

¹⁵⁸ The overseers' accounts recorded the number of rents paid and the level of rents separately in some years but totalled the amounts in a single entry in others.

labourers own cottages.’¹⁵⁹ He also noted in reply to Question 19 that the ‘parish rarely pays rent.’¹⁶⁰ However, the parish overseers spent large amounts of poor relief on the payment of parish rents throughout the period, although several attempts had been made by the parish vestry to put a stop to this practice.¹⁶¹ As at Cropredy and Stoke Lyne, cottage rents at Pyrton also rose during the mid-1790s reaching £57.12.9 (8.2%) in 1795-6. After a slight decline during the late-1790s, they rose to new peaks of £91.2.3 (6.9%) in 1800-1 and £94.5.6 (6.5%) in 1801-2. On 23 April 1804 the parish vestry resolved ‘that the parish do discontinue paying the rents for the cottages and that the overseers be required to give notice to those cottages that the parish have lately paid the rent for, to prepare themselves to pay their rents in future.’¹⁶² Despite this order, annual expenditure on rents actually increased from £91.8.0 (11.4%) in 1803-4 to £94.7.0 (11.2%) in 1804-5 and reached a peak of £114.3.0 (12.1%) in 1808-9. Expenditure fell back from this peak, dropping to £72.7.0 (6.5%) in 1812-13. The parish vestry made another attempt to prohibit the payment of cottage rents on 19 September 1815.¹⁶³ This also failed, although expenditure did fall slightly throughout the 1820s dropping below £50 per annum during the early 1830s. The number of cottage rents paid also followed this pattern rising from 25 in 1791-2 to 35 in 1795-6. Having fallen to 30 in the late 1790s it subsequently increased to 32 in 1799-1800, 43 in 1800-1 and 1801-2, before falling back to 40 until 1805-6.

The typical annual rent at Pyrton varied between £2.2.0 and £2.10.0 and was therefore slightly higher than in the other three parishes. Despite this, and despite attempts by the vestry to restrict their payment, cottage rents continued to be paid in

¹⁵⁹ PP 1834 (XXXI), Evidence of Thomas Wiggins

¹⁶⁰ *ibid.*

¹⁶¹ OA.Par.Pyrton,e.4

¹⁶² *ibid.*

much larger numbers at Pyrton than in the other three parishes. Whether this was simply because more labourers owned their cottages elsewhere, or was the result of the paternalism of the Earl of Macclesfield is impossible to establish. The provision of clothing and medical care were also more generous at Pyrton, which may also reflect the relative wealth of ratepayers in the parish.

Assistance-in-kind

Although housing loomed large in the budget of the poor, the supply of other items such as clothing, fuel and food were also significant. Many of the early entries in the Pyrton Parish Book, for instance, dealt with the provision of clothing.¹⁶⁴ These items included shirts, shoes, petticoats, breeches, hats and caps, stockings and overcoats. Payments were also made for the repair of shoes and other items of clothing in addition to those on the purchase of cloth and yarn and the manufacture of garments.¹⁶⁵ In some cases the poor themselves were supplied with raw materials and expected to make their own clothing.¹⁶⁶ An agreement was made at Pyrton on 21 April 1783 between the parish vestry and Mr Richard Fooway, a draper at Watlington, that he would provide the poor of Pyrton and Assendon with their necessary clothes.¹⁶⁷ A similar agreement was made between the vestry and Mr Cozens of Watlington on 1 April 1793.¹⁶⁸ The vestry also noted that ‘whatever drapery goods be bought without the order of consent of the vestry shall be paid for by the person so ordering the same.’¹⁶⁹

¹⁶³ *ibid.*

¹⁶⁴ OA.Par.Pyrton,e.4

¹⁶⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁶⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁶⁷ *ibid.*

¹⁶⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁶⁹ *ibid.*

A wide array of other household goods were also recorded in the overseers' accounts. These included pots and pans, beds and bedding materials, tables and chairs and buckets and spades. Spinning wheels were purchased for a number of individuals. One was given to Richard Sims' girl at Cropredy on 30 January 1813, costing 3s.¹⁷⁰ Nash's wife received a wheel at Spelsbury on 24 March 1807, at the cost of 2s.¹⁷¹ At Pyrton, near to the lace-making areas of Buckinghamshire, several lace-making pillows were bought for young girls of the parish during the late 1820s and early 1830s. Elizabeth Townsend received one on 4 July 1829, costing 3s., while Mrs King (widow) was paid 2s. by the overseer to teach Crook's girl to make lace on 9 October 1830.¹⁷²

Although a wide variety of items were purchased for the poor at both Cropredy and Pyrton, the amount spent on them was small in both absolute and relative terms. At Cropredy such expenditure peaked in 1797-8 at £14.9.3 (3.8% of total expenditure) while at Pyrton it peaked at £14.2.0 (1.5%) in 1806-7. Such payments continued to be made even during the years of highest bread prices and poor relief expenditure, and while expenditure on these items remained low at Spelsbury and Stoke Lyne, both parishes spent large quantities on coal during the 1820s and early 1830s.

The overseers at Cropredy spent £9.0.2 on the carriage of coal during the mid-1790s and a further £1.14.11 in 1811-12.¹⁷³ Coal purchases began at Stoke Lyne in April 1798, soon after the enclosure of the wide expanse of Bayard's Green, when £1.9.6 was spent on the carriage of 59 cwt. of coal.¹⁷⁴ The overseers subsequently spent £49.14.6 on the purchase and carriage of coal between 1798 and 1820 and a

¹⁷⁰ OA.Par.Cropredy,b.11

¹⁷¹ OA.Par.Spelsbury,b.6

¹⁷² OA.Par.Pyrton,c.8

¹⁷³ OA.Par.Cropredy,b.9,b.11

further £331.0.0 between 1820 and 1835.¹⁷⁵ Total expenditure on the purchase and carriage of coal at Spelsbury between 17 November 1826 when records begin and April 1835 when they cease amounted to £345.4.0. A Select Vestry minute dated 4 October 1824 authorised the purchase of 40 tons for distribution among the poor of Spelsbury (16 tons), Taston (12 tons) and Dean (12 tons).¹⁷⁶ A separate 'coal account' contained on a loose leaf of paper was inserted in the overseers' accounts, showing that coal was sold to the poor at 1s. 6d cwt between 27 November 1824 and 30 April 1825.¹⁷⁷ During this period, 25 paupers received either 0.5 or 1 cwt. of coal each per week.¹⁷⁸ A Select Vestry authorised the purchase of a further 40 tons of coal for the use of the poor on 28 August 1826.¹⁷⁹ Carriage of coal was to be provided free by the teams of the parish although loading, unloading and turnpike costs were paid by the parish at the rate of 7s. for every 2 tons.¹⁸⁰ A coal house was also rented at Taston.¹⁸¹

The parishes in which coal was supplied to the poor had all been enclosed by Act of Parliament by the first decade of the nineteenth century. At Cropredy, the enclosure award allotted 4.1.28 acres to the trustees of the poor in exchange 'for the liberty of cutting sturze or other fewell growing within and upon a certain piece or parcel of ground called the Common Bush Ley.'¹⁸² At Stoke Lyne, the trustees of the poor were allotted a plot of 6.0.18 acres in 1794 'in lieu of a plot of furze called the 'Poor's Plot' for the purpose of burning fuel for the use and benefits of the poor inhabitants of

¹⁷⁴ OA.Misc.Dew.II/3

¹⁷⁵ *ibid.*; OA.Misc.Cor.I/1,Misc.Cor.I/2,Misc.Cor.I/3,Misc.Cor.I/4

¹⁷⁶ OA.Par.Spelsbury,e.2

¹⁷⁷ OA.Par.Spelsbury,f.3

¹⁷⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁷⁹ OA.Par.Spelsbury,e.2

¹⁸⁰ *ibid.*

¹⁸¹ OA.Par.Spelsbury,f.3,f.4,f.5

¹⁸² OA.QSD.A.85

Fewcot.’¹⁸³ The commons at Pyrton, where the poor were not provided with coal or other fuel by the overseer, were not finally enclosed until 1851, when the trustees of the poor were awarded several acres ‘in lieu of the customary right to cut furze on part of the waste.’¹⁸⁴

Medical Expenses

Although 39 Eliz., c.3 (1597-8) referred to the care of the ‘Lame, Impotent, Old and Blind’, no mention was made of the treatment, as opposed to the maintenance, of the sick. At this time, doctors were scarce compared with the suppliers of traditional herbal remedies and quack medicines, and their services were only available to the wealthy. However, the number of physicians, apothecaries and surgeons increased during the seventeenth century and many towns took steps to make their services more widely available. Rural parishes followed their example during the early eighteenth century and in little more than a century medical relief had extended from the occasional payment of doctor's bills to a large and varied section of the relief system. The expansion and diversification of poor relief in this direction was, according to Oxley, one of its greatest successes.¹⁸⁵

Several options were available to the parish overseers by the late eighteenth century. They could enter into a contractual agreement with a doctor for a fixed sum to treat the parish poor over an agreed period, or they could pay the doctor for a particular treatment as and when it was needed. In addition they might employ others,

¹⁸³ OA.QSD.A.116

¹⁸⁴ OA.QSD.A.45

Revd. David Davies, *Husbandry*, 15, reckoned that a family could cut enough fuel for a year in a week. To replace it after enclosure would cost between £1.10.0 and £4.3.0 per annum. Assuming that the ‘Poor’s Plot’ was rented at 20-30s. per acre (figure from A.Young, *Oxfordshire*, 39), it seems likely that the poor were not fully compensated for their loss. Each plot would only have yielded a few £s in rent each year.

including bone-setters, purveyors of quack remedies, nurses and midwives, from time-to-time. For instance, John Matthews of Cropredy was paid £1.1.0 on 6 January 1831 for setting the arms of Henry Giles' girl and Richard Hunt.¹⁸⁶ At Stoke Lyne, Mrs Furlong was paid £4.14.6 on 6 April 1795 'for setting William Stevens' leg'.¹⁸⁷ A third option involved paying a subscription to the Radcliffe Infirmary at Oxford to which sick paupers could be sent for treatment. It had been founded in 1770 and by 1830, at least 80 Oxfordshire parishes were paying up to six guineas each per year to a special scheme.¹⁸⁸ Parishes also had to deal with pauper lunatics and outbreaks of epidemic diseases, most notably smallpox.

All four parishes entered into annual agreements with a variety of doctors to treat the parish poor. Doctor Eagles served at Cropredy in 1793-4, his annual salary varying between £3 and £10 until his contract was terminated at the end of 1811-12.¹⁸⁹ He was replaced by Drs Chapman and Brayne in April 1812, who were paid £10 per annum until they, in turn, were replaced by Dr Harris in 1816-17.¹⁹⁰ He served the parish down to 1834-5 at an annual salary which increased from £10 to £14 at the end of his first year.¹⁹¹

The poor at Stoke Lyne were treated by Dr Davis during the early 1790s, at a annual salary which varied between £3 and £5.¹⁹² He was replaced by Dr Pearce in 1795-6 and over the next fifteen years the position rotated between Dr Pearce, Dr

¹⁸⁵ G.R.Oxley, *England*, 72

¹⁸⁶ OA.Par.Cropredy,b.14

¹⁸⁷ OA.Misc.Dew.II/3

¹⁸⁸ E.G. Thomas, *Medicine*, 4

¹⁸⁹ OA.Par.Cropredy,b.9,b.10,b.11

¹⁹⁰ OA.Par.Cropredy,b.11,b.12

¹⁹¹ OA.Par.Cropredy,b.12,b.13,b.14

¹⁹² OA.Misc.Dew.I/3

Davis and Dr Brain.¹⁹³ The annual salary had increased to £10.10.0 in 1811-12, when Dr Davis returned on a permanent basis, to be replaced by Dr Woodward in 1828-9.¹⁹⁴

The Select Vestry minutes provide more detailed information on the quality of medical treatment at Spelsbury between 1822 and 1828.¹⁹⁵ Dr Dix was replaced by Dr Horniblow in 1806-7 at an annual salary which varied between £6 and £10.¹⁹⁶ However, the Select Vestry resolved on 11 March 1824 'that Mr Horniblow be written to by the Chairman to require a more regular attendance on the sick poor.'¹⁹⁷ A similar resolution was made at a meeting held on 19 April 1824 and it was further resolved at a meeting held on 28 June 1824 'that proposals be received from different medical persons stating the sum at which they are willing to undertake the attendance and medical aid afforded to the sick poor of this parish.'¹⁹⁸ It was agreed on 28 July 1824 that Mr Williams of Charlbury would be paid £8.8.0 per annum in return for his attendance 'in all cases of casualties, broken bones and smallpox.'¹⁹⁹ In other cases, the Chairman or a member of the Select Vestry was to write to him to require his attendance.²⁰⁰ On 6 March 1825, however, the Select Vestry ordered 'that Mr Pratt be desired to obtain of Mr Horniblow the terms on which he is willing to undertake the medical attendance on the sick poor of the parish.'²⁰¹ He returned as parish doctor and was paid £1.18.6 'for extra attendance in consequence of the typhus fever prevailing', in addition to his annual salary of £10.1.6 on 27 March 1826.²⁰² However, payments to him ceased in the late 1820s and an annual payment of £5.5.0 was made to the

¹⁹³ *ibid.*, Misc.Cor.I/1

¹⁹⁴ *ibid.*, Misc.Cor.I/2, Misc.Cor.I/3, Misc.Cor.I/4

¹⁹⁵ OA.Par.Spelsbury,e.2

¹⁹⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁹⁷ *ibid.*

¹⁹⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁹⁹ *ibid.*

²⁰⁰ *ibid.*

²⁰¹ *ibid.*

Radcliffe Infirmary at Oxford.²⁰³ Several entries in the overseers' accounts record the travel expenses of sick paupers to Oxford, though not always back again !²⁰⁴

The Pyrton Parish Book records an agreement made on 9 April 1779 between the parish and Mr Metcalfe 'to find the Poor of the said parish in all the medicines and attendance as an apothecary, all medicines and attendance as a surgeon, and attendance in all cases of midwifery for the sum of £12.12.0.'²⁰⁵ More would be paid for the treatment of smallpox cases.²⁰⁶ He was replaced in the following year by Mr Stringer of Watlington whom the Vestry Clerk deemed to be 'very skilful in his profession, humane in his disposition, and very moderate in his bills.'²⁰⁷ Mr Birkhead of Watlington became the parish doctor at Easter 1788, with an annual salary of £20 to cover all expenses except cases of smallpox and midwifery.²⁰⁸ He was replaced by Dr Alsop in the early 1790s.²⁰⁹

Although the Vestry minutes record the appointment of Dr Alsop as parish doctor in the early 1790s the first annual payment made to him which can be identified in the overseers' accounts £40.13.4 was paid on 17 April 1800.²¹⁰ Since the overseers' accounts began in 1787-8, a number of unspecified bills were paid at the end of the financial year which may have included payments to a parish doctor.²¹¹ Dr Alsop remained as parish doctor at Pyrton down to 1834-5, his salary varying between £27.17.0 in 1815-16 to £52.10.6 in 1819-20.²¹²

²⁰² *ibid.*

²⁰³ OA.Par.Spelsbury,f.3

²⁰⁴ *ibid.*,f.4,f.5

²⁰⁵ OA.Par.Pyrton,e.4

²⁰⁶ *ibid.*

²⁰⁷ *ibid.*

²⁰⁸ *ibid.*

²⁰⁹ OA.Par.Pyrton,c.4

²¹⁰ *ibid.*

²¹¹ *ibid.*

²¹² OA.Par.Pyrton,c.4,c.5,c.7,c.7,c.8,c.9

While all four parishes contracted out the medical treatment to doctors who were paid an annual salary for their troubles, one-off payments for the treatment of specific cases continued throughout the period. Eye complaints were a frequent problem, as in the payment of £1.11.6 to Mr Stone of Cropredy on 25 March 1802 'for curing Richard Sims' eyes.'²¹³ A further payment of 1s. was made to Richard Sims on 7 January 1810 'to buy caps for his children's cold heads'²¹⁴ but these seem to have failed to keep all of their heads warm because a subsequent entry on 25 January 1812 recorded that Mrs Wilson was paid 16s. 'for curing Sims boy of a cold head.'²¹⁵ Other payments refer to trusses, pills, leeches and breast cures.

The threat of smallpox

In general, very little is written in the accounts concerning the nature of the maladies affecting the poor. Smallpox, the greatest scourge parishes had to deal with during the eighteenth century, has the greatest documentation. The most dreaded and most prevalent disease, it was a constant drain on the poor rates. Prior to inoculation parishes did the best they could to treat it, cleaning premises after it had struck and providing food and allowances for those who were affected. Although inoculation was first introduced in 1724, smallpox continued to affect people in the four parishes throughout the early nineteenth century.²¹⁶

The greatest expenditure was recorded at Cropredy where there were several outbreaks during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. On 1 October 1796,

²¹³ OA.Par.Cropredy,b.10

²¹⁴ OA.Par.Cropredy,b.11

²¹⁵ *ibid.*

²¹⁶ According to E.G.Thomas, *Medical*, 8, although inoculation was introduced in 1724 its application was limited during the 1720s and 1730s because it was expensive and sometimes fatal. A milder treatment was developed in the 1740s but it still remained expensive. Smallpox continued to affect

£10.11.11 was spent during an outbreak;²¹⁷ Thomas Bourton was paid £2.2.0 ‘when with pox’ on 21 June 1806;²¹⁸ Mrs Archer was paid £12.12.0 on 20 December 1806 ‘to care for the smallpox’ and received a similar payment of £1.1.0 on 7 February 1807;²¹⁹ 5s. 6 was spent on a bottle of wine, sugar and nutmeg for William Neal’s wife when ‘struck with pox’ on 4 January 1817,²²⁰ and £2.10.0 was spent during the last recorded outbreak on 21 September 1827.²²¹ A separate ‘smallpox account’ was set aside in the overseers’ accounts during the outbreak of April-May 1811.²²² Table 5.10 shows the nature and extent of payments made during this outbreak. In addition, a bill of £50.0.0 was paid to Dr Eagles on 1 July 1811.²²³ Several families were affected by the outbreak and the funerals of Elizabeth Garner, William Davis’ child and Mary Summer were recorded in the overseers’ accounts.²²⁴

Despite the expense, both inoculation and vaccination were widely adopted in all four parishes during the period. Dr Jones was paid 5s. at Cropredy on 28 March 1807²²⁵ for ‘nockladin’ Thomas Judd, while Drs Chapman and Brayne were paid £7.12.6 on 31 August 1815 for ‘cowpocking the poor’.²²⁶ The overseers at Spelsbury paid 17s. 6d on 21 April 1813 ‘for ocklating the poor at Charlbury with cowpox’,²²⁷ while the poor at Stoke Lyne were ‘cowpoxed’ on 26 March 1825 at a cost of

many parishes, which responded by isolating the victims and providing them with relief. Vaccination was introduced in 1798 and was gradually adopted during the early nineteenth century.

²¹⁷ OA.Par.Cropredy,b.9

²¹⁸ OA.Par.Cropredy,b.10

²¹⁹ *ibid.*

²²⁰ OA.Par.Cropredy,b.12

²²¹ OA.Par.Cropredy,b.14

²²² OA.Par.Cropredy,b.11

²²³ *ibid.*

²²⁴ *ibid.*

²²⁵ OA.Par.Cropredy,b.10

²²⁶ OA.Par.Cropredy,b.12

²²⁷ OA.Par.Spelsbury,b.7

£9.0.0.²²⁸ At Pyrton, William Cooke was paid £24.19.0 for dealing with a smallpox outbreak on 14 April 1800.²²⁹ According to E.G.Thomas, Pyrton became the first parish in Oxfordshire to pay for the vaccination of its poor when it paid Dr Alsop £10.0.0 ‘for inoculating the parish with the vaccine’ on 16 February 1806.²³⁰ Dr Alsop's annual payment of £48.5.0 on 3 April 1818 also included his fee for the vaccination of 73 paupers.²³¹ Two other outbreaks of disease are also mentioned in the parish accounts. At Spelsbury, there was an outbreak of typhus fever in 1825-6,²³² while £2.17.9 was spent at Pyrton on 23 February 1833 ‘for spirits and wine to the poor who were ill with cholera morbus.’²³³

Table 5.10. ‘Smallpox Account’ at Cropredy, 20 April 1811 to 28 May 1812

Item of Expenditure	Amount
9 bottles of wine	£2.5.0
Nurses	£8.0.0
Paid John Hounslow to stop the road	£0.1.0
Moving paupers to beds	£0.5.0
Frankingesence to air smallpox houses	£0.3.6
Bottle of Brandy to air houses	£0.2.0
Making sope	£0.5.6
Coal	£1.2.0
Whitewashing houses	£0.6.0
Burial expenses	£2.3.6
Other Bills	£12.12.6
TOTAL	£27.6.9

Source: OA.Par.Cropredy,b.11

In addition to payments for medical treatment, the overseers’ accounts also contain a record of relief expended on the provision of nurses and midwives and also on the

²²⁸ OA.Misc.Cor.I/3
²²⁹ OA.Par.Pyrton,c.4
²³⁰ E.G.Thomas, Medicine, 5
²³¹ OA.Par.Pyrton,c.7
²³² OA.Par.Spelsbury,f.3

maintenance of pauper lunatics. Instances of lunacy could not be ignored and could incur great expenses in their treatment. The founding statutes of the Poor Laws made no separate provision for this type of pauper and it was not until the passage of 12 Anne, c.23 in 1714 that a distinction was made between pauper lunatics and 'Rogues, Vagabonds, Sturdy Beggars and Vagrants'. Afflicted paupers who had relations were to be left to their care, otherwise the parish would assume responsibility. At first parishes brought in unqualified persons to deal with the problem but it increasingly became the accepted policy for the acutely disturbed to be sent to private institutions, which charged high fees.

Widow Ann Steel was first taken by the overseers of Pyrton to the Bethlem lunatic asylum on 17 April 1804 at a cost of £4.14.11.²³⁴ A further entry in the overseers' accounts dated 13 December 1806 recorded £1.14.6 spent on removing her to Bethnal Green.²³⁵ She re-appeared in the parish account book fourteen years later when quarterly payments for her maintenance were made to St Luke's Hospital, Bethnal Green.²³⁶ The last such entry was dated 7 February 1829, £137.17.6 having been spent in the intervening years.²³⁷ Elias Astell, a brickmaker at Cropredy, was committed to a lunatic asylum at Oxford in the late 1820s. Payments of £9.15.0 and £11.16.0 were made towards his maintenance by the parish overseers on 8 November 1828 and January 1829.²³⁸ His wife and seven children became dependent on the parish when he was sent to the asylum. The overseers responded by examining Astell's settlement and discovered that he was settled in the parish of Halesowen, in the County of

²³³ OA.Par.Pyrton,c.8

²³⁴ OA.Par.Pyrton,c.4

²³⁵ *ibid.*

²³⁶ OA.Par.Pyrton,c.7

²³⁷ *ibid.*,c.8,c.9

²³⁸ OA.Par.Cropredy,b.14

Salop.²³⁹ His family were subsequently removed and payments towards his maintenance stopped.²⁴⁰

The cost of nurses and midwives were also paid by the parish. Both positions were usually filled by widows, many of whom were dependent upon the parish for their own support and therefore used these opportunities to supplement their incomes. The identity of parish midwives is shown in Table 5.11.

Table 5.11. Parish Midwives

Parish	Year	Midwife
Cropredy	1795	Mary Hirton*
	1795	Elizabeth Garner*
	1817	Elizabeth French*
	1819-1834	Deborah Wells
Pyrton	1792-8	Widow Lowe*
	1798-9	Widow King*
	1814-17	Widow Lambeth*
	1818-34	Widow Lipscomb*
Spelsbury	1802	Elizabeth Hickman*
	1814-18	Mrs Hounslow

* Also received poor relief at some point.

Sources: OA.Par.Cropredy,b.9,b.12,b.13,b.14; OA.Par.Pyrton,c.4,c.5,c.7,c.8,c.9; OA.Par.Spelsbury,b.6,b.7

Conclusion

Although the proportion of total poor relief expenditure on these payments was small, rarely rising above 30%, they reflect the role of the Poor Laws as a parochially based social welfare system. The overseers would, if required, provide a midwife at birth and a coffin at death, as well as for one’s needs during life. The overseers’ accounts are a testimony to the efforts made by the wealthier members of the parish community to support those deemed less fortunate.

²³⁹ P.Keegan, Brick, 68-75
²⁴⁰ ibid., OA.Par.Cropredy,b.14

Despite the massive increase in poor relief expenditure in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the lists of disbursements did not become a monolithic body of weekly pensions to the able-bodied and their dependents. Even so, 'occasional' payments varied within and between parishes in nature and extent. Expenditure on rents, clothing and medical care at Pyrton was significantly larger than at Cropredy, Spelsbury and Stoke Lyne. This may reflect both the greater relative wealth of ratepayers in that parish and also the paternalistic overlordship of the Earl of Macclesfield.

The overseers therefore had to function as the paymasters and the shopkeepers of the poor, purchasing a variety of goods and services both within the parish and from outside. When bought locally, they could contribute much to the local economy, supporting a wide array of individuals involved in the provision of food, coal, midwifery and medical services. The Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834 which took the relief of poverty out of local hands and centred it upon the Union Workhouse must have devastated these local services.

However, there are signs that by the 1820s the ratepayer and overseers were struggling to deal with the growing burden placed upon them by rising expenditure and the growing lists of disbursements. Attitudes towards poverty and its relief may have changed as emphasis shifted away from the relief of the non-able-bodied poor towards the maintenance of the able-bodied poor. The desire to put a lid on rising expenditure is reflected in attempts to streamline relief administration with the adoption of Select Vestries and assistant overseers. Whether it was also associated with a curtailment in the size of weekly allowances, and therefore the real incomes of the dependent poor, will be considered in the next Chapter.

Pensions and wage supplements

Introduction

We have already seen that the increase in total poor relief expenditure in rural Oxfordshire generally during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was not a smooth progression. It followed a series of surges and slumps, peaking in the high price years of 1795-6, 1800-2, 1810-11 to 1812-13 and 1816-17 to 1819-20. Although this suggests a connection between the price of bread and the level of expenditure, we have also already seen that neither the size nor the timing of peaks in the two series always coincided. What was the relationship in the four parishes, and what clues do their accounts give us about the other influences which broke the tie between bread prices and poor relief expenditure ?

Poor relief expenditure in the eighteenth century

Figure 6.1 shows that annual poor relief expenditure at Stoke Lyne during the eighteenth century followed the pattern of most rural Oxfordshire parishes for which data are available. It rose gradually during the 1750s and 1760s, before accelerating during the 1770s and early 1780s.¹ Although annual expenditure rose almost ten-fold between 1733-4 and 1789-90, increasing from £12.17.3 to £117.7.3, it remained low

¹ Overseers' accounts covering most of the period between 1733-4 and 1834-5 exist at Stoke Lyne. At Spelsbury, surviving overseers' accounts in the eighteenth century cover the period between 1773-4 and 1786-7, while accounts do not begin at Pyrton until 1787-8 and at Cropredy until 1793-4.

in absolute terms. Annual expenditure also increased at Spelsbury during the 1770s and 1780s, climbing from £143.9.5 in 1773-4 to £268.4.7 in 1783-4.²

Although trends in poor relief expenditure were similar in both parishes during the 1770s and early 1780s, the extent and precise timing of their changes varied. While expenditure decreased during the late 1770s and early 1780s at Stoke Lyne, it increased at Spelsbury, rising from £126.8.4 in 1779-80 to £182.4.7 in 1780-1. The upturn in expenditure at Stoke Lyne did not occur until 1782-3, when it jumped from £92.7.0 in 1781-2 to £126.18.2. Expenditure subsequently rose to £162.13.0 at Stoke Lyne in 1783-4, and to £268.4.7 at Spelsbury. While poor relief expenditure doubled at Spelsbury between 1779-80 and 1783-4, it increased by only 65% at Stoke Lyne. It fell in both parishes after the peak in 1783-4, dropping to £202.12.0 at Spelsbury in 1786-7 and £124.2.9 at Stoke Lyne. Total expenditure between 1776-7 and 1786-7 amounted to £2063.7.4 at Spelsbury and £1540.6.6 at Stoke Lyne.

Weekly disbursements at both Spelsbury and Stoke Lyne were dominated by payments to widows, the sick and the elderly during the early 1770s. In April 1774, weekly pensions varying between 1s. and 4s. were paid to seven women and three men at Stoke Lyne and to six women and five men at Spelsbury. Weekly pensions amounted to £62.16.0 out of a total expenditure of £133.9.8 at Stoke Lyne in 1774-5. Other disbursements were listed as 'occasional payments', including the provision of food, fuel and clothing, travel and administrative costs.

² A comparison of my figures calculated from the overseers' accounts with those in the Parliamentary Papers shows that in Spelsbury the overseers returned values for annual poor relief expenditure which averaged 2.4% more than my own, and 1.8% more at Stoke Lyne. It is not possible to compare figures at Cropredy and Pyrton because the overseers returned totals for the parish as a whole rather than breaking them down into their constituent hamlets, townships and liberties.

Although pensions were listed weekly in most years at both Spelsbury and Stoke Lyne, they were called ‘monthly collections’ at Stoke Lyne in 1773-4, 1780-1 and 1789-90. These are shown in Table 6.1.

Table 6.1. ‘Monthly collections’ at Stoke Lyne in the 1770s and 1780s

Month	1773-4	1780-1	1789-90
1	£4.14.0	£3.16.0	£5.6.0
2	£5.0.0	£3.8.0	£5.5.0
3	£5.0.0	£3.0.0	£5.2.0
4	£4.16.0	£3.0.0	£5.8.0
5	£4.18.0	£3.4.0	£6.2.0
6	£4.18.0	£3.4.0	£5.10.0
7	£4.18.0	£3.4.0	£5.15.6
8	£4.18.0	£3.4.0	£6.1.6
9	£4.18.0	£3.4.0	£6.0.0
10	£5.0.0	£3.4.0	£4.12.0
11	£5.0.0	£3.4.0	£5.8.0
12	£5.0.0	£3.4.0	£5.8.0
13	£5.0.0	£3.4.0	£5.8.0
Total	£133.19.0	£99.0.0	£117.7.0

Sources: OA.Misc.Dew.II/1, Misc.Dew.II/2

While the poor at Stoke Lyne were relieved wholly outdoors, payments towards the maintenance of a workhouse were recorded at Spelsbury. These included purchases of food, fuel and clothing ‘for the workhouse.’ On 14 April 1781, Edward Padbury was paid £2.13.0 ‘for fourteen pairs of shoes for the workhouse.’³ The workhouse was extended during the winter of 1780-1. Several payments were made for building materials such as planks, sand and straw and on 8 April 1781, Robert Harris was paid £1.16.7 ‘for plastering the new part of ye workhouse.’⁴

Although the pension lists were dominated by non-able-bodied individuals, payments to able-bodied labourers were made out of the poor rates in both parishes

³ OA.Par.Spelsbury,b.5

from time-to-time. A list of payments to labourers employed as roundsmen during the winter of 1767-8 was inserted in the back of the overseers' account book at Stoke Lyne.⁵ John Franklin was employed 'on the round' for six weeks during February and early March. He was paid 'for six day's work' each week, receiving a weekly wage of 1s. 6d.⁶ Several boys were sent 'on the round' each winter throughout the rest of the 1770s but these payments had ceased by the early 1780s.

Annual poor relief expenditure increased at Spelsbury from £126.8.4 in 1779-80 to £182.4.7 in 1780-1. The parish, perhaps in a quest for greater economy in relief provision, contracted out the maintenance of the poor at the start of 1781-2. Richard Thornett was paid £9.5.0 on 3 April 1781 and these payments continued each month until 20 August 1781 when they were replaced by monthly payments of £10.16.8 to Thomas Oldaker.⁷ Annual expenditure continued to rise, however, and the contract system was abandoned on 6 February 1783.⁸

The increase in annual poor relief expenditure during the early 1770s and early 1780s coincided with a marked increase in the price of wheat. The average national wheat price rose from 48s. 7d per Quarter in 1771-2 to 52s. 7d in 1773-4 and to 54s. in 1774-5.⁹ It fell back to 34s. 8d in 1779-80 but resumed its climb in the early 1780s, reaching 54s. 3d in 1783-4. Although the price of wheat peaked at similar levels in

⁴ OA.Par.Spelsbury,b.5

⁵ OA.Misc.Dew.II/2

⁶ Franklin was rotated around several farmers in the parish. On 31 January 1768 he was paid 2s. for '8 day's work at John Davis', 1s. 6d for '2 day's work at Petty's' and '4 day's work at Turner's' on 7 February, 1s. 6d for '3 day's work at Phillips' and '3 day's work at Allen's' on 14 February, 1s. 6d for '5 day's work at Parish's' and '1 day's work at Butler's' on 21 February, 1s. 6d for '4 day's work at Harris' and '2 day's work at Day's' on 28 February and 1s. 6d for '3 day's work at Day's' and '3 day's work at Phillips' on 6 March, OA.Misc.Misc.Dew.II/1.

⁷ Although the weekly pension lists disappeared from the overseers' accounts during this period, expenditure on clothing, summons and travel continued to be recorded separately, suggesting that they were excluded from the terms of the contract and remained the responsibility of the overseers, OA.Par.Spelsbury,b.5.

⁸ OA.Par.Spelsbury,b.5

⁹ B.R.Mitchell and P.Deane (eds.), *Abstract*, 756

1774-5 and 1783-4, annual poor relief expenditure was much higher at both Spelsbury and Stoke Lyne in 1783-4.¹⁰

The number of seasonally unemployed labourers turning to the parish for employment increased markedly at Spelsbury during the early 1780s, driving annual poor relief expenditure to much greater heights than at Stoke Lyne. The employment of labourers 'by the yardland' was first recorded in the overseers' accounts at Spelsbury in the early 1770s.¹¹ The number of labourers employed in this manner each winter had increased markedly when detailed lists of disbursements resumed in February 1783.

Ten male and four female labourers received payments for 'six day's work by the yardland' each week at Spelsbury during the winter of 1783-4. The number of surplus labourers employed in this manner fell to seven at the start of May, four at the start of June and to two on 18 June 1793. Payments to labourers ceased on 23 July and did not resume until 23 September. By 12 November, ten labourers were employed 'by the yardland', rising to fourteen on 31 December 1783. This marked seasonal pattern, following the seasonal cycles in arable farming activity and employment opportunities, was repeated in 1784-5, 1785-6 and 1786-7.

The small size of each payment for 'six day's work by the yardland' at Spelsbury and some of the names shown in Table 6.2, suggest that persons employed in this manner were single labourers, young boys and women. Married labourers were able to find employment throughout the winter months and remain independent of the parish.

¹⁰ Unless otherwise stated, the bread price refers to the price of a half-peck loaf of standard wheaten bread at Oxford recorded weekly in *Jackson's Oxford Journal*.

¹¹ Richard Langston was paid 2s. 3d 'for three day's work by the yardland' on 20 November 1774. He was paid a further 4s. 'by the yardland' on 25 December, OA.Par.Spelsbury,b.5. Labourers employed in this manner were allocated amongst the farmers of the parish in proportion to the number of yardlands which they possessed in the open-fields, their wages being paid by the parish. As shown in Chapter 5, poor rates were also calculated according to the number of yardlands at Spelsbury.

Table 6.2. Labourers’ wages employed ‘by the yardland’ at Spelsbury, 1783-4

Name	Weekly wage ¹²	Name	Weekly wage
Elizabeth Margetts	1s. 9d	John Gilkins	1s. 6d
Ann Hall	0s. 9d	John Griffin	1s. 6d
Charlotte Benfield	2s. 0d	Thomas Hencher	1s. 6d
Mary Stevens	0s. 10d	William Bowell	1s. 6d
George Mayo	3s. 0d	James Smith	1s. 6d
Thomas Grimett	1s. 6d	James Bowell	1s. 0d
John Margets	1s. 6d	William French	1s. 0d

Source: OA.Par.Spelsbury,b.5

This conclusion is confirmed by a ‘List of the Poor at Spelsbury on 14 January 1778’ found amongst the papers of the Dillon Estate.¹³ It contains 49 families, comprising 156 persons, in the hamlets of Spelsbury, Taston and Fulwell, regarded as ‘Poor’. The ‘List’ includes eight families with five members in each, two with six members, two with seven and one with nine. Only two labourers employed ‘by the yardland’ in 1783-4 shared the same name as a head of household in the ‘List’. Thomas Grimett was recorded as having one child and John Gilkins two children. It is possible, however, that they shared the same Christian name as their father and were, in fact, young boys. The vast majority of married labourers were not mentioned in the overseers’ accounts at this time.

The ‘List of the Poor’ is interesting for a number of reasons. It suggests that a large number of families in the parish were regarded as ‘Poor’ and therefore likely, under certain circumstances, to turn to the parish for support. The population of Spelsbury in 1801 was 509.¹⁴ If one assumes a similar figure in 1778, 30.6% of the parish population were regarded as ‘Poor’. However, it seems likely that the proportion was larger. The ‘List’ excludes the hamlet of Dean, the population of which was included

¹² Weekly payment by the parish ‘for six day’s work by the yardland’.

in the parish census return of 1801. Bearing in mind the rate of population growth in the early nineteenth century, it also seems likely that the population in 1778 was smaller than in 1801. The 'List' is also of interest because a separate column records numbers of shillings against each family. The number of shillings increased by one with each additional member of the household, suggesting that an allowance scale was used to calculate poor relief when it was required.

Poor relief expenditure in the eighteenth century: Summary

Although annual poor relief expenditure followed similar trends at both Stoke Lyne and Spelsbury, mirroring trends in rural Oxfordshire as a whole, the extent and precise timing of these fluctuations did vary. While annual expenditure more than doubled at Spelsbury between 1779-80 and 1783-4, rising to £268.4.7, it rose by 65% at Stoke Lyne to £162.13.3.

The provision of poor relief at Stoke Lyne remained firmly focused on the non-able-bodied poor during the late eighteenth century. At Spelsbury, on the other hand, the number of unemployed labourers turning to the parish for relief or employment during the winter months jumped in the early 1780s. This suggests the emergence of a fundamental difference in the role of poor relief between Spelsbury and Stoke Lyne during the early 1780s.

Both parishes shared the stonebrash soil of the Cotswolds sheep-and-corn farming region and similar acreage's (3900 acres at Spelsbury and 3730 acres at Stoke Lyne). However, the number of ratepayers was much smaller at Stoke Lyne and average farm size was larger. Although Spelsbury contained several large farms, the examination of

¹³ OA.Dil.II/d/3, see Appendix 2

¹⁴ PP 1801 (II)

the poor rate assessments in the previous chapter shows that it also contained many farms which were of less than 50 acres and therefore used family rather than hired labour. Its population of 509 persons in 1801 was much larger than Stoke Lyne's (354) suggesting that there were more landless labourers chasing fewer employment opportunities at Spelsbury. The calculations in Table 6.3 show the effects of harvest fluctuations on sizes of farm surpluses and deficits.

Table 6.3. The effects of harvest fluctuations on sizes of farm surpluses and deficits (in barrels)

Farm size	Yield	Subsistence requirement	Crop surplus or deficit	Price ratio ¹⁵	Cash surplus or <i>deficit</i> at £1 per barrel in a normal year (in £s)
Normal <i>harvest</i>					
10 ha.	300	240	+60	1.00	60
20 ha.	600	240	+360	1.00	360
150% <i>harvest</i>					
10 ha.	450	240	+210	0.40	84
20 ha.	900	240	+660	0.40	264
50% <i>harvest</i>					
10 ha.	150	240	-90	5.53	-498
20ha.	300	240	+60	5.53	332

Source: G.Hoppe & J.Langton, *Östergötland*, 3

These statistics suggest that in years of bad harvests small farmers, like those at Spelsbury, would suffer great losses, compromising their ability to hire labourers, pay high wages and high poor rates. Small farmers were dependent upon good harvests (and therefore low prices) to yield profits. The financial implications of variations in yields and inelastic demand for grain in bad harvest years, such as occurred in the early 1780s, meant that small farmers at Spelsbury, hit by falling incomes, tried to reduce costs by laying off labourers during the quiet winter months. These labourers

¹⁵ Calculated according to the formula of Bouniatian, E.A.Wrigley, *Corn Yields*, 107

were forced to turn to the parish overseer for support, being employed ‘by the yardland’ in return for their wages. At Stoke Lyne, on the other hand, the larger farm sizes meant that farmers did better in bad years and profits rose. Despite the collapse in profits at Spelsbury, however, married labourers continued to be employed directly by farmers throughout the year at both Spelsbury and Stoke Lyne.

The geography of poor relief expenditure, 1792-3 to 1797-8

Although payments to widows, the sick and the elderly continued to dominate the overseers’ accounts at Stoke Lyne in the early 1790s, the situation was noticeably different at Pyrton and Cropredy. These differences became even more marked as the price of bread, shown in Figure 6.2, began to rise during the winter of 1794-5. This is reflected in Table 6.4 which shows total annual poor relief expenditure between 1793-4 and 1797-8.

Total poor relief expenditure at Pyrton during the five year period between 1793-4 and 1797-8 was 1.5 times larger than at Cropredy and 2.3 times larger than at Stoke Lyne. Annual expenditure increased in all three parishes during the mid-1790s, though the size of each increase varied considerably. It was greatest at Pyrton, rising from £496.7.2 in 1793-4 to £703.11.6 in 1795-6.

Table 6.4. Total poor relief expenditure, 1793-4 to 1797-8

Year	Cropredy	Pyrton	Stoke Lyne
1793-4	£271.3.3	£496.7.2	£146.17.9
1794-5	£368.11.9	£516.15.8	£219.4.7
1795-6	£381.10.7	£703.11.6	£277.14.1
1796-7	£392.17.4	£645.6.11	£278.4.9
1797-8	£376.3.0	£356.12.6	£277.12.11
TOTAL	£1790.5.11	£2719.13.9	£1199.14.1

Sources: OA.Par.Cropredy,b.9; OA.Par.Pyrton,c.4; OA.Misc.Dew.II/3

The timing of the peak in annual poor relief expenditure also varied between the three parishes. It was recorded at Pyrton in 1795-6, when the average bread price rose to 1s. 9d, and in 1796-7 at both Cropredy and Stoke Lyne, when the bread price had fallen to 1s. 4d.¹⁶ The level of disbursements must have been influenced by factors other than the average annual bread price in these two parishes. While expenditure returned to its pre-crisis levels at both Cropredy and Stoke Lyne in 1797-8, it collapsed below this level at Pyrton, dropping from £645.6.11 in 1796-7 to £356.12.6 in 1797-8.

Differences in the nature and extent of poor relief expenditure between the three parishes, which became more marked during the period of high prices, were already evident in the early 1790s. Tables 6.5*¹⁷ and 6.6* show that although total annual payments to the non-able-bodied poor varied between the three parishes, differences in payments to the able-bodied poor were much more marked, growing during the period.

Able-bodied poor relief expenditure in the early 1790s

Family allowances had been paid to labourers at Pyrton since the overseers' accounts begin in 1787-8. Figures 6.3 and 6.4 (b) show that weekly pensions were paid to 17-18 labourers, amounting to £10-12 per month. Figures 6.5 (a-d) show that a weekly allowance of 1s. was paid for each additional child, starting with the second. The scale of allowances is shown in Table 6.7.

¹⁶Although variations in poor relief expenditure might reflect local differences in the price of bread, it was established in Chapter 2 that the price of a half-peck loaf varied very little across Oxfordshire during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century suggesting that other forces were at work.

¹⁷Tables marked * are included in Volume II to aid comparison between years.

Table 6.7. Scale of weekly family allowances at Pyrton, 1790-1 to 1793-4

Number of Children	Weekly allowance
2	1s.
3	2s.
4	3s.
5	4s.

Source: OA.Par.Pyrton,c.4

Throughout 1793-4, three labourers received allowances for two children, six for three children, five for four children and four for five children. Assuming that each labourer had a wife, one hundred individuals were members of households receiving family allowances (18 labourers, 18 wives and 64 children) in Pyrton at this time.

Figures 6.4 (a-b) show that while family allowance payments remained constant at Pyrton throughout the year, payments to able-bodied labourers at Cropredy varied seasonally, peaking in the winter months and collapsing during hay-time and the harvest. Family allowance payments at Pyrton topped-up labourers’ wages to a stipulated level. At this time, the price of a half-peck loaf of standard wheaten bread at Oxford varied between 1s. and 1s. 1d. This suggests that weekly allowances were fixed according to the price of bread, the price of a half-peck loaf being paid per additional child, starting with the second. Payments to labourers employed ‘on the round’ at Cropredy were made in exchange for employment and served as wages.

In the absence of comprehensive wage data it is impossible to determine with complete confidence whether labourers receiving part of their weekly income in the form of family allowances at Pyrton were better off than labourers receiving their full wage from farmers or overseers at Cropredy and Stoke Lyne. However, it is interesting to note that the allowances paid to labourers at Pyrton did not vary during

the farming year even though the available data suggest that wages in agriculture increased during the busy hay-making and harvest periods.

Agricultural wages in the early 1790s

‘Answers to the Questions proposed by the Board of Agriculture’ in the winter of 1794-5 have survived amongst the papers of Sir Christopher Willoughby, Chairman of the Oxfordshire Quarter Sessions. These suggest that labourers’ wages for ‘common work’ were fixed at 7s. per week during the winter months. This figure was recorded at North Aston (Wootton Hundred), Stadhampton and Clifton Hampden (Dorchester Hundred) and in the country around Henley-on-Thames (Binfield Hundred).¹⁸ In Binfield and Langtree Hundreds as a whole, ‘common labourers’ were paid 7-8s. per week during the winter. These figures assume a full six-day working week and that wage-labour in agriculture was the only source of income.

The level of wages increased during the busy summer months. Labourers at North Aston were paid 8s. per week during hay-time and the harvest (with small beer).¹⁹ At Stadhampton and Clifton Hampden they were paid 12s. per week during the harvest. ‘Double wages for five weeks in harvest time’ were paid at Henley-on-Thames while ‘reaping, mowing and thrashing [were] chiefly done by the piece which varies according to circumstances.’²⁰ Labourers in Binfield and Langtree Hundreds could also command piece rates of 2s. per day outside hay-time and hay-making.

These seasonal fluctuations in wage rates are not reflected in allowance payments at Pyrton. One possible explanation is that the parish guaranteed labourers’ bread requirements throughout the year according to a static relief scale, irrespective of

¹⁸ OA.Wil.IX/3

¹⁹ OA.Wil.IX/3

wage levels, and allowed labourers to accumulate large surpluses during the busy summer months. These surpluses could be used to meet additional costs such as cottage rents and clothing. A second explanation suggests that wage rates were fixed throughout the year, and additional allowances were paid to labourers with children to make their incomes up to a stipulated minimum level. The population of Pyrton, including the liberty of Assendon, was only 527 in 1801, while the whole parish covered 5,140 acres. Its population density of 0.10 persons per acre was therefore low, compared to Spelsbury (0.13) and Cropredy (0.24). Yet, Pyrton was characterised by large, innovative farmers whom Arthur Young rated amongst the best in the county.²¹ Labour demands at hay-making and the harvest must therefore have been huge, outstripping the supply available in the parish.

The neighbouring market town of Watlington, on the other hand, had a population of 1,276 persons in 1801 on 3,440 acres.²² The 1831 census recorded that there were 183 agricultural labourers in Watlington on 3,440 acres compared to 112 labourers on 5,140 acres at Pyrton.²³ Thomas Barnes, parish overseer at Watlington, also noted that while there were 'few landowners, and the farms generally large, the small farms are impoverished, the occupiers distressed and very poor.'²⁴ Fifty labourers were employed on the parish roads at Watlington each winter and 70-80 received family allowances.²⁵

A ready supply of labour was therefore available at Watlington which could be utilised by the farmers at Pyrton during the busy summer months. Perhaps farmers could maximise their profits by keeping wages at relatively low levels throughout the

²⁰ OA.Wil.IX/3

²¹ A.Young, *Oxfordshire*, 13

²² PP 1801 (II)

²³ PP 1831 (XVIII)

²⁴ PP 1834 (XXX), Evidence of Thomas Wiggins

year while guaranteeing the subsistence of labourers belonging to the parish of Pyrton through a generous system of family allowances. The farmers at Pyrton, who also the paid the poor rates, benefited from the cheap labour-supply at Watlington while looking after their own labourers through the provision of family allowances throughout the year.

Labour allocation in the early 1790s

Figure 6.6 shows that eleven labourers were employed 'on the round' at Cropredy in November (9) and December (10) 1793, when roundsman payments peaked at £7 per month. Expenditure in this manner, having fallen to £3 during the summer of 1794-5 when five roundsmen were employed, began to rise after the harvest. However, total expenditure on family allowances at Pyrton in 1793-4 was more than double the level of roundsman payments at Cropredy. At Stoke Lyne, neither the roundsman system nor family allowances were practised at this time.

Several factors combined to produce winter unemployment at Cropredy. It was situated in the densely populated Redlands region. While it covered just 1,926 acres its population was 470 in 1801 and its population density 0.24 persons per acre. Its population was therefore more than twice as dense as Pyrton's (0.10 persons per acre) and Stoke Lyne's (0.09 persons per acre). Greater emphasis was also placed upon pastoral farming in the Redlands district, with its lower overall and less seasonally peaked labour requirements. In addition, average farm size at Cropredy was smaller than at either Pyrton or Stoke Lyne. Proportionately, therefore, there were more labourers chasing fewer positions at Cropredy during the winter months.

²⁵ PP 1834 (XXX), Evidence of Thomas Wiggins

The subsistence crisis of the mid-1790s

As Table 6.4 revealed, annual poor relief expenditure in the three study parishes for which overseers' accounts are available became more differentiated as the price of bread began to rise following the poor harvest of 1794-5. Each parish responded in its own way to the threat posed by this increase to the living standards of its poor.

Figure 6.2 shows that the price of bread increased during the winter of 1794-5, rising from 1s. before the harvest to 1s. 3d in February 1796. The rise became more marked after a second successive poor harvest in 1795-6, peaking at 2s. 2d in March 1796, twice its pre-crisis level. Annual poor relief expenditure also rose in each of the three parishes during 1794-5 and 1795-6. However, while the price of bread fell after the harvest of 1796-7, dropping to 1s. 3d in October 1796, poor relief expenditure continued to rise at Cropredy and Stoke Lyne, peaking in 1796-7 and only falling slightly in 1797-8.

Non-able-bodied poor relief expenditure in the mid-1790s

Table 6.5* shows that while payments to widows and the elderly peaked in 1795-6 at Pyrton, they actually peaked in the following year at both Cropredy and Stoke Lyne despite the fall in bread price. It also shows that while these payments more than doubled at Cropredy, rising from £106.6.6 in 1793-4 to £229.6.6 in 1796-7, they rose only slightly at Stoke Lyne. Such payments actually fell at Pyrton, even though the large farmers (ratepayers) should have been able to pay more as their incomes were boosted by the poor harvest and high prices.

Figure 6.7 (a) shows that monthly payments to widows and the elderly fell at Cropredy during 1793-4 and the early months of 1794-5, to £4-5 per month. Although fifteen widows received allowances at the start of the period, this had fallen to eight

by the winter of 1794-5.²⁶ Weekly allowances were also paid to six elderly men and five single mothers at this time.

Although the number of widows relieved at Cropredy decreased, allowances paid to those that remained on the pension lists did not change during 1793-4 and 1794-5. The level of payments suggests that they were calculated according to some form of allowance scale, the lowest allowance, 1s. per week, being equivalent to the price of a loaf. As the bread price began to rise during the early months of 1795-6, however, several allowances were increased in a piecemeal fashion. For instance, the allowance paid to Widow Simms, which rose from 2s. 6d to 3s. per week on 15 March 1795, rose again to 4s. 6d on 1 August. It subsequently climbed to 5s. 6d on 7 February 1796. At the start of 1795-6, the eight remaining widows on the pension list at Cropredy received £2.19.6 in allowances each month. Widow Masters (10s. per week) was added to the list on 3 October 1795 and Widow Wilkes (3s. 6d) on 12 December 1795. In April (1) 1796, the ten widows in receipt of pensions were paid £6.4.0. Payments remained at this level throughout 1796-7 and 1797-8 and in April (1) 1798, the ten widows were paid £6.0.0.

While the allowances paid to widows at Cropredy responded in a piecemeal fashion to the rise in the bread price during the mid-1790s, those paid to widows at Pyrton and Stoke Lyne did not increase. Monthly payments to the non-able-bodied poor at Stoke Lyne are shown in Figure 6.7 (c). The eight widows relieved at Stoke

²⁶ Widow Hunt, Widow Lambeth, Widow Stanton, Widow Watts, Widow Lamprey, Old Widow Simms and Widow Shirley were paid 1s. each per week; Widow Gardner, Widow Fennymore and Widow Goldby 1s. 6d; Widow Dunn 2s.; Widow Phillips and Widow Barnett 2s. 6d; Widow Simms 4s. and Widow Giles 4s. 6d. The allowances stopped at irregular intervals during the year. Widow Hunt's stopped on 22 June 1793, Widow Dunn's on 14 September 1793, Widow Fennymore's on 14 October 1793, Widow (Elizabeth) Simms' on 25 November 1793, Widow Shirley's on 24 March 1794, Widow Phillips' on 31 March 1794, Widow Giles' on 21 April 1794, Widow Dunn's on 14 September 1794, and Old Widow Simms' on 28 October 1794.

Lyne in April (1) 1794 received £3.16.0 each month.²⁷ The weekly pension paid to Widow Morris stopped on 31 May 1794 and in the following April (1), the remaining seven widows received £3.8.0. Their allowances, which did not change as the bread price rose during the spring of 1795, were actually cut on 11 July, as the bread price dipped.²⁸ They were restored to their former level after the harvest as the price of bread resumed its rise. Monthly payments to the non-able-bodied poor at Pyrton are shown in Figure 6.7 (b). Six widows were relieved at Pyrton in April (1) 1794, receiving £4.2.0.²⁹ Although the number of widows had increased to seven in April (1) 1795, when they received £5.0.0, several allowances were stopped during the ensuing year and in April (1) 1796, four widows received £3.8.0.³⁰

Able-bodied poor relief expenditure at Pyrton in the mid-1790s

Although expenditure on able-bodied labourers and their dependents rose in all three parishes during the mid-1790s, the nature, extent and timing of these increases varied massively. Table 6.6* shows that although family allowance payments began at both Cropredy and Stoke Lyne during the mid-1790s they were dwarfed by similar payments at Pyrton. Total expenditure on family allowances between 1793-4 and 1797-8 varied from £11.8.6 at Stoke Lyne, £42.9.6 at Cropredy to £697.14.0 at Pyrton.

Figure 6.4 (b) shows that expenditure on family allowances at Pyrton fluctuated around £10 per month throughout 1793-4 and 1794-5. Although the scale of allowances did not increase, monthly payments began to rise at the start of 1795-6 as

²⁷ Widow Haycock, Widow Smallbones, Widow Morris and Widow Chimes were paid 2s. each per week; Widow Adkins 3s. and Widow Summer 5s.

²⁸ The allowance of 5s. was cut to 4s., three allowances remained at 2s., one was cut to 1s. 6d and two were cut to 1s.

²⁹ Widow Beamsley was paid 1s. 6d per week; Widow Cox, Widow Greaves and Widow Rawlins 2s. 6d; Widow Holland and Widow Slater 3s., and Widow House 5s. 6d.

the number of allowances, shown in Figure 6.3, jumped from 17 to 21 in April (1) 1795.³¹ Two further allowances were added to the pension list on 9 May 1795.³²

Figures 6.5 (a-d) show that the scale of allowances at Pyrton was increased in March (13) 1796. Weekly allowances were also paid to labourers with one child. Seven labourers were added to the pension list on this date. Of these, four had one child and three had two children.³³ The new scale of allowances is shown in Table 6.8.

Table 6.8. Scale of weekly family allowances at Pyrton, 12 March 1796

Number of children	Existing allowance scale	New allowance scale, 12 March 1796
1	0s.	1s.
2	1s.	2s.
3	2s.	3s.
4	3s.	4s.
5	4s.	5s.

Source: OA.Par.Pyrton,c.4

Twenty five families containing 116 members received weekly pensions in Pyrton at this time. If the non-able-bodied recipients are included, 144 persons were members of families receiving poor relief in the parish (excluding the liberty of Assendon) in March (13) 1796. The total population of the parish, excluding the liberty of Assendon, was 293 in 1801.³⁴ This suggests that at least 49% of the population was in receipt of weekly allowances.³⁵ Although the new allowance scale extended payments to labourers with one child and raised the level of existing payments, the increase did

³⁰ Although the allowance paid to Widow House rose from 5s. 6d per week in April 1794 to 6s. in April 1795 and 7s. in April 1796, most allowances remained unchanged.

³¹ Thomas Smith and Peter Ansel were each paid 1s. per week for their two children. James Jones and John Hervins were each paid 2s. per week for three children.

³² Thomas Blackall was paid 2s. per week and John Garrett 1s.

³³ Fletcher, Jones, Oakley and Elliott were paid for one child and Anderson and Brooks for two children. The Christian names of recipients were not recorded at this time.

³⁴ PP 1801 (II)

³⁵ Although this figure includes able-bodied labourers and their dependents it does not include the dependents of the non-able-bodied poor.

not wholly compensate labourers with two or more children for the rise in the price of bread. A Pyrton labourer with two children, who received 1s. per week under the old allowance scale when the price of bread was 1s., received 2s. under the new scale. In March (13) 1796, when the price of bread had risen to 2s. 2d, a labourer with four children, who received a weekly allowance of 3s. under the old scale (equivalent to a loaf for each additional child, starting with the second), now received 4s., equivalent to two-thirds of a loaf for each additional child, starting with the second. Figures 6.5 (a-d) show that the allowance scale was reduced to its former level after the harvest in 1796. By the start of 1797-8 both the number of allowances and the size of monthly payments had fallen back to their pre-crisis levels.

Able-bodied poor relief expenditure at Cropredy in the mid-1790s

The family allowance scale issued by the Oxfordshire magistrates at the Epiphany Sessions of 1795 was adopted at both Cropredy and Stoke Lyne. Although the use of this system was not continuous and total expenditure remained small in both relative and absolute terms, it was a significant decision because it set a precedent for future relief policies.

While the magistrates authorised a scale of cash allowances, the immediate response of the overseers at Cropredy was to provide certain labourers with coal. The first weekly payment of '9d in coal' was made to Henry Penn on 28 January 1795.³⁶ Similar payments were made to Richard Hunt, John Wells and John French on 4 and 11 February 1795. The first cash payments were made on 18 February, William Haslewood and John Summer receiving 1s. each and Richard Hunt and John French

³⁶ OA.Par.Cropredy,b.9

2s. These weekly payments continued until 22 March 1795.

While the provision of family allowances and roundsman payments are frequently spoken of in the same breath by historians, as well as by contemporaries, they had different origins and performed different functions. Figure 6.4 (a) shows that annual expenditure on roundsmen peaked at Cropredy during 1794-5, even though family allowance payments were negligible in that year. Monthly roundsman expenditure peaked at £12 in February (12) 1795 when, as shown in Figure 6.6, 17 labourers were sent on the round. In 1795-6, when family allowances increased to £4.12.0, roundsman payments fell to £74.17.0 and to £23.8.6 in 1796-7, when family allowance payments rose to £23.8.6.

The peak in roundsman expenditure at Cropredy during 1794-5 reflects the very severe winter of that year. According to Roger Wells, it was the third most severe winter of the eighteenth century.³⁷ Winter work was decimated by alternating heavy precipitation and intense cold. The period between December and March witnessed almost continuous sub-zero temperatures and there were recurrent huge snow falls in the North and parts of the Midlands. The arctic temperatures were interrupted by temporary thaws and repetitive flooding which proved both extensive and damaging.

As Table 6.9 shows, twenty six labourers served as roundsmen at Cropredy at some time during 1794-5, eight of them for more than half the working days in that year. All the labourers employed as roundsmen were male. Several of them also received family allowances, suggesting that married labourers were sent on the round in addition to single men and young boys. The majority of roundsmen, however, did not receive family allowances, although they were to do so during the scarcity of 1800-2.

³⁷ R.Wells, *Wretched*, 36

Table 6.9. Number of days served by roundsmen at Cropredy, 1794-5

Name	Number of Days	Name	Number of Days
Rd. Giles	289	Sam Judd	89
Wm. Poulter	287	Sam French	74
Robert Smedley	246	Wm. Watts	72
Thomas Penn	228	Daniel Pargeter	69
Sam Garrett	196	Joseph French	66
John Gardner	188	Thomas Pargeter *	55
James Dumbleton	168	Charles Leacock	50
Rd. Fletcher	160	John Hirton	49
Henry Penn *	114	Richard Pratt	42
Joseph Steel	111	William Gardner	24
Thomas Hirton	108	John French *	18
Thomas Master's boy	106	John Wells *	16
Wm. Tyso	91	John Summer *	6

Note: * Received family allowances during 1794-5 and 1795-6.³⁸

Source: OA.Par.Cropredy,b.9

The wage paid to each roundsman ‘for six day’s work’ also varied. Richard Giles, who served almost continuously as a roundsman during 1794-5, was paid 6s. per week; Richard Fletcher, who also received a family allowance of 1s., was paid 5s., Sam French 4s. and James Dumbleton 3s. Wages increased at the start of 1795. James Dumbleton’s wage rose from 3s. to 4s. ‘for six day’s work’ on 24 January 1795, Sam French’s from 4s. to 5s. on 7 February, Richard Fletcher’s from 5s. to 6s. on 31 January and Richard Giles’ from 6s. to 7s. on 21 February. The wage paid to roundsmen had not increased during the previous winter of 1793-4, suggesting that the increase during the winter of 1794-5 was in response to rising food prices. The wage paid to Richard Giles, who continued to serve as a roundsman throughout the summer and harvest period, increased to 8s. on 9 August. His wage remained at this level after

³⁸ Richard Hunt, William Haslewood and John Summer also received family allowances during the winter of 1794-5 but did not serve as roundsmen. Family allowances were also paid to Henry Penn.

the harvest but the majority of roundsmen who had served during the winter of 1794-5 did not reappear in the accounts.

Although the bread price continued to rise, Figures 6.3 and 6.4 (a) show that the provision of family allowances at Cropredy ceased at the end of March (13) 1795. Figure 6.4 (a) also shows that the abandonment of family allowances coincided with a rapid decline in monthly roundsman expenditure, suggesting that similar forces were at work. The decline in roundsman expenditure coincided with the onset of the busy period of the farming season.

Although both the bread price and monthly roundsman expenditure began to increase after the harvest of 1795-6, family allowances were not re-introduced at Cropredy until the start of December 1795. On 5 December 1795, allowances of 1s. were granted to Thomas Pargeter, John Wells, William Haslewood, John Summer, Sam French and Henry Penn. Several of these labourers also served as roundsmen at times during the winter of 1795-6, payments for which continued to be made in addition to their family allowances.

Family allowances of 1s. per week were granted to John French and John Bourton Junior at Cropredy on 9 April 1796 and John Summer's allowance was increased to 2s. per week on 16 April. Although the price of a loaf had peaked at 2s. 2d in March (13) 1796, most allowances remained unchanged. Additional allowances of 1s. each week were granted to Charles Adkins and to John Hitchcox's family on 22 May. These weekly payments continued until May 13 1797 when all payments stopped, with the exception of John Summer's, which was reduced to 1s. per week, John

John Wells and John French. Although they were employed as roundsmen they did not serve many days in this role during 1794-5.

French's and Richard Fletcher's. Family allowance payments ceased altogether on 7 April 1798.

Able-bodied poor relief expenditure at Stoke Lyne in the mid-1790s

The first family allowances were paid at Stoke Lyne on 31 January 1795, when a separate column was inserted in the overseers' accounts, recording 'additional expenses each week'.³⁹ Weekly payments of 1s. were made to James French, William Stockford, William French and William Bennett, while William Whatby received 2s. each week. Family allowances stopped on 7 March 1795, two weeks earlier than at Cropredy.

The return of 'additional expenses' at Stoke Lyne on 22 November lasted for two weeks. Henry James, William Whatby, William Hickman and Henry Goldin each received 1s. per week. Payments resumed on 13 June 1796, even though the price of bread had fallen from its peak of 2s. 2d in March to 1s. 7d in early June. Although the bread price returned to its pre-crisis level of 1s. 2d after the harvest, weekly payments of 1s. to William Stockford, William French, Henry James, Henry Goldin, William Whatby and William Hickman, and 2s. to Joseph Phillips, continued until 7 April 1797.

A 'List of the Number of Children' was inserted in the overseers' accounts at Stoke Lyne on 27 September 1800.⁴⁰ It recorded three labourers with one child each, four labourers with two children, seven labourers with three children, two labourers with four children, two labourers with five children and one labourer with six children. Henry Goldin, Richard Shepherd and William Hickman, who all received family

³⁹ OA.Misc.Dew.II/3

⁴⁰ OA.Misc.Dew.II/3

allowances of 1s. per week during the mid-1790s, were listed with five children each, and Thomas Loveridge with six. The enumerated population of Stoke Lyne at the 1801 census was 334.⁴¹ If the number of persons in the families of those labourers receiving family allowances in June 1796 is calculated from the 'List of Children' in 1800, it suggests that forty individuals were included in the households receiving weekly payments. If the non-able-bodied poor are added to this total, 57 people out of a total population of 334 in 1801 (17%) received poor relief at this time.

Poor relief expenditure, 1792-3 to 1797-8: Summary

While family allowances were paid at both Cropredy and Stoke Lyne during the mid-1790s, they amounted to just £42.9.6 and £11.7.6 respectively between 1793-4 and 1797-8, compared to £697.14.0 at Pyrton. Their use was both intermittent and limited to a few allowances per week at both Cropredy and Stoke Lyne. At Pyrton, however, family allowances had been in operation since at least the late 1780s and the overseers responded to the rise in the bread price by extending allowances to labourers with one child and by increasing the level of payments.

Weekly pensions were granted to just 17% of the population of Stoke Lyne at the height of the period of scarcity in March (13) 1796 compared to 49% of the population at Pyrton. The level of family allowances also differed markedly, with the majority of labourers in receipt of such payments at Stoke Lyne receiving 1s. per week. The size of family allowances at Pyrton, on the other hand, varied with the number of children in a labourers' family and were also increased in response to the rise in bread prices during the scarcity. Although the increase in allowances at Pyrton

⁴¹ PP 1801 (II)

lagged behind the rise in the bread price, they were more generous than at Cropredy or Stoke Lyne, where allowances remained fixed at a much lower level.

Although the level of family allowances failed to keep up with the increase in bread prices in all three parishes, this, on its own, does not necessarily indicate a fall in living standards amongst the pauper population. Other forms of relief provision must also be taken into consideration. At Stoke Lyne, 'bread for the poor' was purchased by the overseer from Anthony Savin on 13 February 1796, costing £20.0.0.⁴² A further £14.12.6 was spent in this manner on 20 March 1796 and £16.9.0 on 16 July. Unfortunately, the overseers' accounts simply list the total payment rather than the manner in which it was disbursed and the identity of the recipients. It may, however, explain why family allowances did not resume until June 1796, while they had done so at Cropredy in December 1795.

At Pyrton, additional cash payments, recorded as 'complaints', were made to both able-bodied and non-able-bodied paupers during the period of highest prices. Annual expenditure under this heading increased from £44.8.0 in 1794-5 to £155.2.9 in 1795-6. It subsequently fell to £98.5.6 in 1796-7 and to just £5.16.6 in the following year. Figure 6.7 (b) shows that peak monthly expenditure on 'complaints' was recorded in March (13) 1796, also the month of peak bread prices, reaching £27.6.0. On 5 March 1796, 31 individuals received payments under this heading. Only 32 payments were recorded in the whole of April (1) 1796, as the bread price fell, and monthly expenditure on 'complaints' dropped to £13 in April (1) 1796 and to £7 in May (2) 1796.

⁴² OA.Misc.Dew.II/3

The absence of roundsman expenditure at Stoke Lyne suggests that labourers were fully employed throughout the year. At Cropredy, on the other hand, twenty six labourers were employed as roundsmen during the winter of 1794-5. Although wages paid to roundsmen were increased by 1s. per week at Cropredy during the period of highest prices, this was far outstripped by the rise in bread prices. While bread purchases at Stoke Lyne and the payment of 'complaints' at Pyrton helped to maintain real incomes, such additional disbursements were not made at Cropredy. This seems to reflect the financial constraints placed upon small farmers at Cropredy during the period of scarcity and the large number of landless labourers chasing relatively few employment opportunities in the parish.

The geography of poor relief expenditure, 1798-9 to 1802-3

Massive grain imports, the sale of government corn in the spring of 1796, and the unprecedented acreage sown with wheat during the favourable autumn of 1795 meant that the bread price fell back to 1s. 3d after the harvest of 1796-7.⁴³ However, although the harvests of 1797-8 and 1798-9 were adequate to maintain low prices, the weather during 1799-1800 was so bad that it ruined the crop. This made the prospects for the 1800-1 harvest automatically ominous. The harvest failed for a second successive year and the price of bread at Oxford, shown in Figure 6.8, nearly trebled, rising to a peak of 3s. 6d in March (13) 1801.

Table 6.10 shows that poor relief expenditure also increased massively during the period of scarcity. Total poor relief expenditure between 1798-9 and 1802-3 was 2.75 times larger at Pyrton than at Stoke Lyne and 1.75 larger than at Cropredy. Moreover,

⁴³ See R.Wells, *Wretched*, 37 for a more detailed discussion of the factors affecting the price of bread at this time.

the size and timing of the peaks in expenditure did not coincide in all four parishes. Although the average price of bread fell from 2s. 7d in 1800-1 to 1s. 11d in 1801-2, poor relief expenditure peaked at both Pyrton and Spelsbury in the lower price year. Annual expenditure almost doubled at Pyrton in 1800-1, rising from £667.17.4 in 1799-1800 to £1326.4.3, before peaking at £1440.19.9 in 1801-2. It also peaked at Spelsbury in 1801-2, rising from £802.7.10 in 1800-1 to £943.0.0.⁴⁴ At both Cropredy and Stoke Lyne, on the other hand, expenditure peaked in 1800-1. It rose from £448.13.9 in 1799-1800 to £836.14.3 at Cropredy, before dropping to £677.5.8 in 1801-2, and from £250.11.5 to £605.14.6 at Stoke Lyne, before falling to £519.12.8 in 1801-2.

Table 6.10. Total poor relief expenditure, 1798-9 to 1802-3

	Cropredy	Pyrton	Spelsbury ⁴⁵	Stoke Lyne
1798-9	£365.9.7	£465.0.5		£240.10.10
1799-1800	£448.13.9	£667.17.4		£250.11.5
1800-1	£836.14.3	£1326.4.3	£802.7.10	£605.14.6
1801-2	£677.5.8	£1440.19.9	£943.0.0	£519.12.8
1802-3	£420.19.5	£906.9.3	£478.14.3	£320.5.7
TOTAL	£2749.2.8	£4806.11.0		£1939.15.0

Sources: OA.Par.Cropredy,b.9,b.10; OA.Par.Pyrton,c.4; OA.Par.Spelsbury,b.6; OA.Misc.II/3, Misc.Cor.I/1

Although the average bread price dropped from 1s. 11d in 1801-2 to 1s. 3d in 1802-3, the fall in prices actually began before the harvest of 1801-2. April 1801 saw a systematic fall in all cereal prices, though May witnessed reversed inflation in wheat, before long-term decreases set in during July and August and continued throughout the rest of the year. The 1801-2 harvest was a farming classic, including a

⁴⁴ Although detailed lists of disbursements are not available at Spelsbury in the first half of 1800-1, total expenditure in the first half of the year was only £209.19.10 compared to £592.8.0 in the second half, showing a great leap in expenditure during the second part of the year.

perfect autumn for wheat sowing and enormous current prices which encouraged the ploughing up of pasture and wasteland and the sowing of an unprecedented wheat acreage. Following the harvest in October 1801, the price of bread dropped to 1s. 5d. Poor relief expenditure fell in all four parishes, although the extent of this decrease varied in both absolute and relative terms.

Annual poor relief expenditure at Cropredy fell below its 1799-1800 level in 1802-3, dropping to £420.19.5, just £55 above its level in 1798-9. It fell by £200 at Stoke Lyne to £320.5.7 in 1802-3, £77 above its level in 1798-9. Although total expenditure is not available at Spelsbury before 1800-1, it almost halved between its peak in 1801-2 and 1802-3, dropping to £478.14.0. At Pyrton, on the other hand, while poor relief expenditure did fall, from £1440.19.9 in 1801-2 to £906.9.3 in 1802-3, this was almost twice its nearest rival and almost twice its own level in 1798-9.

Non-able-bodied poor relief expenditure, 1798-9 to 1802-3

Table 6.11* shows that total expenditure on the non-able-bodied poor varied considerably between the four parishes and that these differences grew during the period of highest prices. This reflects variations both in the number of recipients within each category and the amounts paid to them.

Figure 6.9 (a) shows that monthly payments at Cropredy to widows and the elderly, which increased to £15 during the scarcity of the mid-1790s, remained at this level until the start of 1798-9. Total monthly expenditure on the non-able-bodied poor, which included £3-4 per month to single women and their bastards and a few £s each month to the sick, fluctuated around £20. In April (1) 1798, eleven widows received

⁴⁵ Detailed lists of disbursements began at Spelsbury on 23 September 1800. An annual total of expenditure is given in the overseers' accounts for the financial year 1800-1.

£5.8.0.⁴⁶ Presumably, these changes purely reflected changes in the cost of living and the number of recipients, rather than the changing availability of work and wages as well.

A further five widows were added to the pension list at Cropredy on 27 October 1798 taking monthly payments up to £7.18.0.⁴⁷ Monthly payments to the fifteen widows had reached £8.2.0 by April (1) 1799 before rising slightly to £8.15.0 in April (1) 1800. Eight allowances were cut on 27 June 1800 but they returned to their former level on 13 December 1800.⁴⁸ In April (1) 1801, the same fifteen widows received £10.4.0, falling slightly to £9.5.0 in April (1) 1802. The pensions paid to Widow French (3s. per week), Widow Watts (4s.), Widow Fletcher (3s.) and Widow Lamprey (3s.) all stopped on 24 April 1802 and monthly payments fell to £6.13.0.

Figure 6.9 (b) shows that allowances paid to widows and the elderly actually fell at Pyrton during 1798-9 and the early months of 1799-1800, dropping from £6 to £4 per month. Monthly payments of £3.0.0 were made to only four widows in April (1) 1799, compared to £8.2.0 to fifteen widows at Cropredy.⁴⁹ However, the lowest rate of pay was higher at Pyrton, suggesting more generous allowances. Widow Hester (2s. per week) joined the weekly pension list at Pyrton in May (2) 1800 and Widow Wilson (2s.) in July (4) 1800. Despite these additions, monthly payments only rose to £3.4.0 because Widow Cox's allowance ceased in April (1) 1800.

⁴⁶ Widow Hunt, Widow Lambeth, and Widow Watts were each paid 1s. per week; Widow Watts, Widow Stanton, Widow Wilkes and Widow Gardner 2s.; Widow Simms 3s.; Widow Penn 3s. 6d and Widow Masters 8s.

⁴⁷ Widow Watts was paid 1s. per week; Widow Stone and Widow Goldby 2s.; Widow Roberts 2s. 6d and Widow Franklin 5s.

⁴⁸ The allowances of Widow Roberts, Widow Stanton and Widow Watts were cut from 3s. to 2s. 6d per week, Widow Lamprey's from 3s. 3d to 2s. 6d, Widow Lambeth's from 1s. 6d to 1s., Widow Fletcher's from 3s. 10d to 3s. and Widow Watts' from 7s. to 3s. Widow Fletcher's allowance was increased from 2s. 6d to 3s. on 11 October, Widow Lamprey's from 2s. 6d to 3s. on 18 October, Widow Watts' from 2s. 6d to 3s. on 18 October, Widow Gardener's from 2s. 6d to 3s. on 1 November and Widow Franklin's from 6s. 6d to 7s. 6d on 27 December.

The level of payments to widows at Pyrton increased in a systematic fashion in December (10) 1800 as the bread price continued to rise. Widow Hester's allowance jumped from 2s. to 3s. 3d per week, while Widow House the Younger's and Widow Wilson's pensions increased from 3s. to 3s. 3d each. Widow Rawlings' pension was increased from 5s. to 7s. and Widow House's from 7s. to 9s. Widow Hester's weekly pay was further increased from 3s. 3d to 3s. 7d per week in April (1) 1801. Widow House's allowance was increased from 9s. to 10s. and Widow Rawlings' from 7s. to 7s. 6d. Widow Wiggins (3s. 3d) and Widow White (4s. 6d) were added to the pension lists in December (10) 1800 and February (12) 1801 respectively. Monthly payments peaked at £6.10.9 in April (1) 1801.

These allowances, which had risen in a systematic manner during the winter of 1800-1, were cut during May (2) 1801. The pensions which had risen to 3s. 3d per week were each reduced to 2s. 6d, Widow Rawlings' was cut from 7s. 6d to 6s. and Widow House's from 10s. to 7s. 6d. They were reduced again in November (9) 1801, to 2s., 5s. and 6s. respectively. The allowances paid to Widow Rawlings and Widow House remained at this level throughout the rest of the period, but the allowances paid to widows who had received 2s. were cut still further to 1s. By December (10) 1801, monthly payments had fallen to £4.8.0 per month and to £3.8.0 in April (1) 1802.

The maintenance of some of its poor in a workhouse was unique to Spelsbury amongst the four parishes. Although payments for weaving cloth were occasionally recorded in the overseers' accounts it seems to have operated more as a poorhouse, accommodating women, children and elderly men, rather than as a place to set the poor to work. However, on 25 October 1800, 5s. 10d was spent on the purchase of

⁴⁹ Widow House received 7s. per week, Widow House the Younger 2s., Widow Rawlings 3s., and Widow Cox 3s.

‘flax for the workhouse’ and a further 10s. was paid on 6 December 1800 ‘for weaving 27 ells.’⁵⁰ Expenditure on the maintenance of the ‘workhouse poor’, as they were termed in the overseers’ accounts, peaked at £76.10.7 in 1801-2.⁵¹ It subsequently fell to £12.17.3 in 1802-3 and the final payment was made on 15 May 1802 for a ‘bushel of tators for the workhouse.’⁵² Food accounted for most of the expenditure, including several large bills paid to the butcher for meat.⁵³ Although very little is said in the overseers’ accounts concerning the identities of the inmates, five ‘women out of the workhouse’ were added to the weekly list of pensions on 22 May 1802, a week after the purchase of the ‘tators’.⁵⁴

Although considerable sums were spent on the maintenance of the poor in the workhouse, Figure 6.9 (c) shows that the majority of expenditure on the non-able-bodied poor at Spelsbury was outdoors. The pension lists do not distinguish between widowed, married and single women at Spelsbury and these payments have been combined into one total, including payments to elderly men. Monthly expenditure on the non-able-bodied outpoor at Spelsbury peaked at £17 in March (13) and April (1) 1801. It fell to £11 after the harvest (7) before gradually increasing through the winter of 1801-2.⁵⁵ It had risen to £13 at the start of the summer (4) of 1802-3. Although

⁵⁰ OA.Par.Spelsbury,b.6

⁵¹ OA.Par.Spelsbury,b.6

⁵² OA.Par.Spelsbury,b.6

⁵³ Butcher’s bills were paid on 1 April 1801 (£10.15.9), 8 August 1801 (£14.10.9), 4 October 1801 (£10.14.9), 23 January 1802 (£11.13.5) and 15 May 1802 (£1.11.2). Other food purchases included £1.18.9 spent on ‘flour for the workhouse’ on 21 February 1801, 3s. for ‘three bushels of tators’ on 6 December 1800 and 2s. 3d on ‘a pig’s cheek for the workhouse’ on 18 July 1801. Other items purchased included tea, cheese and beer in addition to 4s. 6d spent on a ‘bushel of peas for the workhouse’ on 21 February 1801. On 15 August 1801, 9d was spent on the purchase of ‘plants for the workhouse garden’, OA.Par.Spelsbury,b.6.

⁵⁴ Ann Marsden was subsequently paid 1s. per week; Ann Dillo 2s.; Mary Cross and Mary Evans 2s. 6d and Mary Green 10s.

⁵⁵ Several allowances were cut on 15 August 1801. Ann Oldaker’s pension was cut from 5s. to 4s. per week, Elizabeth Washband’s from 5s. 6d to 5s., Elizabeth Ancher’s from 5s. to 3s., Elizabeth Williams’ from 4s. to 2s., Elizabeth Chisnell’s from 5s. to 3s. and Elizabeth Cooknell’s from 3s. to 1s. A further cut in allowances took place on 17 October. Ann Oldaker’s pension was reduced from 4s. to 3s., Elizabeth Washband’s from 5s. to 4s., Elizabeth Bourton’s from 3s. 6d to 2s., Elizabeth Chisnell’s from

expenditure had returned to £14 by the end of 1802-3, there had been a slight dip during the summer and harvest when expenditure fell to £12 per month.

Nine women were paid for several day's work 'by the yardland' at Spelsbury each week during the summer of 1800-1. Several of these were labourer's wives, who did not receive allowances during the winter of 1800-1, whilst single women who had been employed 'by the yardland' did. These pensions, which were reduced at the end of May 1801, returned to their former levels after the harvest. This pattern was repeated in 1802-3.⁵⁶

Figure 6.9 (d) shows the pattern of monthly disbursements to the non-able-bodied poor at Stoke Lyne between 1798-9 and 1802-3. Six widows were paid £2.18.0 per month at Stoke Lyne at the start of 1798-9.⁵⁷ Widow Tanner (1s. per week) entered the pension list on 3 February 1799 and several other allowances were increased at different times. By April (1) 1799, when detailed lists of disbursements ended, monthly payments to the seven widows had increased to £3.14.0.⁵⁸ When detailed lists of disbursements resumed on 19 April 1800, Widow Summer's allowance had increased from 5s. to 8s. per week, Widow Tanner's from 1s. to 2s., Widow Brazer's from 1s. 6d to 2s. 6d and Widow Smallbones' from 2s. 6d to 3s. Widow Townser's allowance had fallen to 2s. 6d per week and monthly expenditure had risen to £4.18.0.

3s. to 1s. 6d, Mary Morgan's from 4s. to 2s. and Ann Margets from 2s. to 1s. Monthly expenditure increased in May (2) 1802 with the payment of six weekly pensions to the 'women out of the workhouse', OA.Par.Spelsbury,b.6.

⁵⁶ On 26 July 1800, nine women were employed 'by the yardland'; Elizabeth Evans and Thomas Griffin's daughter were each paid 1s. 'for six day's work', Ann Eden, William Shepherd's wife, Hannah Evans, Thomas Green's wife and Thomas Griffin's wife were paid 1s. 6d and William Moulder's wife was paid 2s. 6d.

⁵⁷ Widow Townser and Widow Haycock each received 1s. 6d per week, Widow Smallbones and Widow Morris 2s. each, Widow Sharman 2s. 6d and Widow Summer 5s.

⁵⁸ Widow Smallbones' allowance rose to 2s. 6d per week on 21 April 1798, Widow Haycock's to 2s. on 12 May 1798, Widow Townser's allowance, which now included her son Anthony, to 4s. on 4 November 1798, and Widow Townser's to 4s. 6d on 17 February 1799.

Monthly payments remained at this level throughout 1800-1 before detailed lists of disbursements ceased in April 1801.

Able-bodied poor relief expenditure, 1798-9 to 1802-3

Although Table 6.12* shows that monthly expenditure on able-bodied labourers and their dependents increased massively during 1800-1 and 1801-2 in all four parishes, it also shows that the nature and extent of changes varied markedly between them.

Figure 6.10 (b) shows that monthly family allowance payments at Pyrton remained at the same level throughout the late 1790s. At the start of 1799-1800, £10 was spent each month on the provision of weekly allowances to 17-18 labourers. Figures 6.11 (a-d) show that the levels of payments continued to be regulated by the same scale of allowances which had operated in the early 1790s, whereby 1s. per week was paid for each additional child, starting with the second.

The provision of family allowances at Cropredy ceased on 7 April 1798. However, Figure 6.10 (a) shows that roundsman payments continued to be made during the 1798-9 winter, rising to a peak of £7 in March (13) 1799. Total expenditure on roundsmen in 1798-9 amounted to £42.18.6, compared to £93.9.0 in the peak year of 1794-5, and one-third of the amount spent on family allowances at Pyrton in the same year. The level of roundsmens' wages at Cropredy continued to vary. While Thomas Neal and John Haslewood were each paid 4s. 'for six day's work', Richard Fletcher and John Wells were paid 5s. These wages were lower than those paid during the scarcity of the mid-1790s, suggesting that the level of payments was influenced by the bread price.

Although the provision of family allowances at Stoke Lyne ceased on 7 April 1797, twelve months earlier than at Cropredy, Figure 6.10 (d) shows that roundsman

payments began in April (1) 1798. However, while five labourers were employed in this manner throughout the winter of 1798-9, total expenditure only amounted to £11.18.5 in that year, rising to £14.10.6 in 1799-1800. Three of the roundsmen were referred to as 'boys'. Two other roundsmen, Thomas Plethro and John Taylor, were referred to as 'Old' elsewhere in the accounts. Married labourers with children were apparently not employed as roundsmen. The level of wages was also very low; Thomas Plethro and John Taylor were each paid 3s. 'for six day's work', while Stockford's boy, French's boy and Shepherd's boy were each paid 1s. 6d.

While roundsman payments ceased at both Cropredy and Stoke Lyne during the summer of 1799-1800, family allowances continued to be paid at the same level at Pyrton. However, they jumped from £10 per month to £22 in November (9) 1799, as the price of bread rose from 1s. 3d to 1s. 10d after the disastrous harvest of 1799-1800. Figure 6.12 shows that the number of family allowances at Pyrton went up from 17-18 to 24 at this time. In addition, Figure 6.11 (a-d) shows that the level of weekly family allowances also increased, from 1s. per additional child, starting with the second, to 1s. 6d. The allowance paid to a labourer with four children therefore rose from 3s. per week to 4s. 6d. The number of family allowances continued to rise at Pyrton during 1800-1, finally peaking at 36 in March (13) 1801. The scale of allowances also increased, rising to 3s. per week for each additional child, starting with the second, in January (11) 1801. The allowance paid to a labourer with four children doubled to 9s. per week.⁵⁹ The scale of allowances continued to guarantee a labourer the price of a half-peck loaf for each additional child, starting with the second, despite the massive increase in bread prices.

⁵⁹ Thus, Richard Holland and William Cox, who both had eight children, received £1.1.0 each week while William Clarke and Thomas Anderson, who both had seven children, received 18s. per week

Annual roundsman expenditure did not increase at either Cropredy and Stoke Lyne in 1799-1800, despite the rise in the bread price. The wages paid to Richard Fletcher and John Summer at Cropredy 'for six day's work' actually fell from 5s. to 4s. 6d on 14 April 1800, although wages paid to other roundsmen did not change. However, the re-introduction of family allowances in both parishes during the winter of 1799-1800 meant that monthly payments to the able-bodied poor, shown in Figures 6.10 (a) and 6.10 (d), began to rise faster than in the previous year. The first family allowances were paid at Cropredy on 27 October 1799. Thomas Pargeter, John Summer and John Wells received 1s. each per week. Richard Fletcher, Henry Penn, John French and John Hitchcox were added to the pension list on 10 November 1799 as the bread price continued to rise.

Although the allowance scale pasted into the overseers' accounts at Souldern in January 1800 stated that it was issued by 'Magistrates acting for the division of Ploughley Hundred',⁶⁰ it is impossible to determine whether this scale was adopted at Stoke Lyne, also in Ploughley Hundred. On 19 April 1800, a payment of £51.7.6 was made 'for ye children for twenty three weeks', but it did not list the recipients or rate of pay.⁶¹

Figure 6.10 (a) shows that family allowance payments at Cropredy continued to rise throughout the winter of 1799-1800, even though roundsman expenditure peaked in November (9) 1799. Family allowances peaked at £17 in the early summer (3) of 1800 when roundsman payments had fallen to £6. Figures 6.11 (a-d) and 6.12 show that the increase in monthly expenditure was due both to the addition of newcomers to the pension list and to an increase in the scale of allowances.

⁶⁰ OA.Par.Souldern,b.9

⁶¹ OA.Misc.Cor.1/1

At Cropredy on 21 November 1799, the allowances paid to Thomas Pargeter, John Summer, John French and John Hitchcox were increased from 1s. to 2s. per week. Several labourers were also added to the pension lists, each receiving 1s. 6d.⁶² Further increases took place on 18 January 1800, by which time the price of a half-peck loaf had risen to 2s. The allowances of John Wells, Richard Fletcher, Henry Penn and Edward Shirley were all raised from 1s. to 2s. per week, William Master's from 1s. 6d to 2s. and John Hitchcox's from 2s. to 3s. Three weeks later, on 8 February 1800, the allowances of 2s. were raised to 3s. 6d, and the weekly payment of 3s. to 4s. 8d. The allowances paid to Robert Judd and Thomas Fletcher were increased from 1s. 6d to 2s. 4d per week. Several newcomers were also added to the list, each receiving 2s. 4d per week.⁶³ An additional allowance of 1s. 2d per week was also established for labourers with just one child. The number of allowances rose from 11 to 14 as a result, compared to 10 during the height of scarcity of the mid-1790s. The allowance scale adopted on 8 February 1800 is shown in Table 6.13.

Table 6.13. Scale of family allowances at Cropredy, 8 February 1800

Number of Children	Allowance
1	1s. 2d
2	2s. 4d
3	3s. 6d
4	4s. 8d

Source: OA.Par.Cropredy,b.9

The bread price rose to 2s. 3d in February 1800, suggesting that family allowances at Cropredy were calculated at the rate of 50% of the cost of a half-peck loaf each week per additional child, starting with the first. At Pyrton, the allowance provided the whole cost of a half-peck loaf per additional child, starting with the second.

⁶² These included William Masters, Robert Judd, Thomas Fletcher and Edward Shirley, none of whom

Labourers with two children received the same allowance, in money terms, in both parishes but the allowance paid to each additional child above this number was 50% smaller at Cropredy. At this time, six labourers claimed allowances for one child at Cropredy, five labourers for two children, three labourers for three children and four labourers for four children. In total, 71 persons (34 adults and 37 children) were members of families receiving family allowances.

The price of bread accelerated much earlier and faster in the 1800-1 season, and from the spring of 1800 retained its unprecedented levels almost throughout, dropping slightly from 2s. 8d to 2s. 2d in September 1800. Such price declines as were witnessed during the harvest were rapidly reversed and spiralled upwards during the autumn and throughout the winter. Despite the short-lived and limited nature of the price decrease during August and September 1800, Figure 6.10 (a) shows that family allowance payments at Cropredy dropped from £17 in the early summer (3) to £6 at the harvest (6). However, the harvest across the country was interrupted by heavy and continuous rainfall and this may have adversely affected the demand for labour. A comparison of Figures 6.10 (a-d) show that the most marked increases in summer unemployment, measured in terms of roundsman expenditure, occurred at Cropredy and Spelsbury, both of which were characterised by small farms and relatively dense populations. The marketable surpluses produced on small farms were more likely to have been wiped out than those in parishes characterised by larger farms, cutting farmers' incomes and the demand for harvest labour.

As the bread price continued to rise after the harvest, and employment opportunities and wages fell with the downturn in the agricultural year, demand for

had received allowances during the subsistence crisis of the mid-1790s.

⁶³ These included Richard Simms, John Bourton Junior, and Lee Davis.

poor relief continued to rise at both Cropredy and Spelsbury. However, the ability of their ratepayers to meet these rising demands seems likely to have been compromised by the collapse in farmers' incomes following the harvest failure. At Pyrton and Stoke Lyne, on the other hand, large farmers were more likely to have benefited from the massive rise in bread prices as they still had (a reduced) surplus to market at the inflated prices. The farmers (and principal ratepayers) in these two parishes were therefore in a much stronger financial position than those at Cropredy and Spelsbury.

Figure 6.10 (a) shows that roundsman expenditure at Cropredy began to increase during the summer of 1800-1801, in contradiction to the general trend. It continued to rise after the harvest and peaked at £22 in January (11) 1801, when, as shown in Figure 6.12, 27 labourers were employed in this manner. Annual expenditure on the roundsman system rose from £42.10.6 in 1799-1800 to £128.5.0 in 1800-1. Wages paid to roundsmen also increased during 1800-1. The wages paid to Richard Fletcher, John Wells and John Summer increased from 4s. 6d to 4s. 8d 'for six day's work' on 5 May 1800. In addition, they were all in receipt of family allowances of 4s. for their three children at this time. Their wages increased to 5s. 'for six day's work' on 8 September 1800 (in addition to family allowances of 3s. per week) and to 6s. per week on 20 October 1800 (in addition to 5s. per week).

The level of roundsmen's wages at Cropredy remained at this level throughout the winter of 1800-1, despite the massive increase in bread prices. The wage of 6s. 'for six day's work' fell to 5s. on 24 October 1801 when roundsman payments resumed after a break for the harvest. Family allowances were only paid to labourers with five or more children at this time. Of the twelve roundsman who received 6s. 'for six day's work' during the winter of 1800-1, ten also received family allowance payments. Their disbursements from the parish were therefore made up of a combination of

family allowance and roundsmen payments. Only six labourers who received family allowances did not serve as roundsmen at this time, suggesting that the majority of married labourers were laid off by farmers at some point during the winter.⁶⁴

Figure 6.10 (a) shows that family allowance payments at Cropredy began to rise immediately after the harvest as the bread price continued to climb. By January (11) 1801, when roundsman expenditure peaked, the price of bread had risen to 2s. 10d and monthly family allowance payments to £20. Although the price of a half-peck loaf continued to rise after the harvest, allowance payments to labourers with only one child ceased and the number of allowances, shown in Figure 6.12, which fell from 22 in June (3) 1800 to 10 during the harvest (6), had increased to 17 by January (11).

Although the number of family allowance payments at Cropredy did not return to the heights of the early summer after the harvest of 1800-1, Figures 6.11 (a-d) show that the scale of allowances was increased for labourers with two or more children. By January (11) 1801, each additional child, starting with the second, was paid 2s. per week. The price of bread had risen to 2s. 10d suggesting that although allowances at Cropredy had not kept up with the rise in prices, labourers with fewer than four children were better off under this allowance scale than the one adopted in February 1800. Thus, a labourer with three children received an allowance worth 1.55 half-peck loaves in February (12) 1800 and only 1.41 loaves in January (11) 1801. A labourer with four children, on the other hand, received 2.07 loaves under the first allowance scale and 2.11 under the second.

⁶⁴ Wages of 6s. 'for six day's work' were paid to Henry Penn (3 children), John Wells (3), Lee Davis (2), William Tyso, John Bourton (1), James Dumbleton (3), Edward Shirley (4) John Summer (3), Sam Judd (2), Richard Fletcher (3), Richard Pratt and Richard Simms (2) during the winter of 1800-1. Wages of 4s. were paid to Daniel Pargeter, John Haslewood, John Hirtton, Edward Newton and William Gardner. The majority of labourers receiving 6s. 'for six day's work' also received family allowances. Labourers who received family allowances but were not employed as roundsmen included Thomas

However, while the bread price continued to rise, peaking at 3s. 6d in March (13) 1801, both the wages paid to roundsmen and level of family allowances at Cropredy remained fixed. Figure 6.10 (a) shows that monthly family allowance payments peaked at £27 in January (11) 1801 and remained at this level over the next four months. The real incomes of labourers in receipt of poor relief therefore fell during the period of highest prices. Both the number and scale of allowances began to fall rapidly as the price of bread decreased during the early summer of 1801-2. Monthly family allowance payments which had fallen to £14 in June (3) ceased in October (8).

The overseers at Stoke Lyne made a further payment of £8.12.6 'for ye children' on 12 April 1800. Figures 6.10 (d) and 6.12 show that when detailed lists of disbursements began in the following week, seventeen labourers were paid £6.10.0 in allowances per month. Figures 6.11 (a-d) reveal that weekly allowance payments were calculated at the rate of 2s. per additional child, starting with the second. A loaf cost 2s. at this time, suggesting that family allowances at Stoke Lyne, like those at Pyrton, were regulated by the bread price, the price of a half-peck loaf being paid per additional child. The rate of pay at Stoke Lyne at this time was also similar to that laid down by the 'Magistrate acting for the division of Ploughley Hundred' on 3 January 1800.⁶⁵ According to this scale, each additional child was to be paid 2s. per week. Labourers with four children who received a weekly allowance of 4s. 8d at Cropredy at this time were paid 6s. at both Pyrton and Stoke Lyne.

Allowances paid to labourers with two children ceased at Stoke Lyne during the harvest of 1800-1 and the number of allowances fell from 17 to 13. Monthly expenditure crashed from £27 in June (3) to £7 in August (6), suggesting that the scale

Pargeter (3), John Hitchcox (4), William Masters (3), Robert Judd (2), Thomas Fletcher (2) and John French (2). None of those labourers receiving 4s. 'for six day's work' were paid family allowances.

of allowances for those labourers still receiving payments had also been reduced. Each additional child, starting with the third, was only paid 1s. per week during the harvest month.

The allowance scale at Stoke Lyne returned to its former level after the harvest, the number of allowances rose to 17, and monthly expenditure returned to £27. A ‘List of Labourers with Children’ on 27 September 1800, shown in Table 6.14, was inserted in the overseers’ accounts and shows that allowances continued to be regulated by the price of bread which remained at 2s. 3d.

Table 6.14. ‘List of Labourers with Children’ at Stoke Lyne, 27 September 1800

Two Children	Three Children	Four Children	Five Children	Six Children
Wm. Whatby	Jn. Leacock	Wm. French	Henry Goldin	Jn. Loveridge
Th. Keen	Geo. Barley	Jn. Phillips	Rd. Shepherd	
Wm. Morris	Henry Penn		Wm. Hickman	
Wm. Thornton	Wm. Stockford			
	Jn. Coggins			
	Henry James			
	Sam Franklin			
Allowance: 2s. 2d	4s. 4d	6s. 6d	8s. 8d	10s. 10d

Source: OA.Misc.Cor.I/1

Detailed lists of weekly family allowance payments at Stoke Lyne stopped on 11 October 1800. On 9 November 1800, £30.7.1 was paid to Anthony Savin for ‘bread for the poor’.⁶⁶ Similar purchases continued throughout the winter of 1800-1 and are shown in Table 6.15. In total, £256.15.9 was spent in this manner between 9 November 1800 and 4 July 1801. This relief measure was introduced in an attempt to stabilise the cost of the poor’s bread. It added to administrative simplicity avoiding the

⁶⁵ OA.Par.Souldern,b.9
⁶⁶ OA.Misc.Cor.I/1

need to pay out weekly cash payments which were subject to erosion by rapid price inflation.

Table 6.15. Bread purchases at Stoke Lyne, 1800-1 and 1801-2

Date	Description of Payment	Amount
9 November 1800	Savin's Bill for Bread	£30.7.1
14 December 1800	Savin's Bill for Bread	£41.7.6
17 January 1801	Savin's Bill for Bread	£44.2.2
8 March 1801	Savin's Bill for Bread	£61.17.2
6 April 1801	Savin's Bill for Bread	£32.15.1
4 July 1801	Savin's Bill for Bread	£46.6.9

Source: OA.Misc.Cor.I/1

The list of disbursements in the overseers' accounts at Stoke Lyne changed once again on 4 July 1801. Several large payments 'to Mr Jarvis' were recorded at intervals and these continued until 15 April 1802.⁶⁷ While payments for clothing, administrative costs and other items had continued to be listed in the overseers' accounts when bread purchases were made, these stopped when payments to Mr Jarvis began. This suggests that the entire responsibility for the maintenance of the poor was contracted out to him. He was paid £83.3.11 on 4 July 1801, £45.10.0 on 27 February 1802 and £117.10.5 on 15 April 1802. An additional payment of £2.9.6 was made 'to the loaves book' on 15 April 1802.⁶⁸ The form of the overseers' accounts changed again during 1802-3. Thirteen monthly payments were listed in the overseers' accounts during 1802-3 in addition to a payment of £95.18.11 on 11 April 1803 to Mr Williams 'for last year's accounts.'⁶⁹ There was no mention of Mr Jarvis during this year.

⁶⁷ OA.Misc.Cor.I/1

⁶⁸ OA.Misc.Cor.I/1

⁶⁹ OA.Misc.Cor.I/1

The wages paid to Old John Taylor, Old Thomas Plethro and Old Thomas Bennett for 'six day's work' on the round at Stoke Lyne increased from 3s. to 4s. on 14 June 1800. Figure 6.13 shows that the number of roundsmen increased after the harvest of 1800-1, rising to nine in January (11) 1801. Thomas Stockford was paid 5s. 'for six day's work' on 10 January 1801; George French 4s.; John Stockford, Old William Stockford and John Gubbins 3s. each. Several women were also sent on the round during the winter of 1800-1, including Martha Johnson (1s. 6d for 'six day's work'), Bet Morris (2s.) and Stockford's daughter (1s. 6d). None of the male roundsmen were included in the 'List of the Children' on 28 September 1800, again suggesting that roundsmen in this parish were generally aged or young. The wages paid to roundsmen returned to their former level on 5 December 1801.

Although detailed lists of family allowance payments only began at Spelsbury on 23 September 1800, payments to roundsman were recorded from the start of May. Several labourers were paid 'for six day's' work at this time, including married labourers with children.⁷⁰ The wage was fixed at 4s. 6d, lower than at Cropredy. After the harvest, fourteen labourers were paid 4s. 6d 'for six day's work' including seven labourers referred to in the 'List of the Poor at Spelsbury taken the 10th of January 1803' as married labourers with families.⁷¹

The wage paid to married roundsmen at Spelsbury increased to 5s. 6d on 29 November 1800. Although it subsequently rose to 6s. 3d on 27 December 1800, it returned to 5s. 6d in the following week. Several labourers were added to the list of

⁷⁰ These included George Mayo (3), Sam Evans (5), Thomas Oldaker, Thomas Griffin, John Margetts (5) and John Coulling. The figure in brackets refers to the number of children in the labourer's family as recorded in a 'List of the Poor at Spelsbury' on 10 January 1803. This list only records the poor of Spelsbury and Taston, OA.Dil.II/d/1e, see Appendix 2.

⁷¹ These included William Moulder (6), George Mayo (5), John Betteridge (4), Joseph Nash (3), John Margetts (5), Sam Evans (5), Thomas Green (2), Thomas Oldaker, Thomas Griffin, Thomas Snow, Charles Moulder, Henry Bailes, John Gilson and William Mayo, OA.Dil.II/d/1e.

roundsman payments and at its peak in January (11) 1801, as shown in Figures 6.10 (c) and 6.13, eighteen labourers received 5s. 6d 'for six day's work'.⁷² Monthly expenditure reached £22 at this date and twenty six labourers were sent on the round.

Annual roundsman expenditure at Spelsbury dropped from £119.9.9 in 1800-1 to £48.19.6 in 1801-2.⁷³ Figure 6.10 (c) shows that by April (1) 1801, monthly roundsman payments had fallen to £8, with ten labourers being sent on the round, before ceasing at the start of May (2). Several labourers were sent on the round during mid-July but these payments ceased at the end of July. When payments resumed on 24 October 1801, the rate of wages had fallen from 5s. 6d to 4s. per week, remaining at this level throughout the winters of 1801-2 and 1802-3.

Figure 6.10 (c) shows that monthly family allowance payments at Spelsbury rose throughout the winter of 1800-1, peaking at £40 in April (1) and May (2) 1801. Figures 6.11 (a-d) and 6.12 also reveal that although allowances were paid to labourers with two or more children at Spelsbury, only 11 were paid in March (13) 1801, compared to 16 at Cropredy and 36 at Pyrton. The number of allowances actually peaked at Spelsbury immediately after the 1800-1 harvest, reaching fourteen, and subsequently declined slightly, even though the bread price continued to rise.

Figures 6.11 (a-d) show that the allowance scale was also much lower at Spelsbury during the period of highest prices. In March (13) 1801, each additional child, starting with the second, received 1s. 9d per week at Spelsbury, compared to 2s. at Cropredy and 3s. at Pyrton. However, although the scale of cash allowances was much lower at Spelsbury, large sums were also spent on the purchase of 'bread for the poor'.⁷⁴ These

⁷² Richard Austin, James Bragniton, James Sturdy and Sam Edinburgh (2) were added to the list during the winter of 1800-1.

⁷³ The total for 1800-1 does not include the first four weeks of the year which were missing from the overseers' accounts.

⁷⁴ OA.Par.Spelsbury,b.6

payments, which are shown in Table 6.16, totalled £118.17.7 during the winter of 1800-1, £123.13.1 in the whole of 1801-2 and £25.9.0 in 1802-3.

Table 6.16. Bread purchases at Spelsbury, 1800-1 to 1802-3

Date	Payment	Date	Payment
11 October 1800	£15.5.6	21 November 1801	£8.13.0
20 December 1800	£45.9.1	26 December 1801	£14.4.0
1 April 1801	£58.3.0	13 February 1802	£12.7.7
15 July 1801	£36.19.0	17 April 1802	£6.8.2
26 September 1801	£39.2.0	9 October 1802	£14.5.0
10 October 1801	£5.10.4	2 March 1803	£11.4.0

Source: OA.Par.Spelsbury,b.6

Annual expenditure on family allowances fell from £190.14.7 at Cropredy in 1800-1 to £137.16.9 in 1801-2, and to £33.8.0 in 1802-3. Figures 6.11 (a-d) show that allowances to labourers with fewer than five children had ceased at the start of the 1801-2 harvest and did not return during the rest of the period. Annual expenditure on family allowances remained high in absolute terms at both Pyrton and Spelsbury. It fell from £573.17.0 at Pyrton in 1800-1 to £558.1.3 in 1801-2, before dropping to £250.2.0 in 1802-3. At Spelsbury, it fell from £323.6.0 in 1801-2 to £163.17.9 in 1802-3.

The amount spent on ‘bread for the poor’ plummeted at Spelsbury in 1802-3. Figures 6.11 (a-d) show that the scale of allowances was also lower at Spelsbury than it had been during the period of peak prices. It was, however, higher at this time than the one adopted at Pyrton. After the harvest of 1802-3, allowances paid to labourers with two children stopped at Pyrton but continued at Spelsbury. Weekly allowances were paid at the rate of 1s. per additional child, starting with the third child at Pyrton and the second at Spelsbury. A labourer with four children therefore received 3s. per week at Spelsbury and only 2s. at Pyrton.

Poor relief expenditure, 1798-9 to 1802-3: Summary

At the height of the scarcity in March (13) 1801, 74% of the population at Pyrton were members of households receiving weekly doles from the parish. At Cropredy, the proportion was 25% and only 21% at Spelsbury.⁷⁵ The level of allowances also varied markedly between parishes. At the height of the scarcity in March (13) 1801, the overseers at Pyrton provided the price of a half-peck loaf per additional child each week, starting with the second child, 50% more generous than the allowance scale adopted at Cropredy. The large farms and low population density at Stoke Lyne, like Pyrton, were also associated with low roundsman payments and generous allowance payments which rose in line with the bread price.

Although small farms and a relatively dense population at Spelsbury were, like Cropredy, associated with heavy roundsman expenditure and a relatively low allowance scale, these low allowances were supplemented by the purchase of 'bread for the poor'. Supplementary relief payments were not made at Cropredy, suggesting that the real incomes of both the able-bodied and non-able-bodied poor fell during the periods of highest prices.

The geography of poor relief expenditure, 1810-11 to 1814-15

The summer of 1801-2 witnessed a significant fall in cereal prices and the inflated food prices of the period of scarcity ended with the harvest of 1801-2. This reduction continued throughout 1801-2 and 1802-3. Poor relief expenditure also fell throughout rural Oxfordshire and remained at this level until 1805-6 when higher bread prices

⁷⁵ In total, 144 persons received weekly pensions at Pyrton, 117 at Cropredy and 108 at Spelsbury. These figures do not include 'occasional payments' and are therefore likely to be an underestimate of the proportion of the population in receipt of poor relief. In addition, they do not include the dependents of the non-able-bodied poor whose numbers cannot be calculated from the overseers' accounts. At

caused it to rise again. Bread prices and poor relief expenditure fell to their former levels in 1807-8, but this reduction proved to be short-lived as the average bread price climbed from 1s. 5d in 1807-8 to 1s. 9d in 1808-9 and to 2s. 1d in 1809-10. Figure 6.14 shows that a prolonged period of inflated bread prices followed until 1814-15. Although Table 6.17 shows that annual poor relief expenditure did not return to the heights of 1800-2 between 1810-11 and 1814-15, the period of high expenditure (and bread prices) was much more drawn out.

While the peaks in annual poor relief expenditure had clustered around the high price years of 1795-6, 1796-7, 1800-1 and 1801-2 during the previous periods of scarcity, Table 6.17 shows that they were more dispersed during this period. Although the average annual bread price peaked at 2s. 8d in 1812-13, a peak in poor relief expenditure was only recorded in that year at Stoke Lyne, where it reached £506.1.4. At Cropredy, it peaked at £628.9.0 in 1810-11 when the bread price averaged 2s. 2d, and had fallen to £546.2.1 by 1812-13. Annual expenditure at Pyrton reached £1115.1.5 in 1810-11 and, having fallen to £947.7.6 in the following year, rose to £1114.10.3 in 1812-13. At Spelsbury, it peaked in 1813-14 at £770.7.0, having risen from £758.18.3 in the previous year.

Table 6.17. Annual poor relief expenditure, 1810-11 to 1814-15

	Cropredy	Pyrton	Spelsbury	Stoke Lyne
1810-11	£628.9.0	£1115.1.5	£543.13.11	£320.7.4
1811-12	£592.14.3	£947.7.6	£581.16.7	£325.4.6
1812-13	£546.2.1	£1114.10.3	£758.18.3	£506.1.4
1813-14	£463.12.7	£1053.5.10	£770.7.0	£459.16.1
1814-15	£486.16.8	£886.5.9	£565.16.0	£323.1.6
TOTAL	£2717.14.7	£5116.10.9	£3220.12.0	£1934.10.9

Sources: OA.Par.Cropredy,b.11,b.12; OA.Par.Pyrton,c.5; OA.Par.Spelsbury,b.7; OA.Misc.Cor.1/1

Spelsbury, the number of labourers receiving weekly relief may have been higher, but was disguised by the lump-sums spent on the purchase of bread.

These differences in the timing and size of the peaks in annual poor relief expenditure suggest that it was not simply influenced by the level of bread prices and that other influences were at work. This is also reflected in the differential decline in poor relief expenditure at the end of the period. It fell back to its 1810-11 level at both Spelsbury and Stoke Lyne in 1814-15. At Cropredy in 1814-15, where relief had peaked in 1810-11, expenditure had fallen by £140, while expenditure at Pyrton had fallen to £886.5.9 by 1814-15, £230 lower than in 1810-11.

Non-able-bodied poor relief expenditure, 1810-11 to 1814-15

Table 6.18* shows that total expenditure on the non-able-bodied poor in each parish differed by over £450 between 1810-11 and 1814-15, varying between £1224.16.8 at Stoke Lyne and £1696.12.6 at Pyrton. These differences become less marked if one bears in mind that ‘complaints’ at Pyrton include payments to both non-able-bodied and able-bodied poor.

Figure 6.15 (a) shows that monthly payments to widows at Cropredy fluctuated around £3.16.0 throughout 1810-11 and 1811-12. Six widows were relieved in addition to five single women and four elderly men.⁷⁶ Widow Davis (2s. per week) was added to the pension lists on 25 May 1811, Widow Hitchcox (1s. 6d) on 18 April 1812 and Widow Hunt (3s.) on 27 March 1813. Monthly payments to widows at Cropredy which had increased to £5.2.0 by April (1) 1813 jumped to £12.2.0 in May (2) 1813. On 8 May, three widows were added to the pension lists. Widow Elkington and family were paid 7s. per week, while Widow Hunt and family and Widow Smith

⁷⁶ Widow Lambeth received 2s. per week, Widow Garrett 2s. 6d and Widow Hunt, Widow Roberts, Widow Masters and Widow Checkley 3s. each.

and family received 14s. each per week. Monthly payments dropped to £10.4.0 in September (7) 1813 as the allowance paid to Widow Smith was reduced to 10s. 6d per week and Widow Hunt's to 8s.

The overseers at Stoke Lyne paid weekly pensions to five old men, six single women and five widows at the start of 1810-11. The five widows were paid £3.0.0 per month at this time.⁷⁷ Widow Summer's allowance was increased from 5s. to 10s. per week during 1810-11 and Widow Townser's from 3s. to 6s. Monthly payments had risen to £4.12.0 by April (1) 1811. Although Widow Summer's allowance was subsequently raised to 12s. on 10 December 1812, the other allowances remained unchanged. The addition of two new widows to the pension list, Widow Morris (6s. 6d per week) on April 16 1814 and Widow Hall (4s.) on 28 May 1814, increased payments to £6.10.0 per month.

Although more widows received weekly pensions at Pyrton, Figure 6.15 (b) shows that the pattern of monthly payments was similar. Ten widows, eight single women and five old men received allowances at the start of 1810-11. The ten widows received £7.8.0 between them in April (1) 1810.⁷⁸ Total monthly payments remained at this level throughout 1810-11 and 1811-12 but increased during 1812-13 as several new names were added to the pension list.⁷⁹ Widow Seymour's allowance of 10s. 8d per week began on 10 November 1812, while Widow Holland (3s.) and Widow Sarratt

⁷⁷ Widow Tanner and Widow Brazer were each paid 2s. per week, Widow Townser and Widow Stevens 3s. each, and Widow Summer 5s.

⁷⁸ Widow Wiggins, Widow Nailson, Widow White, Widow Herbert and Widow Harris each received 2s. 6d per week, Widow Hester was paid 3s., Widow Fletcher 4s., Widow Sarratt and Widow Eadle 5s., and Widow Brown 7s. 6d. The minimum payment to widows therefore continued at a higher level at Pyrton than at Cropredy.

⁷⁹ Widow Seymour (10s. 8d per week) was added to the pension lists in November (9) 1812 and Widow Holland (3s.) in December (10). Widow Nailson's allowance stopped in February (12) 1813.

(2s. 6d) were added to the pension lists during the following winter. In April (1) 1811, eleven widows received £10.8.8.⁸⁰

Twenty three women and girls received pensions at Spelsbury at the start of 1813-14. The allowance paid to Mary Green was reduced from 4s. per week to 8d on 10 April and stopped completely over the next four weeks before resuming at 2s. per week on 15 May. The allowances paid to Ann Eden (2s. 8d per week), Elizabeth Washband (2s.), Jane Bailes (3s.) followed a similar pattern. Ten allowances were stopped completely at the start of July, before returning to their former levels on 16 October. This pattern was repeated in 1814-15, with a break in some allowances between 30 April 30 and 28 May and a longer break between 16 July and 9 October when many of the payments ceased altogether.

In 1810-11, 1811-12 and 1812-13, several of the women at Spelsbury whose weekly allowances were stopped during the busy periods of the farming year in 1813-14 and 1814-15 were employed 'by the yardland' for parts of the year. Throughout the winter of 1810-11, Ann Eden, Ann Dillo, Elizabeth Townsend, Elizabeth Cross, Mary Margetts and Hannah Bowell received weekly pensions but were paid 'for six day's work by the yardland' on 23 and 30 March 1811, suggesting that they were expected to contribute towards their own subsistence through work if it were available.

Able-bodied poor relief expenditure, 1810-11 to 1814-15

Although payments to the able-bodied poor peaked in all four parishes during 1812-13, Table 6.19* shows that total expenditure in the five year period between 1810-11 and 1814-15 varied considerably, between £1722.5.11 at Spelsbury and £453.6.11 at

⁸⁰ Widow White, Widow Hester, Widow Harris and Widow Newcomb each received 2s. 6d per week, Widow Holland and Widow Herbert 3s., Widow Wiggins 7s., Widow Brown 7s. 6d, Widow Eadle 8s.,

Stoke Lyne. It also shows that the composition of these totals differed. While total roundsman expenditure amounted to £268.1.9 at Cropredy and £195.11.8 at Spelsbury, family allowance payments amounted to only £537.19.6 at Cropredy compared to £1526.14.3 at Spelsbury. This reflects fundamental differences in the nature of the parish economy and the role of poor relief in each.

While the price of bread fell from 2s. 8d at the start of 1810-11 to 1s. 10d in June 1811, Figure 6.16 (b) shows that family allowance payments at Pyrton remained at £22-23 per month throughout 1810-11 and 1811-12. Figures 6.17 and 6.18 (a-d) show that they were paid to 21-23 labourers at the rate of 2s. per additional child each week, starting with the second. While the number of allowances remained unchanged as the price of bread began to rise during the winter of 1811-12, the scale of allowances was increased. By the spring of 1812-13, each additional child, starting with the second, received 2s. 9d per week and monthly expenditure had risen to £29.

Figure 6.17 shows that family allowances were paid to 17 labourers at Stoke Lyne in April (1) 1810. Figure 6.18 (a-d) shows that they were paid to labourers with two or more children at the weekly rate of 1s. 6d per additional child. However, while the scale of allowances remained unchanged at Pyrton as the price of bread began to fall during 1810-11, it was reduced at Stoke Lyne in the next month and payments to labourers with two children ceased. The number of family allowances fell to 13 and the scale of weekly allowances was reduced to 1s. 6d per additional child, starting with the third. A labourer with four children who had received 4s. 6d per week in April (1) received 3s. in May (2) 1810. At Pyrton, a labourer with four children received 6s. per week at this time.

and Widow Seymour 10s. 8d.

The scale of allowances continued to be reduced at Stoke Lyne as the bread price fell, suggesting that it was more responsive to falling prices than the scale adopted at Pyrton. Allowance payments to labourers with three children stopped in March (13) 1811 and the number of allowances dropped to nine. Monthly family allowance payments at Stoke Lyne fell from £12 at the start of 1810-11 to £4 in March (13) 1811 and ceased at the start of the summer of 1811.

Figure 6.16 (a) shows a similar decline in expenditure on family allowances at Cropredy during 1810-11 and the first half of 1811-12. However, while monthly payments at Stoke Lyne had fallen from £13 in April (1) 1810 to £3-4 at the harvest (5-7), they fell from £17 in May (2) to £14-15 in June (3) at Cropredy and fluctuated around this level until October (8) 1810. The collapse in expenditure at Stoke Lyne was therefore much more marked than at Cropredy, suggesting that higher wages were paid during hay-time and the harvest at Stoke Lyne, enabling labourers to remain independent of the parish.

While Figure 6.17 shows that the number of allowances fell rapidly at Stoke Lyne from 17 in April (1) 1810 to 4 at the harvest, as allowances first to labourers with two children and then to labourers with three children were stopped, it also shows that the number of allowances fell very slightly from 13 to 12 at Cropredy in the same period. Weekly allowances continued to be paid to labourers with three or more children at Cropredy although the scale of allowances was reduced from 1s. 6d for each additional child to 1s. at the start of October (8) 1810. Figures 6.18 (a-d) show that allowances to labourers with three children were reduced and then stopped at Cropredy in January (11) 1811. Allowances to labourers with four or five children were also reduced in January (11) 1811, with each additional child, starting with the fourth, receiving 1s. per week. Allowances paid to labourers with four or five children

ceased in July (4) 1811, although allowances continued to be paid to three labourers, each with six children.

Family allowances were extended to labourers with three or more children at Stoke Lyne after the harvest of 1811-12 as the price of bread jumped from 1s. 10d before the harvest to 2s. 2d in October. Fifteen labourers were paid £9 per month during the ensuing winter at the weekly rate of 2s. per additional child, starting with the third. Allowances were extended to labourers with two children at the start of 1812-13 as the price of bread continued to rise and the number of allowances jumped to nineteen. The scale of weekly allowances was also increased, being paid at the rate of 2s. 6d for each additional child, starting with the second. Monthly expenditure peaked at £24 in the summer (5) of 1812-13. A labourer with four children received 7s. 6d each week at this time, compared to 8s. 3d at Pyrton.

Family allowances were initially extended only to those labourers with five or more children at Cropredy during the winter of 1811-12. Labourers with fewer children were expected to make do with their winter wages, while labourers with three or more children received family allowances at Stoke Lyne. The number of allowances rose to seven and monthly expenditure to £7-8. The allowances were calculated at the rate of 1s. 3d per additional child each week, starting with the fifth. Allowances were extended to labourers with four children during the winter and the number of allowances increased to ten. The scale of allowances also increased, rising to 1s. 6d for each additional child, starting with the fourth. A labourer with four children who had received 3s. per week during the early months of 1810-11 now only received 1s. 6d, compared to an increase from 4s. 6d to 7s. 6d at Stoke Lyne. The allowance scale at Cropredy was therefore much less generous.

Allowances to labourers with four children at Cropredy stopped during the harvest but resumed, at the same rate of pay, during the winter of 1812-13. This suggests that the allowances scales issued by magistrates operating in Banbury and Bloxham Hundreds on 17 October 1812 and 12 November 1812 were not adopted by the Cropredy overseers.⁸¹ While these scales ordered payments to labourers with three or more children at the rate of the price of a half-peck loaf per additional child, allowances to labourers with four children only began in January 1813, and they were much lower than the Justices' scales. Although family allowances resumed at Cropredy after a break for the harvest during 1813-14, the rate of pay had been cut and allowances to labourers with four children stopped in December (10) 1813. Allowances to labourers with five children fell to 3d per week in January (11) 1814 and stopped in June (3) 1814. They returned for a few months at 3d per week in the winter of 1814-15.

It seems likely that higher wage rates at Stoke Lyne meant that family allowances were not required in normal years. When the price of bread increased, however, the parish guaranteed the real incomes of the able-bodied poor at Stoke Lyne by regulating the allowance scale according to the price of bread. The larger farmers at Stoke Lyne, who prospered during bad years, were able (and willing) to meet the increases in poor relief expenditure which this guarantee ensured.

At Cropredy, on the other hand, where farms were smaller, the incomes of the ratepayers tended to suffer during the years of harvest failure and high bread prices. Although demand for poor relief expenditure increased as a result of the higher prices, the ratepayers were unable to pay as generously as those at Stoke Lyne and the real incomes of labourers decreased. Family allowances were therefore only used at Stoke

⁸¹ OA.OA/9/10/item c, See Chapter 3 for details of these allowance scales.

Lyne during the years of highest prices and they were soon abandoned after prices had returned to their normal levels. At Cropredy, however, the relatively low level of jobs and wages meant that allowances had to be paid to labourers with large families even in normal years.

Annual expenditure on family allowances increased from £64.5.3 at Stoke Lyne in 1811-12 to £209.18.8. It then collapsed to £73.8.1 in 1813-14 and such payments stopped completely in 1814-15. At Cropredy, expenditure on family allowances rose from £95.17.0 in 1811-12 to £173.3.9 in 1812-13. It then fell to £76.7.6 in 1813-14 and to £28.13.6 in 1814-15. Total expenditure on family allowances at Spelsbury rose from £279.14.3 in 1810-11 to a peak of £406.14.6 in 1812-13, before falling to £362.17.3 in 1813-14 and £202.1.3 in 1814-15. Expenditure remained high even in normal years, suggesting that they were used to subsidise low wage rates.

Figure 6.17 shows that at the start of 1810-11, family allowances were paid to 14 labourers at Spelsbury. Although the number relieved in this manner was lower than at either Cropredy or Stoke Lyne, monthly expenditure at £23 was much higher. Figures 6.18 (a-d) reveal that allowances at Spelsbury were paid at the rate of 2s. 6d per week for each additional child, starting with the third. Although labourers with three (2s. 6d) or four (5s.) children received less than those at Cropredy or Stoke Lyne, labourers with five or more children received larger sums. Figure 6.16 (c) shows that monthly family allowance payments at Spelsbury fell to £14 during the harvest (7) as allowances to labourers with four children or fewer ceased. Weekly payments to labourers with five children were cut to 3s. The number of allowances increased from 15 to 18 as additional pensions were granted to three labourers each with two children after the harvest. Although the number of allowances had increased, the scale at which they were paid was reduced. A weekly allowance of 1s. 9d was paid per additional

child, starting with the second. While labourers with four or fewer children were better off under the new allowance scale, those with five or more were worse off. A labourer with four children received 5s. 3d per week under the new scale compared to 5s. under the previous one, while a labourer with five children received 7s. compared to 7s. 6d.

The scale of family allowances at Spelsbury remained at this level throughout much of 1811-12 and the early summer of 1812-13. During the harvest (6) of 1812-13, however, allowances to labourers with four or fewer children were stopped and the payment to labourers with five children fell to 4s. per week. The number of allowances fell to four during this month and expenditure collapsed to £3-4. Allowances returned to their previous levels after the harvest. The allowance scale at Spelsbury was less generous than those adopted at Pyrton and Stoke Lyne. While a labourer with four children received 5s. 3d per week at Spelsbury he received 7s. 6d at Stoke Lyne and 8s. 3d at Pyrton. At Cropredy, on the other hand, he only received 4s. per week.

Figure 6.17 shows that during the winter of 1812-13, the number of family allowances at Spelsbury increased to 20 as a further three labourers, with two children each, received weekly pensions. The scale of allowances remained at its existing level and monthly expenditure rose to £29-30. The number of allowances increased to 24 in May (2) 1812 and expenditure peaked at £39. Monthly expenditure fell to £17 during the harvest (7) as the number of allowances fell to 13 and the scale of allowances also changed. Labourers with three children were each paid 3s. per week, those with four children 5s. 3d and those with five children 7s. 6d.

The scale of weekly family allowances at Spelsbury returned to 1s. 9d per additional child, starting with the second, in the winter of 1812-13 and monthly

expenditure peaked at £37 in March (13). Figure 6.16 (c) shows that the seasonal collapse in family allowance payments was repeated in both 1813-14 and 1814-15. Payments to labourers with three children also ceased during the summer and harvest of 1813-14 and expenditure slumped to £21. In the following winter, weekly allowances were paid to labourers with three or more children at the rate of 2s. per additional child, starting at the third. They remained at this level throughout the winter of 1813-14 and 1814-15, with the exception of the harvest month when allowances were only paid to labourers with five or more children.

The provision of family allowances at Spelsbury was therefore subject to acute seasonality. The number and scale of allowances fell during early May and then collapsed during July. They returned to their former levels after the harvest. Family allowances appear to have been used as wage subsidies at Spelsbury. Farmers paid low wages during the winter months and the difference between these and the cost of subsistence was made up out of the poor rates. Family allowance payments at Spelsbury therefore continued even in normal years, although the scale of allowances was cut:

Figure 6.16 (b) shows that family allowance payments also fell at Pyrton during the summer of 1813-14, the decline continuing after the harvest. Monthly expenditure fell from £28 in June (3) 1813 to £15 in December (10). Figures 6.18 (a-d) reveals that weekly allowance payments to labourers with two children were reduced from 2s. 9d at the start of 1813-14 to 1s. 9d in August (6) and to 9d. in December (10). They finally stopped at the end of January (11) 1814. The number of allowances fell from 22 at the start of 1813-14 to 16 in the winter. The scale of payments was reduced to 1s. 2d per week to each additional child, starting with the third, but recovered to 1s. 9d per additional child after the harvest in 1814-15.

In the late 1790s, labourers with two children at Pyrton had received an allowance of 1s. per week while those with three children, who received 1s. 9d in 1814-15, received 2s. in the 1790s. Labourers with four or more children received a greater allowance in cash terms in 1814-15 than in the 1790s. The real value of their allowances was cut, however, as the average bread price rose from 1s. 1d in 1798-9 to 1s. 8d in 1814-15.

Labour allocation, 1810-11 to 1814-15

Although family allowance payments increased rapidly in all four parishes during the winter of 1812-13, Table 6.19* shows that roundsman expenditure did not return to the heights reached in 1800-1. Annual expenditure on the employment of surplus labourers amounted to £38.3.3 at Cropredy in 1812-13, £30.11.9 at Spelsbury and only £3.5.10 at Stoke Lyne. No payments to surplus labourers were recorded at Pyrton. Although the price of bread had remained high for several years, a harvest failure to rival that in 1800-1 did not occur and farmers' incomes were not devastated at Cropredy or Spelsbury as they had been during the previous scarcity. However, the bountiful harvests of 1813-14 and 1814-15 were followed by a fall in bread prices which also undermined the incomes of small arable farmers. Roundsman expenditure increased at both Cropredy and Spelsbury as increasing numbers of labourers were laid off after the harvest each year.

Payments of 6s. 'for six day's work' were made to 13 labourers at Cropredy during the winter of 1810-11, nine of whom were also in receipt of family allowances.⁸²

⁸² Richard Simms, William Watts, Jack Summer, William Haslewood, Richard Haslewood, Richard Hunt, William Dunn and John Haslewood received both family allowances and roundsman payments. George Mobbs, William Tyso, Thomas Dunn and William Gardner received roundsman payments, while William Bloxham, John Wells, Thomas Bourton, Thomas Pargeter and James Dumbleton received family allowances but were not employed as roundsmen.

Wages were increased to 8s. per week on 5 December 1812, suggesting that attempts to compensate labourers for the higher bread prices stretched beyond the provision of family allowances. William Dunn and Richard Hunt were employed as roundsmen throughout the summer of 1813-14 and their wages increased to 11s. on 19 June 1813. They were reduced to 8s. on 9 October 1813 and to 7s. 3d on 15 January 1814.

Roundsman payments were paid to 22 male and 19 female labourers at Spelsbury during 1810-11 and 1811-12. Only three of the male labourers (Jobe Benfield, Joseph Benfield and William Bowell) also received family allowances during this period. A further nine male labourers were added to the list of roundsmen during the winter of 1812-13, including four who were in receipt of family allowances.⁸³ Payments to female roundsmen ended at the start of October 1813 and their recipients were added to the regular weekly pension lists. They returned to the roundsman lists in April 1814 but resumed their weekly pensions after the harvest. Although the overseers' accounts did not record the number of days worked each week, several of the married labourers, who were also paid family allowances received 6s. 3d or 7s. 6d per week, suggesting slightly higher wages than at Cropredy.

Annual roundsman expenditure increased from £38.3.3 at Cropredy in 1812-13 to £54.1.0 in 1813-14 and to £75.15.6 in 1814-15. It increased at Spelsbury from £30.11.9 in 1812-13 to £59.4.6 in 1813-14 and to £56.1.0 in the first eleven months of 1814-15. A further twenty four names were added to the list of roundsmen at Spelsbury in 1813-14, including five who also claimed family allowances, and six more in 1814-15, none of whom received family allowances.⁸⁴ Figure 6.19 shows that

⁸³ William Field, John Night, John Harvey and Sam Evans received both family allowances and roundsman payments.

⁸⁴ Richard Benfield, Thomas Snow, William Moulder, Sam Bowell and James Sturdy, all of whom received family allowances, were added to the list of roundsmen in 1813-14.

the number of roundsmen increased at both Cropredy and Spelsbury in 1813-14 and 1814-15 as the price of bread fell.

Figures 6.16 (d) and 6.19 show that although eight labourers were employed 'on the round' at Stoke Lyne during the winter of 1810-11, monthly roundsman expenditure remained low. The eight roundsmen included four boys, Old William Stockford (who was paid 3s. 'for six day's work'), and Old Matt Butler (3s.). Old Henry James (3s.), Old John Morris (3s.) and Old Peter Chimes (3s.) were added to the list of roundsmen in the winter of 1811-12. In the winter of 1814-15, however, William Brown (who was paid 7s. 'for six day's work') and Joseph Phillips (7s.), both of whom received family allowances during the winter of 1812-13, were each employed on the round for several weeks. Joseph Phillips had also been employed for 'one week on the road' during the winter of 1812-13 and was paid 12s. The vast majority of married labourers at Stoke Lyne did not, however, turn to the parish for employment.

Poor relief expenditure, 1810-11 to 1814-15: Summary

The rise in poor relief expenditure in 1812-13 differed from that in the scarcity of 1800-1 in several respects. The rate and extent of increase was not as marked and the seasonal labour surplus, as measured by roundsman expenditure, was lower. In 1800-1 the twin pillars of high bread prices and high seasonal unemployment drove poor relief expenditure to new heights at Cropredy and Spelsbury. In 1812-13, high bread prices drove family allowances upwards but roundsman payments to surplus labourers remained much lower. At the time of peak bread prices in May (2) 1812, 53% of the population of Pyrton received weekly pensions, 35% at Stoke Lyne, 27% at Spelsbury and 23% at Cropredy.

Geographical variations in poor relief expenditure and the real incomes of the rural poor which were evident in 1800-2 continued to be marked during this period. The example of Cropredy suggests that while allowance scales might be fixed by neighbouring magistrates, they were not always adhered to by parish overseers. Local variation, inherent in the parochial administration of the Poor Laws, was not, therefore, always subsumed beneath the dictates of the Justices. A significant development also emerged at the end of the period. Roundsman expenditure, which had previously increased during years of bad weather and high prices, began to rise at Cropredy and Spelsbury in 1813-14 and 1814-15 while the bread price fell. The first payments to surplus labourers were also recorded at Pyrton in the winter of 1814-15, £9.15.0 being spent in this manner.

The geography of poor relief expenditure, 1815-16 to 1819-20

Although the parliamentary returns suggest that annual poor relief expenditure peaked in Oxfordshire in 1817-18, an examination of surviving overseers' accounts reveal that 1800-1 and 1801-2 witnessed the highest totals. Figure 6.20 shows that the bread price peaked at the start of 1817-18, averaging 2s. 1d in that year, compared to an average of 2s. 7d in 1800-1.

Table 6.20 shows that although poor relief expenditure increased markedly in all four study parishes between 1815-16 and 1816-17, it only peaked in 1817-18 at Cropredy and Spelsbury, peaking in 1818-19 at Pyrton and in 1819-20 at Stoke Lyne. Total poor relief expenditure at Pyrton between 1815-16 and 1819-20 was 15% larger than at Spelsbury, 40% larger than at Cropredy and twice as large as at Stoke Lyne. However, while annual poor relief expenditure fell from £1022.8.6 to £865.3.10 at Pyrton between 1818-19 and 1819-20 it actually rose from £486.18.8 to £514.11.5 at

Stoke Lyne. Between 1815-16 and 1819-20, poor relief expenditure at Stoke Lyne increased by £238 (86%). It rose by £126 (22%) at Cropredy during this period, £73 (9%) at Pyrton and £38 (5%) at Spelsbury.

Table 6.20. Annual poor relief expenditure, 1815-16 to 1819-20

	Cropredy	Pyrton	Spelsbury ⁸⁵	Stoke Lyne
1815-16	£564.10.5	£792.9.6	£740.10.5	£276.7.6
1816-17	£669.17.8	£966.5.0	£824.5.0	£450.5.11
1817-18	£695.14.9	£977.19.1	£888.6.0	£446.19.8
1818-19	£691.8.9	£1022.8.6	£789.12.0	£486.18.8
1819-20	£690.15.4	£865.3.10	£778.10.2	£514.11.5
TOTAL	£3312.6.11	£4622.5.11	£4021.3.7	£2175.5.2

Sources: OA.Par.Cropredy,b.12; OA.Par.Pyrton,c.7; OA.Par.Spelsbury,b.7; OA.Misc.Cor.1-2

Non-able-bodied poor relief expenditure, 1815-16 to 1819-20

Table 6.21* shows that total expenditure on the non-able-bodied poor varied by £600 between 1815-16 and 1819-20, ranging from £1143.17.11 at Stoke Lyne to £1749.10.0 at Cropredy. Payments to widows varied between £739.6.2 at Stoke Lyne and £1178.12.3 at Cropredy. At Spelsbury, detailed lists of disbursements are only available between 3 April and 22 October 1815 and 30 March and 28 December 1816. Between 29 October 1815 and 23 March 1816, single weekly totals were recorded for all payments. Although these totals distinguished between payments ‘by the yardland’ and other disbursements, they did not record detailed lists of disbursements. Between 3 April 1817 and 25 March 1820, the relief of the poor at Spelsbury was contracted out and single monthly payments to the contractor were recorded in the overseers’ accounts.

⁸⁵ Complete sets of overseers’ accounts are not available at Spelsbury for the financial year 1816-17. Annual poor relief expenditure recorded in the parliamentary returns has therefore been substituted for that year.

Figure 6.21 (a) shows monthly payments to the non-able-bodied poor at Cropredy between 1815-16 and 1819-20. In April (1) 1815, eleven widows received £8.14.0 in allowances at Cropredy.⁸⁶ Widow French and family joined the pension list on 17 August 1816 and was paid 5s. 4d. per week. The weekly allowances paid to Widow Smith and family, Widow Hunt and family, and Widow French and family were all raised on 9 November 1816 to 10s., 8s. 6d and 6s. respectively. These were increased to 10s. 8d, 9s. and 6s. 4d respectively on 14 December 1816 and monthly payments to widows had increased to £10.4.0 by April (1) 1817.⁸⁷ The weekly allowances paid to the three widows and their families were increased to 11s., 10s. 3d and 6s. 6d respectively on 14 June 1817, while the others remained unchanged. They were reduced on 9 August 1817 to 9s., 8s. 3d and 5s. 10d and again on 11 October to 8s., 6s., and 5s. Monthly payments to the eleven widows had fallen to £9.8.0 by April (1) 1818.⁸⁸

Weekly pensions were paid to thirteen widows at Pyrton in April (1) 1815, at a monthly rate of £11.0.0, in addition to payments to three elderly men and eight single mothers.⁸⁹ While the allowances paid to the majority of widows at Cropredy remained stationary throughout the period there is evidence of adaptation to the changing bread price at Pyrton. Eight allowances were reduced in August (5) 1815 and monthly

⁸⁶ Widow Hunt was paid 1s. 6d per week; Widow Hitchcox and Widow Lambeth 2s.; Widow Roberts, Widow Garrett, Widow Masters and Widow Hunt 3s.; Widow Hunt 4s.; Widow Hunt and family and Widow Elkington 7s., and Widow Smith and family 8s. It is interesting to note that three different Widow Hunts were in receipt of poor relief at this time, suggesting family connections between the recipients.

⁸⁷ Widow Robert's allowance was stopped on 16 November 1815.

⁸⁸ Widow Hunt's allowance was increased to 4s. per week on 13 September 1817 and Widow Garrett's to 4s. on 29 March 1817 and to 5s. on 20 December 1817.

⁸⁹ Widow White and Widow Harman were each paid 2s. 6d per week; Widow Eadle, Widow Newcomb and Widow Holland 3s.; Widow Wilson, Widow Hester, Widow Sarratt, Widow Oakley and Widow Radbourne 4s., and Widow Seymour, Widow Wiggins and Widow Smith 7s.

payments fell to £9.16.0.⁹⁰ By April (1) 1816, they had fallen to £9.4.0 per month. Several allowances were increased in a piecemeal fashion during 1816-17 and by April (1) 1817, monthly payments had risen to £11.8.0.⁹¹

Allowance payments to five of the six widows on the pension lists at Stoke Lyne were cut on 23 September 1815 and monthly expenditure fell from £5.18.0 to £5.4.0.⁹² In addition, 7-8 single women and 5-6 elderly men received weekly pensions. Several allowances were increased in a piecemeal fashion during 1816-17 and by April (1) 1817 monthly payments had risen to £6.4.0.⁹³ Although the allowances of both Widow Morris and Widow Butler were stopped on 10 May 1817, and monthly payments fell to £4.16.0, Widow Bonner entered the pension lists on 21 June (3s. 6d) and disbursements increased to £5.2.0 per month.

Figure 6.21 (d) shows that the seasonal decrease in the monthly payments to the non-able-bodied poor at Spelsbury at the start of April, and the collapse during the harvest, continued in 1815-16. The weekly allowances paid to Mary Green (3s. 6d), Ann Eden (3s. 6d), Jane Bailes (3s. 6d) and Elizabeth Cross (3s.) all stopped on April 8 1815, while Ann Dillo's (2s. 6d) ceased on 22 April. The allowances paid to Ann Sturdy (2s.6d) and Elizabeth Stow (2s. 6d) ended on July 22. They resumed at their former levels on 16 September 1815, after the harvest.

⁹⁰ Widow White's allowance was reduced from 2s. 6d to 2s. per week, Widow Brown's from 3s. to 2s., Widow Newcomb's and Widow Eadle's from 3s. to 2s. 6d, Widow Oakley's from 3s. 6d to 3s., Widow Seymour's from 6s. to 5s., Widow Sarratt's from 4s. to 3s., and Widow Smith's from 7s. to 6s.

⁹¹ Widow Brown's allowance was increased from 2s. to 4s. per week, Widow Newcomb's from 2s. 6d to 3s. and Widow Sarratt's from 6s. to 12s. 6d. Widow Roberts (3s. per week) was added to the pension list in January (11) 1817.

⁹² The allowances paid to Widow Walsby and Widow Brazer were cut from 2s. 6d to 2s. per week; Widow Butler's from 3s. to 2s.; Widow Tanner's from 3s. to 2s. 6d; and Widow Summer's from 12s. to 10s. Widow Morris' allowance remained at 6s. 6d per week.

⁹³ Widow Walsby's allowance was increased to 3s. per week on March 30 1816, Widow Brazer's to 5s. on June 1, Widow Summer's to 11s. on January 4 1817.

Able-bodied poor relief expenditure, 1815-16 to 1819-20

Table 6.22* shows that total able-bodied poor relief expenditure was only £125 lower at Cropredy than at Pyrton between 1815-16 and 1819-20. While such payments fell from £1451.19.9 at Pyrton between 1810-11 and 1814-15 to £1148.5.9 between 1815-16 and 1819-20, they rose from £806.0.3 to £1024.15.9 at Cropredy in the same period. While family allowance payments fell at both Cropredy and Pyrton, roundsman expenditure more than doubled at Cropredy, rising from £268.1.9 to £550.0.6. Total expenditure on labour allocation also increased at Pyrton from £9.5.0 to £125.16.0.

Although detailed breakdowns of disbursements are unavailable at Spelsbury during much of this period, total expenditure exceeded that at Cropredy by £150-£200 per year. Total expenditure on labour allocation at Spelsbury, which was detailed in the overseers' accounts, increased massively, rising from £195.11.8 between 1810-11 and 1814-15 to £660.19.6 between 1815-16 and 1819-20.

While dwarfed by such payments at Cropredy and Spelsbury, payments to surplus labourers employed by the parish also increased at both Pyrton and Stoke Lyne. Total expenditure on roundsmen at Stoke Lyne rose from £25.11.0 between 1810-11 and 1814-15 to £124.18.9 between 1815-16 and 1819-20. At Pyrton, total expenditure on the employment of surplus labourers rose from £9.18.0 to £125.16.3. The majority of this expenditure at Pyrton was spent employing labourers 'on the parish roads' rather than as roundsmen.

A comparison of Figures 6.20 and 6.22 (d) reveals that family allowances payments at Pyrton continued to mirror the rise and fall in prices during this period. Both the number and scale of allowances fell as the price of bread slumped during 1815-16. Figure 6.23 shows that the number of allowances dropped from 17 in April (1) to 12

in September (7) before increasing to 13 in October (8). Figures 6.24 (a-d) show that the scale of allowances was also reduced, dropping from 1s. 9d per additional child, starting at the third child, to 1s. 2d. The allowance paid to a labourer with four children therefore fell from 3s. 6d to 2s. 4d per week. Monthly expenditure slumped from £19 in April (1) to £7 in September before recovering to £8 in October. It remained at this level throughout the winter of 1815-16.

Figure 6.22 (d) shows that weekly family allowances resumed at Stoke Lyne during the winter of 1815-16, paid to labourers with three or more children at the rate of 1s. 6d per additional child. They were increased to 1s. 9d per child, starting with the second, in May (2) 1816. Family allowances were only paid to labourers with six or more children at Cropredy during the winter of 1815-16, amounting to £2-3 per month. Many married labourers at Cropredy were employed on the round during the winter and were only paid 6s. 'for six day's work'. Although bread prices had fallen since the heights reached in 1812-13, the real incomes of married labourers with children employed on the round had fallen. The extent of the diminution in real income increased with the number of children in a labourer's family.

Figure 6.22 (c) shows that the acute seasonal pattern of family allowances, which had been evident at Spelsbury between 1810-11 and 1814-15, continued at the start of 1815-16. Although family allowances were paid to 16 labourers, this fell throughout the spring and summer, dropping to 9 at harvest time (7). Detailed lists of disbursements stopped at Spelsbury in October (8) 1815, before resuming in April (1) 1816. Monthly family allowance payments had risen to £27 at this time and 20 labourers were relieved in this manner. Allowances were paid at the weekly rate of 2s. 3d per additional child, starting with the third. A labourer with four children therefore received 4s. 6d per week. Total monthly payments fell throughout the spring and

summer and had dropped to £15 at the harvest (7). The number of allowances also dropped, from 20 in May (2) to 10. The scale of allowances was reduced from 2s. 3d per additional child, starting with the third, to 1s. 6d. A labourer with four children now received 3s. per week rather than 4s. 6d.

The number and scale of family allowances at Spelsbury began to increase after the harvest and by December (10) 1816, when detailed disbursements were replaced by single monthly payments to a contractor, family allowance payments had risen to £37 per month. Allowances of 1s. 6d per week were paid to labourers with two children while labourers with three or more children received 2s. for each additional child. A labourer with four children therefore received 5s. 6d per week.

Figure 6.22 (b) shows that family allowance payments at Pyrton, which had risen slightly during the first few months of the year, jumped after the harvest of 1816-17, rising from £14-15 per month in October (8) to £25 in January (11) 1817. While the number of allowances, shown in Figure 6.24, increased slightly from 15 to 16, the scale of each payment was increased in line with the rise in the price of bread. By January (11) 1817, when the price of bread stood at 2s. 5d, 2s. 6d was paid to each additional child, starting at the third. A labourer with four children therefore received 5s. per week compared to 2s. 4d in the winter of 1815-16. The scale of allowances was less generous at Pyrton in 1815-16 than it had been at the start of the century. Although allowances were still regulated by the price of bread they now began with the third child rather than with the second. Allowances to labourers with two children stopped at the end of 1813-14. Figure 6.20 shows that the bread price dropped from 2s. 8d before the harvest to 1s. 10d in October and the scale of family allowances at Pyrton, shown in Figures 6.24 (a-d), was cut to 2s. per additional child, though still starting with the third child. Monthly payments fell from £25 to £15. They fluctuated

around this level throughout the rest of 1817-18 and 1818-19 before dropping to £13-14 after the harvest of 1819-20. The allowance scale was also reduced after the harvest of 1819-20, dropping to 1s. 3d per week for each additional child.

Figures 6.22 (a) and 6.22 (d) show that family allowance payments also began to increase at both Cropredy and Stoke Lyne after the harvest of 1816-17. They were extended to labourers with two or more children at Stoke Lyne and the number of allowances jumped to 17 in December (10) 1816 and to 26 between February (12) 1817 and July (4) 1817. The scale of allowances also increased, rising to 3s. per week for each additional child, starting with the second. A labourer with four children therefore received a weekly allowance of 9s. during the spring and early summer of 1817 at Stoke Lyne, compared to 5s. at Pyrton.

At Cropredy, allowances were also extended to labourers with two or more children but the number of allowances only increased to a peak of 13 during the summer of 1817. Far more families were therefore dependent on family allowances at Stoke Lyne than at Cropredy. This may well reflect the increase in population at Stoke Lyne from 394 in 1811 to 509 in 1821. Allowances were paid to labourers with two or more children at Stoke Lyne but only started with the fifth child at Cropredy.

Wages paid to roundsmen increased at Cropredy during this period. In the winter of 1815-16, married labourers were paid 6s. 'for six day's work'. This rose to 7s. on 14 December 1816 and remained at this level throughout the spring of 1817. Three married labourers were employed 'on the round' during the summer and harvest of 1817-18 and their wages increased substantially on 16 August 1817: Richard Hunt's to 9s. 4d per week, Charles Adkins' to 11s. 6d and George Mobbs' to 12s.

The wages paid to roundsmen at Cropredy were reduced on 20 September 1817, Richard Hunt's falling to 8s., Charles Adkins' to 9s. 6d and George Mobbs' to 8s. per

week. They were reduced again on 25 October to 6s. 6d, 7s. 6d and 6s. 6d respectively and remained at this level until 10 January 1818 when Richard Hunt's wage was increased to 8s. 6d, Charles Adkins' to 8s. 6d and George Mobbs' to 8s. The roundsman system was abandoned in April 1818 and replaced by the Labour Rate system.

Eighty one male and twenty nine female labourers were employed 'by the yardland' at Spelsbury between 1815-16 and 1819-20, including twelve male labourers who also received family allowances.⁹⁴ Again, the overseers' accounts do not record the number of days worked but several labourers who received family allowances also received weekly payments of 7s. 6d 'by the yardland'. At Stoke Lyne, on the other hand, while sixty six male labourers and one female labourer were employed on the rounds during this period, only George Mayo, who was paid 7s. 6d 'for six day's work', and Thomas Vicars (6s. 3d) also received family allowances. The vast majority of roundsmen at Stoke Lyne received between 1s. and 3s. 'for six day's work' and included many who were referred to as 'boys' in the overseers' accounts.

Figure 6.22 (b) shows that the employment of surplus labourers by the parish also became a significant problem at Pyrton during the winter of 1817-18. Labourers were employed on the parish roads rather than as roundsmen and expenditure peaked at £11 in both December (10) 1817 and January (11) 1818. Although expenditure again rose during the winter of 1818-19, peaking at £7 in January (11), payments did not resume after the harvest of 1819-20. Twenty five different male labourers were employed in this manner during 1818-19, including several who also received family allowances.

⁹⁴ William Howell, Joseph Benfield, Jobe Benfield, Thomas Green, Richard Tooley, John Mayo, William Moulder, Richard Benfield, John Night, James Sturdy, John Cook and Sam Evans all received both family allowances and were employed 'by the yardland'. Thomas Snow, George Mayo, William Rook, Thomas Smith, William Field and John Harvey received family allowances during this period but were not employed by the parish.

Where stated, wages paid to labourers employed in this way were high. Richard Holland, George Jones, William Clark, Sam Randall and Thomas Brown were all paid 10s. each 'for six day's work' during the winter of 1818-19.

Figures 6.22 (a) and (d) show that monthly family allowance payments increased to £27-30 at Stoke Lyne in the spring and early summer of 1817-18 and to £14-15 at Cropredy. Payments subsequently fell in both parishes and ceased during the harvest month (7). Although family allowances resumed at Stoke Lyne after the harvest they were not paid to labourers with two children. Labourers with three children were each paid 9d per week and 2s. for each additional child. A labourer with four children therefore received 2s. 9d per week. The number of allowances fell from 26 before the harvest to 13 and monthly payments dropped from £30 to £7-8.

Allowances also resumed at Cropredy and labourers with two children were paid 6d per week and 1s. for each additional child. A labourer with four children was therefore paid 2s. 6d per week. The number of allowances had actually increased from 13 before the harvest to 15 and monthly payments only fell slightly to £13. Allowances to two, three and four children stopped in August (5) and those for five children were reduced to 6d per week. The number of allowances fell to 7 and monthly expenditure to £7.

After the harvest (6), the scale of allowances at Cropredy was extended to labourers with three children. They each received 6d per week and 1s. per additional child. The number of allowances rose to 14 during the winter and monthly payments to £12-13. The scale of allowances was again reduced in the following summer. The number of allowances fell to four during the harvest month (6) and monthly payments to £2-3 as allowance payments to labourers with five children or less ceased.

Although allowance payments resumed after the harvest, the scale was lower than in the previous winter. Weekly allowances began with the fourth child and were calculated at the rate of 6d per additional child, starting with the fourth. The number of allowances fell from 14 in the previous winter to 10-12 and monthly payments from £13-14 to £5. A labourer with four children who had received 2s. 6d per week in the winter of 1817-18, 1s. 6d in the winter of 1818-19 now only received an allowance of 6d.

Labour allocation at Cropredy: the Labour Rate

The system of employing surplus labourers 'on the round' came under concerted attack in Cropredy during 1817-18. The Oxford Canal Company, which contributed towards the poor rate of the parish, complained that much of this money was used to 'defray the expenses of labour ...rather than in the relief of the poor.'⁹⁵ Revd. John Ballard, the vicar at Cropredy, also high-lighted this tendency, emphasising that the practice was harmful to labourers and farmers alike, and stated in his letter to the parish vestry that 'I will not employ any Roundsmen.'⁹⁶ W.H.Chamberlain, the parish overseer at Cropredy, was therefore requested by the vestry 'to devise some other scheme for their employment.'⁹⁷ Revd. Ballard had suggested that 'it is also very clear that in this Parish if every one would employ labourers in proportion to the quantity of land he may occupy there would be very few left unemployed, and those would be proper objects for Parish relief.'⁹⁸ However, W.H.Chamberlain devised a more complicated scheme, adopted at Cropredy in November 1818, which became known as the Labour Rate System.

⁹⁵ OA.OA/9/4, Letter from Oxford Canal Company to Cropredy parish vestry, 5 February 1818

⁹⁶ OA.OA/9/3, Letter from Revd. John Ballard to Cropredy parish vestry, 4 February 1818

He later noted that before the Plan was adopted, ‘of the 40-50 labourers in the parish, 30-35 were sent on the round during the winter months and paid out of the parish rates.’⁹⁹ According to his Plan, a value was placed on the labour of each man and boy in the parish and this was deducted from the farmers’ contribution to the poor rate if he employed them at that price. It was, according to Chamberlain, ‘sanctioned by all the local magistrates and was carried on upwards of two years with evident and acknowledged benefits to the employers and the employed.’¹⁰⁰

Table 6.23. Weekly wage rates according to the Labour Rate system

Name	Wage	Name	Wage
Thomas Smith	9s. 0d*	Daniel Haslewood	6s. 0d
Richard Simms	9s. 0d*	Richard Hunt	5s. 6d*
Edward Shirley	8s. 6d*	John Summer	4s. 0d
Thomas Newton	8s. 6d*	William French (boy)	3s. 0d
William Fletcher	8s. 6d*	John Eagles (boy)	3s. 0d
Richard Fletcher	6s. 0d*	John Hunt (boy)	2s. 6d
Sam Judd	6s. 0d*	Charles Hunt (boy)	2s. 6d
John French	6s. 0d*	Richard Hunt (boy)	2s. 6d
John Wells	6s. 0d*	George Adkins (boy)	2s. 0d
Henry Penn	6s. 0d*	James Hirtton (boy)	2s. 0d

Note: *Received family allowances during 1817-18.

Source: OA.Par.Cropredy,b.12

The number of days in which labourers were employed according to the Labour Rate System was first recorded in the overseers’ accounts at Cropredy on 5 January 1822. It therefore becomes possible to calculate wage rates. Table 6.23 shows that the highest wages were paid to married labourers with children who had previously received family allowances. Although family allowance payments ceased on 26 May

⁹⁷ W.H.Chamberlain, *Plan*, 1
⁹⁸ OA.OA/9/3, Letter from Revd. John Ballard to Cropredy parish vestry, 4 February 1818
⁹⁹ W.H.Chamberlain, *Plan*, 2
¹⁰⁰ PP 1834 (XXXVIII), Evidence of W.H.Chamberlain

1821, the labourers' weekly incomes still seem to have been calculated according to the number of children in their families.

Poor relief expenditure, 1815-16 to 1819-20: Summary

Although the population of Stoke Lyne increased by almost 30% between 1811 and 1821, from 394 to 509, annual poor relief expenditure still lagged behind the other three parishes. Expenditure on the employment of roundsmen in this parish was dwarfed by similar payments at Cropredy and Spelsbury. Moreover, while many of the roundsmen employed at Cropredy and Spelsbury were married labourers also in receipt of family allowances, the majority of roundsmen at Stoke Lyne were old men and boys.

The provision of family allowances at Stoke Lyne continued to be restricted to the periods of highest prices. When family allowances were adopted, however, they were calculated according to the price of bread, guarding labourers' incomes against price inflation and ensuring large increases in poor relief expenditure. The ratepayers could afford these more generous allowances because their profits also increased with bread prices. On the small farms at Cropredy and Spelsbury, profits fell with poor harvests which brought large increases in bread prices, and allowances were less generous. At Pyrton, although family allowances continued to be regulated according to the bread price, they now started with the third child rather than the second; labourers' incomes therefore fell in real terms compared to earlier in the decade.

Thus, family allowances were paid to 26 labourers (52 adults and 76 children) at Stoke Lyne at the height of bread prices in April 1817, compared to 19 labourers (38 adults and 70 children) at Spelsbury, 14 labourers (28 adults and 47 children) at Cropredy and 16 labourers (32 adults and 70 children) at Pyrton. In total, 33% of the

population of Stoke Lyne was in receipt of poor relief in April (1) 1817, compared to 21.5% at Spelsbury and 20.4% at Cropredy.¹⁰¹

The geography of poor relief expenditure, 1828-9 to 1832-3

Annual poor relief expenditure collapsed at Spelsbury in the early 1820s, from £638.18.0 in 1821-2 to £388.10.2 in the following year.¹⁰² It fluctuated around this level throughout the 1820s and had fallen to £323.6.3 by 1828-9. Annual expenditure in the other three parishes also fell during the early 1820s, though to a much lesser extent. It subsequently increased at Cropredy, Pyrton and Stoke Lyne during the mid-1820s, rising from £422.3.9 at Cropredy in 1822-3 to £504.11.5 in 1828-9, £634.1.1 to £814.14.7 at Pyrton and from £309.8.10 to £452.9.7 at Stoke Lyne.

Table 6.24. Annual poor relief expenditure, 1828-9 to 1832-3

	Cropredy	Pyrton	Spelsbury	Stoke Lyne
1828-9	£504.11.5	£814.14.7	£323.6.3	£452.9.7
1829-30	£506.6.3	£935.17.3	£332.18.0	£539.17.1
1830-1	£629.19.9	£923.0.5	£358.10.11	£492.1.6
1831-2	£604.0.6	£998.1.1	£361.1.7	£540.11.1
1832-3	£581.11.8	£833.11.9	£309.17.9	£697.14.7
TOTAL	£2826.9.7	£4505.5.1	£1685.14.6	£2722.13.10

Sources: OA.Par.Cropredy,b.14; OA.Par.Pyrton,c.8; OA.Par.Spelsbury,f.3,f.4; OA.Misc.Cor.I/3,Misc.Cor.I/4

Table 6.24 shows that total annual poor relief expenditure at Pyrton between 1828-9 and 1832-3 was 60% greater than at Cropredy and Stoke Lyne and almost three times as large as at Spelsbury. Annual expenditure peaked at £629.19.9 at Cropredy in

¹⁰¹ It is not possible to calculate the percentage of Pyrton’s inhabitants in receipt of poor relief at this time because the 1821 census return includes the population of the liberty of Assendon whose poor were excluded from the overseers’ accounts.

¹⁰² Overseers’ accounts are not available at Spelsbury for 1820-1 and 1821-2. The figure given for annual poor relief expenditure in 1821-2 was taken from the parliamentary returns.

1830-1, £998.1.1 at Pyrton in 1831-2, £361.1.7 at Spelsbury in 1831-2 and at £697.14.7 in 1832-3 at Stoke Lyne.

Figure 6.26 shows that both the absolute bread price and its fluctuations remained low during this period. The highest annual average price of 1s. 7d was recorded in 1830-1 and the lowest in 1832-3, when it was 1s. 4d. The peaks and troughs in annual poor relief expenditure were scattered throughout the period suggesting that the bread price was not the sole influence. At Stoke Lyne, for instance, annual poor relief expenditure rose by £240 to £697.14.7 between 1828-9 and 1832-3, even though the average bread price fell from 1s. 6d to 1s. 4d, while at Spelsbury, it fell by £14 to £309.17.9.

Non-able-bodied poor relief expenditure, 1828-9 to 1832-3

Table 6.25* shows that total expenditure on the non-able-bodied poor varied between £833.2.9 at Spelsbury and £1579.13.9 at Cropredy.¹⁰³ Although expenditure was slightly higher at Pyrton, totalling £1606.7.3, this includes ‘complaints’ paid to both the able-bodied and non-able-bodied poor. At Stoke Lyne, detailed breakdowns of disbursements were replaced by single totals of monthly expenditure at the start of 1832-3. While total expenditure on widows and old men amounted to £620.2.9 at Cropredy during the first four years of the period, it was £1023.0.9 at Stoke Lyne. Sickness payments, on the other hand, totalled £417.16.3 at Cropredy in the first four years and £130.14.8 at Stoke Lyne.

¹⁰³ Although expenditure was slightly higher at Pyrton this includes the ‘complaints’ category, within which payments were made to both non-able-bodied and able-bodied poor. Also, if one assumes that total expenditure on the non-able-bodied poor did not increase or decrease markedly during 1832-3 at Stoke Lyne, this gives a similar total to Cropredy during the period.

Weekly allowances were paid to ten widows and five old men at Cropredy at the start of 1828-9 and to fifteen widows and nine old men at Stoke Lyne.¹⁰⁴ Although family allowance payments to able-bodied labourers virtually ceased at Cropredy in the early 1820s, weekly pensions continued to be paid to a number of labourers who were termed 'ill' in the overseers' accounts. In the winter of 1828-9, John French (8s. per week), Henry Giles (3s.), John Haslewood (3s.), William Davis (9s.), Thomas Fletcher (13s. 6d), John Wells (6s. 6d) and George Simms (10s.) all received weekly sickness payments. In addition, Joseph Smith (2s.) and George Mobbs (6s.), who had previously received weekly allowances on account of being elderly, were also paid sickness benefits.

Thus, although sickness benefits tended to increase at Cropredy, Spelsbury and Stoke Lyne during the winter months, the base from which this rise took place was much larger at Cropredy. Figure 6.27 (a) shows that sickness payments remained above £5 per month at Cropredy even in summer, while Figures 6.27 (c) and 6.27 (d) show that they tended to fall to £1-2 at Spelsbury and Stoke Lyne and even cease completely in some months. The highest winter peaks were recorded at Cropredy in May (2) 1830 when payments reached £13, at Spelsbury in February (12) 1831 when they increased to £10, and at Stoke Lyne in February (12) 1830, rising to £7.

The ten widows on the pension lists at Cropredy in April (1) 1828 received £4.4.0 per month. By the following April (1) the nine remaining widows received £3.18.0 per

¹⁰⁴ At Cropredy, Widow Simms and Widow Davis were each paid 1s. per week; Widow Bourton, Widow Watts, Widow French, Widow Hunt and Widow Shirley were paid 2s., Widow Lambeth 2s. 6d, Widow Judd 3s., and Widow Tyso 3s. 6d. At Stoke Lyne, Widow Harris was paid 1s. 6d per week; Widow Tanner, Widow Brazer, Widow West, Widow Mills, Widow Coggins and Widow Stockford 2s. 6d, Widow Inns 3s., Widow Walsby 3s. 6d, Widow James and Widow Brown 4s. 6d, Widow Whain 5s. 6d, Widow (John) Butler 6s., and Widow Butler and Widow Summer 7s. each.

month.¹⁰⁵ Widow Hunt (4s. per week) was added to the pension list on 4 July 1829 and Widow Smith (2s. 6d) on 17 October 1829. By April (1) 1830, eleven widows received £5.6.0 per month. Eight allowances were increased on 4 December 1830 and monthly expenditure rose to £6.6.0.¹⁰⁶ Monthly payments rose to £7.2.0 on 23 April 1831 when Widow Franklin (4s. per week) was added to the lists, but returned to £6.6.0 on 10 December 1831 when Widow Judd's payment stopped.

While weekly allowances to widows increased at Cropredy during the winter of 1830-1, they fluctuated around £11-12 at Stoke Lyne throughout the period. Fifteen widows were relieved in April (1) 1828 receiving £11.10.0 each month. A list was inserted in the overseers' accounts on 19 June 1827 which recorded the number of individuals in each family dependent on poor relief.¹⁰⁷ Five widows were listed without children and four of these continued to receive pensions of 2s. 6d each per week in April (1) 1828.¹⁰⁸ Widow James, who was listed as having one child, received 4s. 6d per week; Widow Whain, Widow Brown and Widow (John) Butler (two children) each received 6s. and Widow Butler (three children) received 7s. In addition, eight old men were listed, including five with wives.¹⁰⁹ While Figure 6.27 (d) shows that monthly payments to widows and old men changed very little at Stoke Lyne

¹⁰⁵ Widow Hunt's allowance of 2s. per week was stopped on 12 June 1828. The allowance paid to Widow Simms was increased from 1s. to 2s. 6d per week and Widow Watts' allowance was reduced from 2s. to 1s. Widow Bourton and Widow French, who both received an allowance of 2s., were recorded as having a 'family'.

¹⁰⁶ Widow Lambeth's allowance was increased from 2s. 6d to 3s. per week, Widow Bourton and family's from 2s. to 2s. 6d, Widow Smith and family's from 3s. to 3s. 6d, Widow French and family's from 2s. to 2s. 6d, Widow Judd's from 3s. to 3s. 6d, Widow Tyso's from 4s. to 4s. 6d, Widow Shirley from 2s. to 2s. 6d and Widow Hunt's from 4s. to 4s. 6d. The bread price also increased at the start of December from 1s. 6d to 1s. 8d.

¹⁰⁷ OA.Misc.Cor.I/3

¹⁰⁸ The list included 'Old Widow Coggins, Old Sarah Shrewsbury, Old Widow Stockford, Old Widow Mills, Old Widow Tanner, Old Widow Smith, Old Widow Tanner, Widow Harris, Old Widow Brazer and daughter and Old Martha Morris'. Of these, Widow Coggins, Widow Stockford, Widow Mills, Widow Tanner and Widow Brazer received weekly pensions in April (1) 1828.

¹⁰⁹ Old William Walsby and wife were paid 6s. per week in April (1) 1828, Old William Thornton and wife 6s., Old John Wesley 4s., Old Thomas Green 6s., Old William French and wife 6s., Old Peter Chimes 4s. 6d, Old Robert Innes and wife 1s. and Old Thomas Bennett 5s.

between 1828-9 and 1832-3, payments to single women did vary seasonally. A separate list of 'payments to girls' was included in the overseers' accounts each year, beginning in early November and continuing until the end of March.¹¹⁰ Payments of 1s. each per week were made to 13-14 girls in 1828-9, 1829-30 and 1830-1. In 1831-2, 19 payments were made each week during the winter and 21 in 1832-3. On 16 November 1832, the payments were listed according to the parents of the girls. This suggests that they were the daughters of labourers who also received family allowances.¹¹¹ The amount paid to each girl fell from 1s. per week to 9d in December 1831 and to 6d on November 1832.

Figure 6.27 (b) shows that monthly payments to widows and old men at Pyrton also remained unchanged during this period. The number of allowances paid to widows increased to twelve on 12 March 1829 when Widow Pocock (3s. 6d per week) was added to the pension lists and monthly payments rose from £6.11.0 to £7.2.0.¹¹² The minimum payment to a widow, paid to Widow Slater, Widow White and Widow Smith, remained at 2s. 6d per week throughout the period.

Figure 6.27 (c) shows that the seasonal decrease in the number and size of allowances paid to the non-able-bodied at Spelsbury, which had been evident since 1810-11, continued to repeat itself during this period. The Select Vestry minutes at Spelsbury shed some light onto the causes of these fluctuations. On 21 April 1822, the Select Vestry ordered 'that the weekly payments of the under-mentioned persons be reduced in consequence of their obtaining employment as follows: Elizabeth Night

¹¹⁰ OA.Misc.Cor.I/3,Misc.Cor.I/4

¹¹¹ James Phillips (3) was paid 1s. 6d per week (1 daughter), John Hickman (1) 6d, James Butler (1) 6d, Sam Whitmore (1) 6d, James French (2) 1s., Thomas Stockford (3) 1s. 6d, Thomas Goldin (1) 6d, John Coggins (1) 6d and John James (1) 6d.

¹¹² Widow Slater was paid 2s. per week; Widow Smith and Widow White 2s. 6d each; Widow Oakley, Widow Seymour, Widow James, Widow Anderson and Widow Nichols 3s., Widow Sarratt and Widow Banister 3s. 6d and Widow Page and family 3s. 9d.

1s., Ann Green, 1s. 6d, Elizabeth Harvey 1s., Jane Bailes 1s., Martha Newport 1s., Ann Sturdy 1s., and Hannah Hitchcox 6d.’¹¹³ On 17 July 1826, it ordered ‘that the weekly pay to the under-mentioned be discontinued on account of the harvest: Elizabeth Night 1s., Martha Newport 1s., Elizabeth Margetts 1s. 6d and Thomas Field wife 1s.’¹¹⁴

Harvest wages for women were fixed at 1s. per day on 30 July 1826.¹¹⁵ The Select Vestry also fixed women’s wages at hay-time. On 31 May 1824 it resolved that ‘the price for the hay harvest be as follows: for mowing seeds 18d per acre; for mowing grass 20d per acre; women hay-making 4s.’¹¹⁶ The level of harvest wages was set at a higher level than during hay-time. This suggests that fluctuations in the number and size of allowances paid to women followed seasonal variations in the level of farming activity. Rising wages and greater employment opportunities at hay-time and the harvest caused allowances to be cut. Year-to-year fluctuations in the timing and length of hay-time and harvest are reflected in the overseers’ accounts. Allowances were cut on 21 April in 1822-3 but the Select Vestry waited until 17 May in 1823-4.

Figure 6.27 (c) shows that by the late 1820s, the seasonal decrease in allowances to the non-able-bodied poor at Spelsbury had become concentrated in the harvest month. Allowances continued at their winter levels throughout the spring and early summer and no longer dipped during hay-time, suggesting that fewer employment opportunities were available to women in farming at this time and/or a change in land use. The allowances of eleven women were reduced on 9 August 1828.¹¹⁷ They were

¹¹³ OA.Par.Spelsbury,e.2

¹¹⁴ OA.Par.Spelsbury,e.2

¹¹⁵ OA.Par.Spelsbury,e.2

¹¹⁶ OA.Par.Spelsbury,e.2

¹¹⁷ The allowances paid to Amy Shepherd and Elizabeth Night were reduced from 2s. each per week to 1s.; Sarah Nichols’, Martha Newport’s, Elizabeth Margetts’, Jane Bailes’, Ann Green’s and Elizabeth Mayo’s from 2s. 6d to 2s.; Ann Clark’s from 3s. to 1s. 6d and Elizabeth Harvey’s from 5s. to 4s.

restored to their former levels on 3 October. In 1829-30, the allowances dipped on 15 August and increased on 3 October; on 14 August and 2 October in 1830-1; 6 August and 1 October in 1831-2, and 19 August and 23 September in 1832-3.

While the majority of payments to the non-able-bodied poor at Spelsbury were made outdoors, weekly payments were also made to the assistant overseer towards the maintenance of the poor in the workhouse.¹¹⁸ On 12 January 1824 the Select Vestry ordered 'that Thomas Herbert be allowed 3s. per head each week to maintain the persons in the poorhouse to the 1st January 1825.'¹¹⁹ This payment was increased to 3s. 6d on 10 January 1825 and remained there throughout the late 1820s and early 1830s.¹²⁰

It is possible to calculate the number of workhouse inmates by dividing the weekly payment to the assistant overseer by the per capita charge. At the start of 1825-6, 13 paupers were maintained in the workhouse. The overseers' accounts ceased in December 1825 and when they resumed in October 1826, only five paupers remained in the workhouse. It continued at this level until 16 November 1828 when it fell to four. Having subsequently dropped to two on 5 November 1831, it stayed at this level until 14 November 1835 when the overseers' accounts stopped.

Very little is known about the identities of the paupers maintained in the workhouse. A summons was taken out by the Select Vestry on 27 November 1823 'against Mary Smith for absenting herself from the poorhouse for several nights and for bad conduct.'¹²¹ A meeting on 29 December resolved 'that Mary Smith having absented herself from the poorhouse voluntarily be not permitted to sleep or reside

¹¹⁸ OA.Par.Spelsbury,f.1,f.2,f.3,f.4,f.5

¹¹⁹ OA.Par.Spelsbury,e.2

¹²⁰ OA.Par.Spelsbury,c.2

¹²¹ OA.Par.Spelsbury,e.2

there again.’¹²² In an entry dated 19 October 1827, it was recorded that ‘notice is given to Sarah Toovey, her daughters Ann and Hannah Toovey and Alice Bowell to quit the workhouse in one month from the date hereof.’¹²³ The weekly payment to the workhouse master did not change, however, which suggests that the order was not acted upon.

Able-bodied poor relief expenditure, 1828-9 to 1832-3

Able-bodied poor relief expenditure collapsed at Spelsbury in the early 1820s. Although family allowance payments continued, payments to roundsmen were absent from the overseers’ accounts when they resumed in 1822-3.¹²⁴ Table 6.26* shows that such payments rose markedly at Cropredy, Pyrton and Stoke Lyne during the late 1820s and early 1830s, driving poor relief expenditure upwards. Annual expenditure at Spelsbury, on the other hand, stagnated and was lower in 1828-9 than in 1822-3. Resolutions passed by the Select Vestry at Spelsbury not only fixed the level of family allowances in the parish but also fixed labourers’ wages. On 8 July 1822, it ordered that ‘the parish allowance of a man and wife be considered at 3s. 6d per week - that each child at 1s. 3d per week.’¹²⁵ It was also resolved that ‘the old men whose allowance has been 4s. per week be now reduced to 3s. 6d on account of the cheaper rate of provisions.’¹²⁶

As hay-time approached and demand for labour increased the Spelsbury Select Vestry responded by raising wage rates and reducing family allowances. Wages were set both by the week and by the piece. On 2 June 1823, piece rates for mowing were

¹²² OA.Par.Spelsbury,e.2

¹²³ OA.Par.Spelsbury,e.2

¹²⁴ OA.Par.Spelsbury,f.1

¹²⁵ OA.Par.Spelsbury,e.2

¹²⁶ OA.Par.Spelsbury,e.2

established at 16d per acre for seeds and 18d for grass, while weekly wages were set at 10s.¹²⁷ Harvest wages were set at 15s. per week on 11 August 1823 and mowing barley was rated at 15d per acre.¹²⁸ On 6 October 1823, following the completion of the harvest, it was resolved that 'the labourers' wages be 7s. per week.'¹²⁹ They were raised to 8s. per week on 26 January 1824, probably in response to the rise in bread prices from 1s. 4d in October 1823 to 1s. 6d in January 1824. In addition, the Select Vestry established on 9 September 1823 that 'the allowance to each person requiring relief to be one quartern loaf and a half and 3d per week in money.'¹³⁰ This suggests that the incomes of labourers with families were to be made up out of the rates when their subsistence requirements exceeded the wage rate established by the Select Vestry.

The Select Vestry ordered that family allowances should be reduced and even stopped during haymaking and the harvest month each year as higher wage rates were established. Thus, it reduced ten allowances on 17 May 1824 (five men and five women) and a further thirteen (nine men and four women) on 31 May 1824. Labourers' wages were fixed at 8s. per week on 27 September 1824 and family allowance payments resumed at their former levels.

The Select Vestry minutes also shed light onto the cause of the collapse in poor relief expenditure at Spelsbury in the early 1820s. Thirteen labourers applied to the Select Vestry for employment on 14 January 1822. Rather than being employed 'by the yardland', with their wages being paid by the parish, they were allocated amongst various farmers in the parish, who were responsible for paying the wages fixed by the

¹²⁷ OA.Par.Spelsbury,e.2

¹²⁸ OA.Par.Spelsbury,e.2

¹²⁹ OA.Par.Spelsbury,e.2

¹³⁰ OA.Par.Spelsbury,e.2

Select Vestry.¹³¹ The burden of surplus labourers which had previously been placed collectively upon the parish, was returned to the shoulders of the individual farmers. The apparent burden of poor relief expenditure was therefore reduced even though the total cost of maintaining the labourers remained unchanged.

Although payments out of the poor rates to seasonally unemployed labourers remained rare at Spelsbury during the early 1820s, payments to labourers employed on the parish roads and in the parish stone-pit began to increase after the harvest of 1827-8. Eleven labourers were employed in this manner, at between 6s. 6d and 8s. each per week.¹³² It was therefore agreed at a Select Vestry held in on 31 December 1827 'to call a General Vestry to be held on Monday January 7th to consider and determine on a proper mode of relieving by labour or otherwise the unemployed poor of this parish.'¹³³ The General Vestry resolved that 'the assistant overseer should prepare a list of the employed and unemployed poor labourers of this parish in order to make a proper distribution of the unemployed labourers or supernumerous labourers among the several landholders according to the number of acres in the occupation of each.'¹³⁴

While payments to labourers employed on the parish roads and at the stone-pit ceased at Spelsbury on 2 March 1828, Figure 6.28 (c) shows that family allowances continued to be paid during the winter months. Figures 6.29 (a-d) show that allowances were paid to labourers with three or more children. They were paid at the

¹³¹ William Hitchcox was to be employed by Mr Evans at 6s. 6d per week, John Night by Mr Evans at 6s., William Townley by Mr Evans at 6s. 6d, Thomas Field by Mr Evans at 4s. 6d, Thomas Snow by Mr Evans at 7s. 6d, Thomas Sturdy by Mr Evans at 8s., Thomas Harris by Mr Pratt at 5s., John Cook by Mr Harris at 8s., Thomas Hitchcox by Mr Evans at 3s., Michael Rook by Mr Evans at 4s., Joseph Benfield by Mr Kimble at 7s., Richard Thornett by Mr Evans at 2s. and Thomas and Charlotte Griffin by Mr Evans at 4s.

¹³² John Rouse, William Rouse and Sam Smith each received 6s. 6d per week, William Townley was paid 7s., and George Hall, James Moulder, John Cross, John Griffin, Joseph Benfield and Thomas Field were each paid 8s. In addition, George Hall and Joseph Benfield received family allowances of 1s. 6d per week.

¹³³ OA.Par.Spelsbury,e.2

¹³⁴ OA.Par.Spelsbury,e.2

rate of 1s. 6d per additional child each week, starting with the third. The allowance scale was reduced on the onset of hay-making each year, from 1s. 6d to 1s. per additional child, and stopped completely during the harvest. Figure 6.30 shows that the number of allowances also demonstrated a stepped appearance, dropping from 17 during the winter of 1829-30 to 12 in July (4) and August (5) before collapsing to 2 during the harvest month (7). This stepped pattern is also evident in monthly expenditure which fell from £11-12 during the winter to £5 in July and August to £2 in the harvest period.

Annual expenditure on family allowances remained steady at Spelsbury between 1828-9 and 1831-2, varying between £103.0.3 in 1828-9 and £115.9.9 in 1830-1. The number of family allowances increased to 25 during the winter of 1830-1, although the scale of allowances remained unchanged. Total payments fell to £89.10.9 in 1832-3 as the number of allowances, which had risen to 15 during the winter of 1831-2, rose to 13 after the harvest. Monthly expenditure peaked at £16 during the winter of 1831-2 and fell to £8 in the winter of 1832-3, reflecting the much smaller number of allowances.

Figure 6.28 (d) shows that monthly expenditure on family allowances at Stoke Lyne also assumed an acutely seasonal pattern, peaking in the winter months, dropping during hay-time and slumping during the harvest. Total annual expenditure of this kind lagged £20-30 behind Spelsbury even though the number of allowances, shown in Figure 6.30, reached 22-23 per week at Stoke Lyne during the winter. Allowances were also paid to labourers with three or more children at Stoke Lyne but were paid at the weekly rate of 1s. per additional child compared to 1s. 6d at Spelsbury. A labourer with four children therefore received 3s. per week at Stoke Lyne and 4s. 6d at Spelsbury.

The scale of allowances, which remained fixed at Spelsbury throughout the period, was increased at Stoke Lyne during the winter of 1830-1 as the bread price rose to 1s. 8d. The allowance for each additional child was raised from 1s. per week to 1s. 4d but returned to its former level after the harvest of 1831-2. Monthly expenditure which usually rose to £7-8 during the winter months rose to £12 at Stoke Lyne and from £11-12 to £16 at Spelsbury. Figures 6.29 (a-d) and 6.30 show that the number and size of family allowance payments at Stoke Lyne also exhibited a stepped pattern. Both fell during June each year, before collapsing at the start of August. Payments resumed after the harvest in both Spelsbury and Stoke Lyne. The date of these changes varied, however, both between the two parishes and between years, suggesting that the timing and length of haymaking and harvest also varied.¹³⁵

While family allowance payments exhibited marked seasonality at both Spelsbury and Stoke Lyne, Figure 6.28 (b) shows that they continued at the same level throughout the year at Pyrton. Monthly allowances at Pyrton fluctuated around £16-17 in 1828-9 and 1829-30 but increased to £20-21 in 1831-2, before collapsing to £13 after the harvest in 1832-3. The number of allowances, having increased from 18 to 20 at the start of 1829-30, remained at this level throughout the rest of the period, suggesting that fluctuations in the scale of allowances was the key. Annual expenditure on family allowances at Pyrton increased from around £200 in both 1828-9 and 1829-30 to £225 in 1830-1. It rose to £253.3.3 in 1831-2 before dropping to £207.1.6 in 1832-3.

¹³⁵ Family allowance payments decreased at Spelsbury on 7 June 1828 before collapsing on 9 August. They returned to their former level on 4 October. In 1829-30, the respective changes took place on 30 May, 15 August and 3 October; on 19 June, 14 August and 16 October in 1830-1; on 18 June, 6 August and 22 October in 1831-2, and on 17 June, 12 August and 21 October in 1832-3. At Stoke Lyne, on the other hand, the respective changes took place on 8 June, 3 August and 18 October in 1828-9; 27 June, 15 August and 3 October in 1829-30; 19 June, 14 August and 9 October in 1830-1; 5 June, 5 August and 15 October in 1831-2.

Figures 6.29 (a-d) show that the scale of weekly family allowances adopted at Pyrton was increased from 1s. 4d per additional child, starting with the third, to 1s. 9d after the harvest of 1828-9. A labourer with four children, who had been paid 2s. 8d per week, now received a family allowance of 3s. 6d. The scale of allowances returned to its former level during the winter of 1829-30 but was increased again to 1s. 9d per week in the early months of 1830-1. It remained at this level until after the harvest of 1832-3 when the allowance per additional child fell from 1s. 9d per week to 1s. 3d.

Family allowances had been abandoned at Cropredy on 26 May 1821.¹³⁶ Labourers allocated amongst farmers by the Labour Rate System were paid wages which took their family size and the price of bread into account. This is confirmed by Table 6.27 which shows that higher wages were generally paid in the years of higher bread prices.

Table 6.27. Labourers' wages at Cropredy, 1822-3 to 1827-8

	22	Jan.	31	Jan.	2	Jan.	1	Jan.	7	Jan.	6	Jan.	8	Jan.
	1822		1823		1824		1825		1826		1827		1828	
Th. Smith	9s. 0d				8s. 0d		9s. 0d		8s. 0d		8s. 0d			
Rd. Simms	9s. 0d		7s. 0d		9s. 0d		8s. 0d		9s. 0d		5s. 0d		7s. 0d	
Ed. Shirley	8s. 6d		4s. 0d		6s. 6d		8s. 0d		9s. 0d		7s. 6d		7s. 6d	
Th. Newton	8s. 6d						8s. 0d		9s. 0d					
Wm. Fletcher	8s. 6d						8s. 0d				7s. 6d		9s. 0d	
Rd. Fletcher	6s. 0d		4s. 6d		5s. 0d		5s. 0d		5s. 0d		5s. 0d		5s. 0d	
Sam Judd	6s. 0d													
Jn. French	6s. 0d				5s. 0d		5s. 6d		4s. 0d		2s. 0d		2s. 0d	
Jn. Wells	6s. 0d										5s. 6d		5s. 6d	
Henry Penn	6s. 0d				4s. 6d		5s. 0d		5s. 0d		5s. 0d			
Dan. Haslewood	6s. 0d		2s. 6d		7s. 0d		8s. 0d		9s. 0d		7s. 6d			
Rd. Hunt	5s. 6d				4s. 6d				5s. 0d		5s. 6d			
Bread Price	1s. 5d		1s. 1d		1s. 4d		1s. 7d		1s. 6d		1s. 3d		1s. 3d	

Source: OA.Par.,Cropredy,b.13

¹³⁶ OA.Par.Cropredy,b.13

However, the Labour Rate system was abandoned at the start of 1828-9 and payments to roundsmen resumed on 9 April 1828.¹³⁷ According to W.H.Chamberlain, 'a few of the smaller occupiers were opposed to the Labour Rate and attacked it by an appeal to the Quarter Sessions at Oxford and, having the letter of the law on their side, justice for the parish could not be obtained.'¹³⁸ The Bench 'regretted that they could not deal otherwise with it, but the returning to the farmers money that was raised by a rate for the relief of the poor, was an expenditure unwarranted by law.'¹³⁹

Although the Labour Rate system was abandoned at Cropredy, Figure 6.28 (a) shows that family allowances did not resume until the winter of 1831-2, when they were paid to labourers with five or more children. Monthly payments rose to £7 at this time, allowances being paid to twelve labourers. They ceased at hay-making and did not resume after the harvest. When roundsman payments resumed in April 1828, Richard Summer was paid 8s. 'for six day's work', Edward Shirley 7s. 6d, Charles Adkins, John French and Richard Simms 7s. each, John Penn 5s. 6d, Richard Fletcher 5s. and Thomas Dunn 7s. The bread price at this time was 1s. 4d. The level of pay increased during the winter of 1828-9, with Thomas Fletcher being paid 13s. per week; John Haslewood 11s.; Edward Shirley and Daniel Haslewood 10s. each; William Fletcher and Richard Summer 9s.; Charles Adkins, John French and Richard Simms 8s. and Richard Fletcher 6s. 6d. The bread price had also increased, rising to 1s. 8d.

The wages paid by the parish to Charles Adkins and Thomas Fletcher fell at the start of April 1829 to 7s. 6d and 10s. per week respectively but the others remained

¹³⁷ OA.Par.Cropredy,b.14

¹³⁸ PP 1834 (XXXVIII), Evidence of W.H.Chamberlain

¹³⁹ PP 1834 (XXXVIII), Evidence of W.H.Chamberlain

high. However, wage rates had collapsed by January 1830.¹⁴⁰ Although the price of bread had also fallen, from 1s. 8d in January 1829 to 1s. 5d in January 1830, wage rates had fallen to a greater extent, undermining real incomes. The wages paid to Daniel Haslewood, William Fletcher and John Haslewood had almost halved. Wage rates at Cropredy were increased during the winter of 1830-1, as the bread price rose to 1s. 9d, but were reduced again during the following winter, when the bread price had fallen to 1s. 5d.¹⁴¹ Although wage rates were reduced during the winter of 1831-2, family allowance payments resumed on 8 October. William Neal (3 children) was paid 2s. per week, John French (3) 1s. and William Haslewood (4) 2s. 6d. These payments ceased on 24 June 1832.

Figure 6.28 (a) shows that roundsman payments at Cropredy continued to follow a seasonal cycle of booms and busts in winter and summer. Monthly expenditure peaked at £17 in December (10) 1828 at Cropredy, when 20 labourers were employed in this manner. Although Figure 6.31 shows that the number of roundsmen peaked at 22 in February (12) 1833, monthly expenditure only rose to £11. Roundsman payments still assumed twin peaks, a major one in the winter and a secondary one in the early summer.

The employment of roundsmen, which had ceased at Stoke Lyne on 22 October 1826, resumed on 7 November 1829.¹⁴² Figure 6.31 shows that twenty four labourers were employed as roundsmen at Stoke Lyne in November (9) 1829 and monthly expenditure, shown in Figure 6.28 (d), rose to £11. In subsequent years, however, both

¹⁴⁰ Richard Simms was paid 7s. per week, Joseph Gardner 6s. 6d, William Neal and John Wells 6s., Thomas Newton, Daniel Haslewood and William Fletcher 5s., Charles Adkins 4s. 6d and John French 4s.

¹⁴¹ Charles Adkins' wage was increased to 5s. per week and those paid to John French, Richard Summer, William Neal and William Haslewood to 7s. each. During the winter of 1831-2, the wages paid to Richard Summer and William Neal were each reduced to 6s. per week and William Haslewood's wage fell to 5s.

the number of labourers employed in this way and total payments fell. By the winter of 1832-3, roundsman expenditure had virtually ceased, at just £2-3 per month. Annual expenditure fell from £62.0.3 in 1831-2 to £37.14.0 in the following year and amounted to just £8.16.2 in 1834-5, the final full year of the operation of the Old Poor Law. At Cropredy, on the other hand, £102.17.9 was spent on the employment of roundsmen in 1834-5.

Although total expenditure on roundsmen was much smaller at Stoke Lyne, 71 male and 32 female labourers were relieved in this way between 1828-9 and 1832-3. However, although twenty two labourers received family allowances during this period none of them was employed on the round at the same time.¹⁴³ This suggests that roundsmen in Stoke Lyne were either the young or the old, rather than married labourers with children. In his reply to the *Rural Queries* section of the 1834 Poor Law Report for Oddington parish and Ploughley Hundred, Philip Serle J.P. maintained that children in the Hundred 'are usually sent on the round and paid wholly by the overseer.'¹⁴⁴

The decline in annual roundsman expenditure, shown in Figures 6.28 (a) and 6.28 (d), was noticeable at both Cropredy and Stoke Lyne in the early 1830s. At Pyrton, on the other hand, annual expenditure on the allocation of surplus labourers by the parish increased massively during the late 1820s and early 1830s, amounting to £879.5.0 between 1828-9 and 1831-2 compared to £390.4.9 at Cropredy, £158.2.10 at Stoke Lyne and £0 at Spelsbury.

¹⁴²OA.Misc.Cor.I/3

¹⁴³ William Goldin, William Peacock, James Haynes, John Howkins, Thomas Harris, Thomas Vicars, Joseph French, James French, John Wiggins, John Heydon, James Butler, William Hickman, Richard Goldin, John Hickman, James Philips, John Harris, Thomas Hickman, James Perrin, Thomas Stockford, Thomas Keen, Henry James and Richard Sharman all received family allowances at some point between 1828-9 and 1832-3.

¹⁴⁴ PP 1834 (XXXI), Evidence of Philip Serle J.P.

Annual expenditure on labour allocation at Pyrton jumped from £53.4.3 in 1823-4 to £90.14.11 in 1824-5. It continued to rise gradually during the mid-1820s before jumping again between 1828-9 and 1829-30 from £147.11.0 to £269.10.9. A further leap in expenditure took place between 1831-2 and 1832-3, rising from £228.0.2 to £342.18.10. Table 6.28 shows that the surplus labourers at Pyrton were switched between several different forms of payment during the 1820s and early 1830s. Although the majority were employed as roundsmen during the 1820s, payments to labourers employed ‘on the parish roads’ grew during the early 1830s. The first payments to labourers ‘in lieu of labour’ were made in 1828-9.¹⁴⁵

Table 6.28. Payments to surplus labourers at Pyrton, 1820-1 to 1834-5

Year	‘On the rounds’	‘On the roads’	‘Out of work’
1820-1	£6.6.0		
1821-2	£45.16.0		
1822-3	£17.0.9		
1823-4	£53.5.3		
1824-5	£90.14.11		
1825-6	£87.0.8	£5.9.9	
1826-7	£84.18.5	£32.2.9	
1827-8	£107.3.0	£38.6.3	
1828-9	£11.11.0	£131.15.9	£4.5.11
1829-30	£183.15.9	£83.1.6	£2.13.6
1830-1	£125.15.1	£107.4.1	£1.1.0
1831-2	£128.6.11	£98.13.3	£1.1.0
1832-3	£221.1.2	£118.15.3	£3.2.3
1833-4	£227.7.7	£150.1.7	£22.7.7
1834-5	£135.3.0	£164.3.0	£114.9.4
Total	£1525.5.6	£929.13.2	£145.0.7

Sources: OA.Par.Pyrton,c.7,c.8,c.9

Married labourers with children employed ‘on the parish roads’, who had previously received family allowances, were paid 8-10s. per week. Roundsman

¹⁴⁵ OA.Par.Pyrton,c.8

payments were made to the farmers of the parish every six months, suggesting that the farmers paid the labourers' wages before being reimbursed by the overseer, further clouding the distinction between wages paid directly by farmers and those paid out of the poor rates.

The geography of poor relief expenditure, 1790-1 to 1834-5: Conclusion

The recent debate on the Poor Laws has tended to focus attention upon the economic role of poor relief, particularly on the relationship between the provision of poor relief and the structural economic effects of parliamentary enclosure.¹⁴⁶ Little emphasis has been placed upon the Old Poor Laws as a system of more general social welfare. Yet, a consideration of geographical variations in poor relief expenditure shows that levels of provision varied markedly, emphasising the complex relationships between the geographies of law, society and the physical environment.

With the exception of Pyrton, detailed lists of disbursements do not exist in the four study parishes for every year between 1790-1 and 1834-5. Breakdowns of weekly payments are available at Cropredy between 1793-4 and 1834-5 and at Stoke Lyne between 1790-1 and 1798-9, 1804-5 and 1824-5, and 1826-7 and 1832-3. At Spelsbury, missing account books and the periodic adoption of the contract system, mean that such records are only available between 1801-2 and 1802-3, 1805-6 and 1806-7, 1810-11 and 1814-15, and 1827-8 and 1834-5. Table 6.29 shows a breakdown of total expenditure in each of the study parishes during these years.

¹⁴⁶ See, for example, D.A.Baugh, *Cost*; M.Blaug, *Myth, Re-examined*; G.R.Boyer, *Economic, Empirical, English*; M.Dean, *Constitution*; A.Digby, *Constitution*; D.N.McCloskey, *New*; K.D.M.Snell, *Annals*.

Table 6.29. Poor relief expenditure at Cropredy, Pyrton, Spelsbury and Stoke Lyne, 1790-1 to 1834-5

Parish	Able-bodied	Non-able-bodied	Other	Total
	£.s.d	£.s.d	£.s.d	
Cropredy	£5,692.12.6 (26.7%)	£11,168.12.0 (52.2%)	£4508.10.6 (21.1%)	£21,370.0.0
Pyrton	12,257.11.0 (32.0%)	£13,294.10.0 (34.7%)	£12,778.2.0 (33.3%)	£38,330.3.0
Spelsbury	£3,566.15.0 (43.1%)	£3,474.3.0 (42.0%)	£1,239.9.0 (14.9%)	£8,280.7.0
Stoke Lyne	£2,865.6.0 (21.8%)	£7,457.16.0 (56.7%)	£2,838.18.0 (21.5%)	£13,162.0.0

Sources: OA.Par.Cropredy,b.9-b.14; OA.Par.Pyrton,c.4-c.9; OA.Par.Spelsbury,b.5-7,f.1-5; OA.Misc.Dew.I/3,Misc.Cor.I/1-4

Table 6.30. Poor relief expenditure at Cropredy, Pyrton, Spelsbury and Stoke Lyne, 1805-6 to 1834-5

Parish	Able-bodied	Non-able-bodied	Other	Total
	£.s.d	£.s.d	£.s.d	£.s.d
Cropredy	£1,813.0.3 (25.6%)	£3,692.6.0 (52.2%)	£1,565.9.6 (22.2%)	£7,070.16.0
Pyrton	£4,724.17.0 (38.2%)	£4,208.17.0 (34.1%)	£3,427.3.0 (27.7%)	£12,360.17.0
Spelsbury	£2,861.8.0 (42.2%)	£2,653.11.0 (39.2%)	£1,256.19.0 (18.6%)	£6,771.18.0
Stoke Lyne	£1,200.0.0 (21.3%)	£3,385.11.0 (60.1%)	£1,045.17.0 (18.6%)	£5,631.8.0

Sources: OA.Par.Cropredy,b.10,b.11,b.14; OA.Par.Pyrton,c.4,c.5,c.8,c.9; OA.Par.Spelsbury,b.6,b.7,f.3-5; OA.Misc.Cor.I/1,Misc.Cor.I/3-4

Table 6.30 contains comparable totals of expenditure in the four parishes for the thirteen years (between 1805-6 and 1806-7, 1810-11 and 1814-15, and 1827-8 and 1834-5) in which detailed accounts are available in all. If Spelsbury is excluded from this analysis, it is possible to compare these totals in thirty four years between 1790-1 and 1834-5 (1793-4 to 1798-9, 1804-5 to 1824-5 and 1826-7 to 1832-3), as in Table 6.31.

Table 6.31. Poor relief expenditure at Cropredy, Pyrton and Stoke Lyne, 1790-1 to 1834-5

Parish	Able-bodied	Non-able-bodied	Other	Total
	£.s.d	£.s.d	£.s.d	£.s.d
Cropredy	£4,835.7.0 (28.1%)	£8,993.14.0 (52.3%)	£3,336.18.0 (19.6%)	£17,196.19.0
Pyrton	£8,888.13.0 (30.7%)	£10,362.15.0 (35.8%)	£9,688.14.0 (33.5%)	£28,940.2.0
Stoke Lyne	£2,836.16.0 (22.1%)	£7,185.2.0 (56.2%)	£2,762.17.0 (21.7%)	£12,784.15.0

Sources: OA.Par.Cropredy,b.9-14; OA.Par.Pyrton,c.4-9; OA.Misc.Dew.II/1,Misc.Cor.I/1-4

These statistics illustrate both similarities and differences between the four study parishes. While confirming that weekly pensions constituted the bulk of poor relief expenditure, the proportion of ‘occasional’ payments did vary. The extent of these differences becomes even more marked when absolute expenditures are taken into account. Expenditure on ‘occasional’ payments was largest at Pyrton, both in relative and absolute terms, reflecting the greater generosity of the parish in the provision of medical assistance, clothing, housing and other items of relief. These statistics also show that while total payments on non-able-bodied pensions at Pyrton exceeded those made in the other three parishes, the difference was even greater when able-bodied pensions are considered. In the thirty four years covered by Table 6.31, weekly pensions paid to the non-able-bodied poor amounted to £10,362.15.0 at Pyrton, £1,400 more than at Cropredy and £3,200 more than at Stoke Lyne. Total able-bodied pensions paid at Pyrton in the same period amounted to almost twice those at Cropredy and over three times those paid at Stoke Lyne.

Figure 6.32 shows indexes of non-able-bodied poor relief expenditure in the four study parishes between 1790-1 and 1834-5. These all broadly followed the bread price until the early 1820s, after which they diverged. During the late 1820s and early

1830s, there was a marked increase in expenditure on the non-able-bodied poor at Stoke Lyne. The lists of disbursements contained in the overseers' accounts reveal that this increase was the result of an rise in the number of recipients rather than in the size of individual payments. Table 6.31, too, shows that total weekly pension payments to the non-able-bodied poor considerably outweighed those made to the able-bodied poor. At Stoke Lyne, the ratio was over 2.5:1, while at Cropredy it was almost 2:1. This suggests that although there was a large increase in payments to the able-bodied poor during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the principal function of the Old Poor Law remained the relief of those individuals deemed to be physically unable to provide fully for themselves, such as the elderly, infirm, widows and single mothers.

However, Tables 6.29 and 6.30 show that at Spelsbury, the relative importance of payments to the non-able-bodied and able-bodied was reversed. Large numbers of family allowances were paid to labourers even in normal years, serving as a supplement to low weekly wages, in addition to payments to surplus labourers employed 'by the yardland'. The allocation of labourers amongst the farmers of the parish, who paid their wages, after 1822-3 meant that even at Spelsbury, expenditure on the non-able-bodied poor was greater than payments to the able-bodied during the late 1820s and early 1830s.

While Tables 6.29-6.31 show that total expenditure on the able-bodied poor at Stoke Lyne was smaller than in the other study parishes, Figure 6.33 reveals that the level of payments fluctuated most from year-to-year. A comparison between Figure 6.33 and Figure 6.34 suggests that variations in expenditure on family allowances, following the surges and slumps in the bread price, underlay these differences. These payments ceased in normal years, before resuming as the rising bread price threatened

to undermine the real incomes of the poor. Figures 6.35 (a-d) show that allowance payments at Stoke Lyne were more generous than those paid at Cropredy and Spelsbury. Rising poor relief expenditure at Stoke Lyne therefore concealed stable real incomes rather than a collapse into poverty. At Cropredy and Spelsbury, on the other hand, rising poor relief expenditure obscured falling real incomes.

In addition, the precise timing of the peaks and troughs in the level of expenditure on family allowances did vary. This was a function of variations in both the number and size of allowances. Such differences demonstrate the extent to which local circumstances could outweigh the over-arching influence of fluctuations in the price of bread. Similarly, although magistrates issued allowance scales which fluctuated with the number of children in a labourers' family and the price of bread, parish overseers did not always adhere to them. While the level of allowances paid to labourers with three children peaked at Pyrton in 1801-2, 1805-6, 1812-13, 1817-18 and 1823-4, they peaked at Spelsbury in 1800-1, 1806-7 and 1811-12; at Cropredy in 1800-1, 1806-7, 1809-10 and 1816-17, and at Stoke Lyne in 1800-1, 1809-10, 1812-13, 1816-17 and 1824-5.

These statistics demonstrate that although the Old Poor Law operated as a system of social welfare, shoring up labourers' incomes in response to falling employment and wages and rising bread prices, the level of provision varied markedly. Overall, the most generous allowances were paid at Pyrton and Stoke Lyne, both characterised by large farms and relatively sparse populations. However, attempts to draw conclusions based on these data must beware of the sheer complexity of the poor relief system. While weekly pensions were an important constituent of the burden of poor relief expenditure, Figures 6.36 (a-d) indicate the wide array of relief forms adopted in each

parish. The significance of the different types of provision also varied both between parishes and within the same parish over time.

Conclusion: The geography of poor relief expenditure

In recent years, the questions of local and national interconnectedness and appropriate scales of analysis have received growing attention amongst historians.¹ Discussion has focused upon the locality as an object of study, seeing events in localities as an expression of broader, regional and national processes. Such an integration of local and national scales and processes is long overdue in the study of the Poor Laws and yet is still largely neglected. This study has demonstrated that the mapping out of spatial diversity, and the consideration of the forces moulding it, is fundamental to an understanding of the functioning of the Old Poor Law in late eighteenth and early nineteenth century rural England.

One of the most interesting points to emerge from this study is that patterns of poor relief expenditure were not simply controlled by the nature of farming; that is to say, local variations cannot be reduced to a common economic denominator. The Malthusian condemnation of poor relief, resting on the twin pillars of morality and economy, also disguises one of the most fundamental characteristics of relief provision: that is, massive geographical variations, both in its economic, social and ethical implications. The practice of responding on a local parochial basis to the needs of any parishioner, as diagnosed by the overseers of the poor of a parish or township, or by Justices of the Peace resident within or near to it, from money collected through

¹ See, for example, D.Eastwood, *Governing*; D.Gregory, *Transformation*; M.J.Freeman, *Perspective*; H.J.Habbakuk, *Agrarian*; G.Hoppe & J.Langton, *Östergötland*; P.Hudson, *Proto-industrialisation*;

levying a rate on all property holders in the parish, survived until the passage of the Poor Law Amendment Act in 1834. This Act replaced one geography of order, founded upon localised paternalistic concepts of society, with another, stressing the ordering of the free market.

The overall rise in national poor relief expenditure in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was also evident in Oxfordshire. While annual disbursements in England and Wales increased by a factor of 4.5 between 1775-6 and 1817-18, from £1,720,316 to £7,871,000, they increased more than five-fold in Oxfordshire, from £28,750 to £156,410. The surges and slumps following the trend in bread prices, which characterised the upward progression nationally, were also evident in Oxfordshire.

Chapter 2 demonstrated some clear regional differences in the level of poor relief expenditure and the chronology of change. An analysis of variations in per capita relief payments reveals a pattern of high levels of poor relief expenditure in the Chilterns and along the Cherwell Valley as it cuts through the Redlands and Cotswolds regions. Chapters 3 and 4 showed that parishes in the Chilterns, dominated by large farms, were able (and willing) to pay generous allowances calculated according to bread scales. The difference in per capita expenditure between this and other regions fluctuated as allowances rose and fell with the surges and slumps in the bread price. It became most marked during periods of scarcity when allowances elsewhere lagged behind the rise in the cost of living. The densely populated parishes strung out along the line of the River Cherwell, characterised by small pastoral farms, were associated with an acute labour surplus and the adoption of the roundsman

P.Hudson (ed.), *Regions*; A.Kussmaul, *General*; J.Langton, *Lancashire*; J.Langton, *Industrial Revolution*; J.Langton & R.J.Morris (eds.), *Atlas*; J.Thirsk, *England's*.

system. Poor relief expenditure was therefore boosted by the collapse in demand for labour during the years of scarcity, particularly 1800-2, when marketable surpluses and farmers' incomes on small farms were wiped out.

It seems that the arable parishes in the Chilterns accommodated their labour surpluses outside the harvest through labour allocation to farmers who paid the wages. This was also practised in the more remote arable parishes at the western end of the Cotswolds region, but less generous allowances were paid in this region in comparison to the Chilterns, thus keeping down per capita poor relief expenditure. These probably reflect the greater impoverishment of the small arable farmers on the Cotswolds during the periods of scarcity.

However, despite clearly marked regional patterns of poor relief expenditure, a consideration of surviving overseers' accounts and vestry minutes suggest significant differences from parish to parish in the detailed chronology of change in the burden of relief. These differences, which also extended to the ways in which they coped with crisis years of escalating grain prices, existed both within and between regions. Regional averages and trends do not make intelligible the kaleidoscopic welter of local variations indicated by a closer examination of the details of poor relief expenditure and practice contained in parish records.

While the statistics contained in the series of parliamentary returns on the Poor Laws identify 1817-18 as the year in which poor relief expenditure peaked both nationally and locally, overseers' accounts in Oxfordshire indicate 1800-1 as the climatic point. The overseers' accounts also reveal the mammoth extension of the role of poor relief during the wartime scarcities of 1795-6 and 1800-2. As the price of bread rocketed, overseers throughout the county extended disbursements to individuals who had hitherto remained independent of the parish. This pattern was

repeated in 1805-6, 1812-13 and 1817-18 as the rising bread price again threatened to undermine the subsistence of the poor. Yet, statistical analysis of poor relief, focusing solely upon expenditure trends, reveals very little about the functioning of the Poor Laws and the reality of poor relief. Chapters 5 and 6 demonstrated that high poor relief expenditure could mean different things in diverse places according to the system of relief practised. Variations in the level of poor relief expenditure cannot automatically be taken to indicate differences in the rates of what we might think of as poverty or unemployment.

The founding statutes of the Old Poor Law, whilst insisting upon public provision for those unable to support themselves, did not state the level at which this support should be provided. Although Oxfordshire magistrates attempted to establish a minimum subsistence income across the county during the scarcity of 1795-6, such efforts had been abandoned by the turn of the century. Responses to the second period of scarcity between 1800-2 were left to the parish authorities, closely supervised by local magistrates sitting at petty sessions. This created scope for widespread geographical variations in the nature and extent of poor relief payments. The level of allowances could vary markedly both within and between the different administrative districts of the county. While I have identified a number of allowance scales issued by magistrates sitting at petty sessions, the example of Cropredy in 1812-13, where the overseers ignored the level of payments established by the Justices at Banbury, shows that these were guidelines rather than rules. This again emphasises the need to study the Poor Laws within their parochial context, using overseers' accounts and vestry minute books as the principal source materials.

The fluidity of relief provision also meant that the value of allowances, both in cash and real terms, could rise and fall within the same place over time. The same level of

annual poor relief expenditure might therefore conceal very different levels of allowances and hence real incomes. In one parish it might result from the payment of generous allowances to a few individuals, while in another it might be the product of a large number of small allowances. The level of real incomes in the two parishes would vary considerably if the smaller allowances were not supplemented by other forms of poor relief, such as the payment of rents, the provision of clothing or the supply of subsidised coal and bread. These differences are fully evident in the examples of the parishes of Cropredy, Pyrton, Spelsbury and Stoke Lyne.

Since the late 1780s, when surviving overseers' accounts began, able-bodied labourers at Pyrton had received weekly allowances from the parish, calculated in proportion to the number of children in their families and the price of bread. Cottage rents were also paid, medical expenses were covered and large quantities of clothing provided. The size of the family allowances rose sufficiently in cash terms during the scarcities of 1795-6, 1800-2, 1812-13 and 1817-18 to maintain their value in real terms.

Stoke Lyne, like Pyrton, was characterised by large farms and a relatively sparse population. When allowance payments resumed during the scarcity of 1800-2, they were calculated at a similar rate to those at Pyrton, guaranteeing labourers' incomes against inflation. Although family allowances ceased at Stoke Lyne as the bread price returned to pre-crisis levels after the harvest of 1801-2, they resumed during the high price years of 1805-6, 1812-13 and 1817-18, again maintaining incomes in real terms. High poor relief expenditure at Pyrton and Stoke Lyne during the years of scarcity therefore reflects generous allowance payments rather than a collapse of the labouring population into poverty. Differences in the level of allowances in the four parishes are shown in Table 7.1.

Table 7.1. Allowance payments to labourers with three children, 1800-1, 1812-13, 1817-18 and 1830-1

	Cropredy	Pyrton	Spelsbury	Stoke Lyne
March (13) 1801	4s. 0d	6s. 0d	3s. 0d	
May (2) 1812	0s. 0d	6s. 0d	3s. 6d	5s. 6d
March (13) 1817	1s. 6d	5s. 6d		6s. 3d
March (13) 1831	0s. 0d	1s. 9d	1s. 6d	1s. 6d

Sources: OA.Par.Cropredy,b.9,b.12,b.14; OA.Par.Pyrton,c.4,c.5,c.7,c.8; OA.Par.Spelsbury,b.6,b.7,f.4; OA.Misc.Cor.I/1,Misc.Cor.I/2

Family allowances were also paid to labourers at Spelsbury in normal years, supplementing the low level of wages paid in the parish. Although the level of allowances increased in cash terms during the years of scarcity, they did not rise to fully compensate their recipients for the rise in bread prices. Similarly, the increase in allowances at Cropredy, which, like Spelsbury, was characterised by small farms and a relatively dense population, did not keep up with rising bread prices. Relatively low poor relief expenditure in these two instances therefore conceals falling real incomes during periods of rising prices.

Moreover, it was not automatically the case that low rates of poor relief expenditure meant low rates of what we might think of as unemployment. In many parishes, both in arable and pastoral areas, much of the relief actually went directly to fund farm labour, where labour was allocated and paid (wholly or partially) by the overseer, or where the roundsman system was used. These forms of labour allocation had been abandoned in many parishes by the late 1820s, in a quest to prevent the abuses attendant upon their practice, and alternative systems adopted.

In some parishes, surplus labourers were allocated amongst farmers in proportion to their acreage or poor rate assessment, the farmers paying their wages. Although the size of the seasonal labour surplus might be the same in both instances, poor relief

expenditure would vary markedly. At Spelsbury, payments to labourers employed 'by the yardland' ceased at the start of 1822-3. Annual poor relief expenditure almost halved as surplus labourers, who were subsequently allocated amongst the farmers of the parish in proportion to their acreages, were paid by their employers. This system of labour allocation broke down at Pyrton during the late 1820s. Annual poor relief expenditure increased as the surplus labourers were employed as roundsmen, in digging stones and 'on the parish roads', their wages being paid by the parish.

Although many parishes experimented with alternative forms of labour allocation in the late 1820s and early 1830s, complaints about the idleness and immorality of the labouring population continued to litter the pages of vestry minute books and *Jackson's Oxford Journal*. D.O.P. Okeden, Edward Gilson and Richard Hall, in their roles as Assistant Poor Law Commissioners, described a universal system of pauperism which, they maintained, existed in the county in the early 1830s.

While annual poor relief expenditure did fall in many (though not all) parishes in this period, labourers' incomes continued to be regulated by the dictates of the parish vestry. Blanket wage rates were established, applying to all labourers whether employed privately or by the parish. The total weekly income of married labourers was fixed according to the number of children in their families and the price of bread. The difference between this figure and the weekly wage rate was made up out of the poor rates. Although this system, which divorced earnings from the quantity and quality of work performed, was almost universal in the county, it has been shown that the level at which the weekly income was set varied considerably.

The absence of detailed compulsory clauses dictating the nature and extent of poor relief expenditure fixed the administration of the system firmly in the locality. Ultimate responsibility was placed upon the parish overseers, supervised by Justices

of the Peace, providing almost unlimited administrative scope. Autonomy in relief practice gave parochial authorities considerable discretionary powers, militating against a uniform response across the county or its natural regions to problems of rising prices and unemployment.

While shedding light on the human-ecological distinctions in poor relief expenditure and the types of relief upon which they were based, regional statistics and trends ignore the fact that, above all, relief provision was a social process, rooted in the parish. The provision of relief put large sectors of the population in immediate debt to the ratepayers and administrators. Receipt of poor relief was conditional upon subservience to particular modes of behaviour, illustrated by the denial of relief to applicants who had left their previous employment in dubious circumstances and in a succession of resolutions passed by Oxfordshire parish vestries which stated that overseers would terminate relief to those who persisted in keeping a dog, a practice which was subject to taxation from the 1790s onwards.²

The provision of poor relief involved a major extension of public authority over claimants and their families. The poor were to remain subservient, take what was offered, and acquiesce to the authority of their affluent neighbours. Social control through the rates sought to mediate and reinforce patterns of authority and powerlessness within local society. The administration of the Poor Laws therefore sharply defined an office-holding elite of local ratepayers and established a complex network of power, paternalism and dependence. This network, which encompassed neighbouring magistrates, used the administration of the Poor Laws to assert traditional authority within local society.

²See, for example, OA.Par.Bampton,c.8,OA.PAR.248/2/A1/1, OA.Par.Cuddesdon,d.1, OA.Par.Stanton St. John,e.7, OA.Par.Enstone,c.10, OA.Par.Spelsbury,e.2 and OA.Par.Warborough,e.3.

Yet, the way in which these patterns of authority were articulated varied from place to place. In some places, protesting recipients were dragged before the courts, while in others, fierce disputes developed between the ratepayers. Tensions were also apparent between the parish authorities, who ultimately had to foot the bill, and the (supposedly) more benevolent magistrates. That this tension could, on occasions, boil over into outright hostility is evident at South Newington in 1821 and at Ramsden in 1834/5.

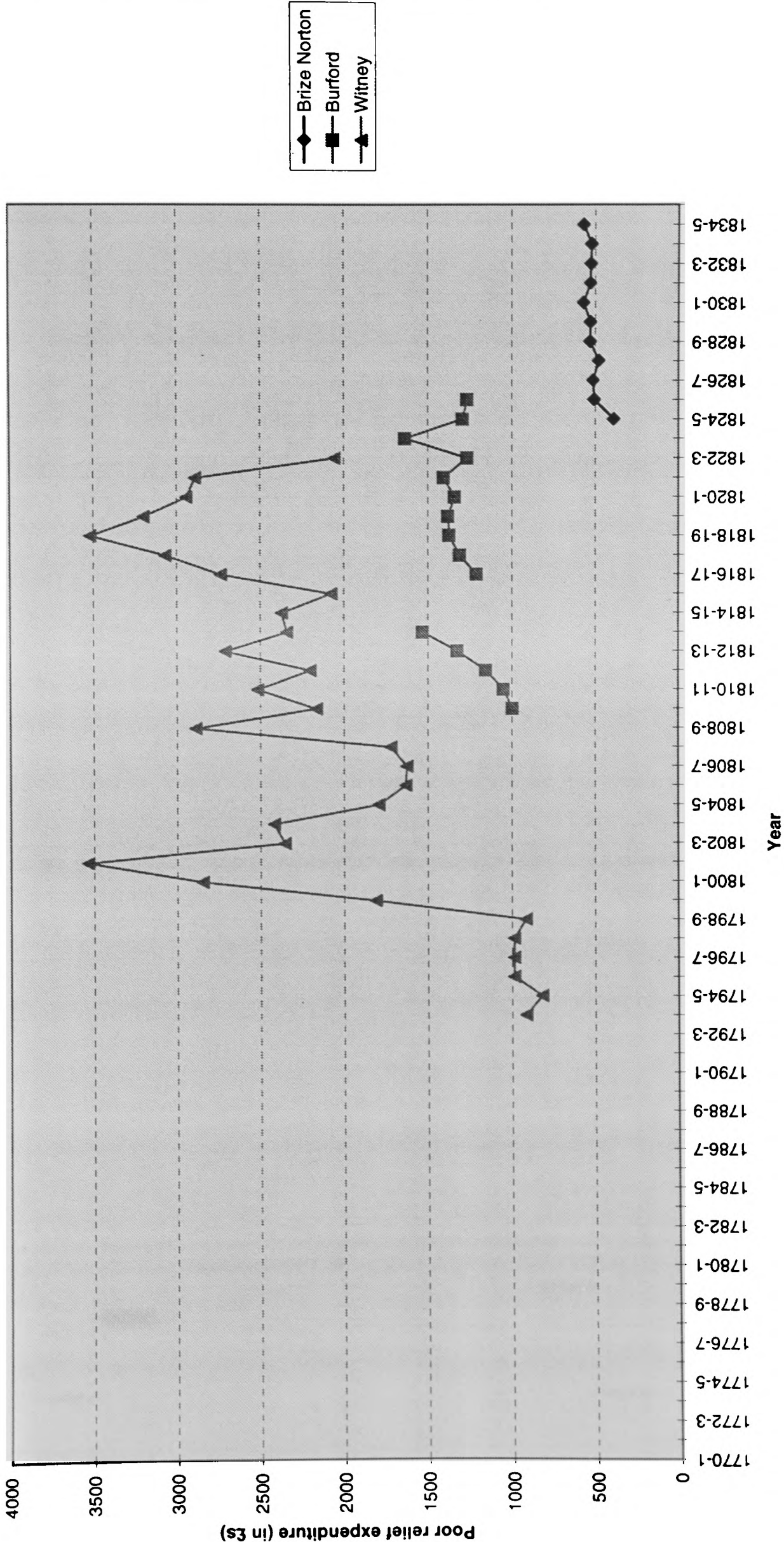
The Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834 was passed with the intention of removing geographical variation inherent in the existing system of poor relief. It sought to initiate a uniform system of social welfare, the New Poor Law, and a uniform national legal space. These reforms rejected the localism inherent in a system of relief founded upon the maintenance of ordered relationships between the members of the village community. In doing so, it sought to redefine the unit of social welfare, removing the responsibility for the maintenance of one's family from the parish and vesting it instead in the individual labourer.

The locality cannot simply be seen to have derived its character from national structures, such as 43 Eliz., c.2 (1601), but must be seen to have played an active role in their shaping. The Old Poor Law cannot be detached from the particular places in which it acquired its meaning and saliency. Thus, the recipients of poor relief may be treated as individuals rather than as abstract units of labour. Even so, the parish must be set within the wider, regional, sphere in which the Poor Laws operated. The boundaries of both economic and administrative units which were much smaller than the nation state - indeed, much smaller than the county - extended beyond those of the parish community and had a fundamental impact upon the operation of the Poor Laws and the daily experiences of both ratepayer, administrator and recipient.

Appendix 1

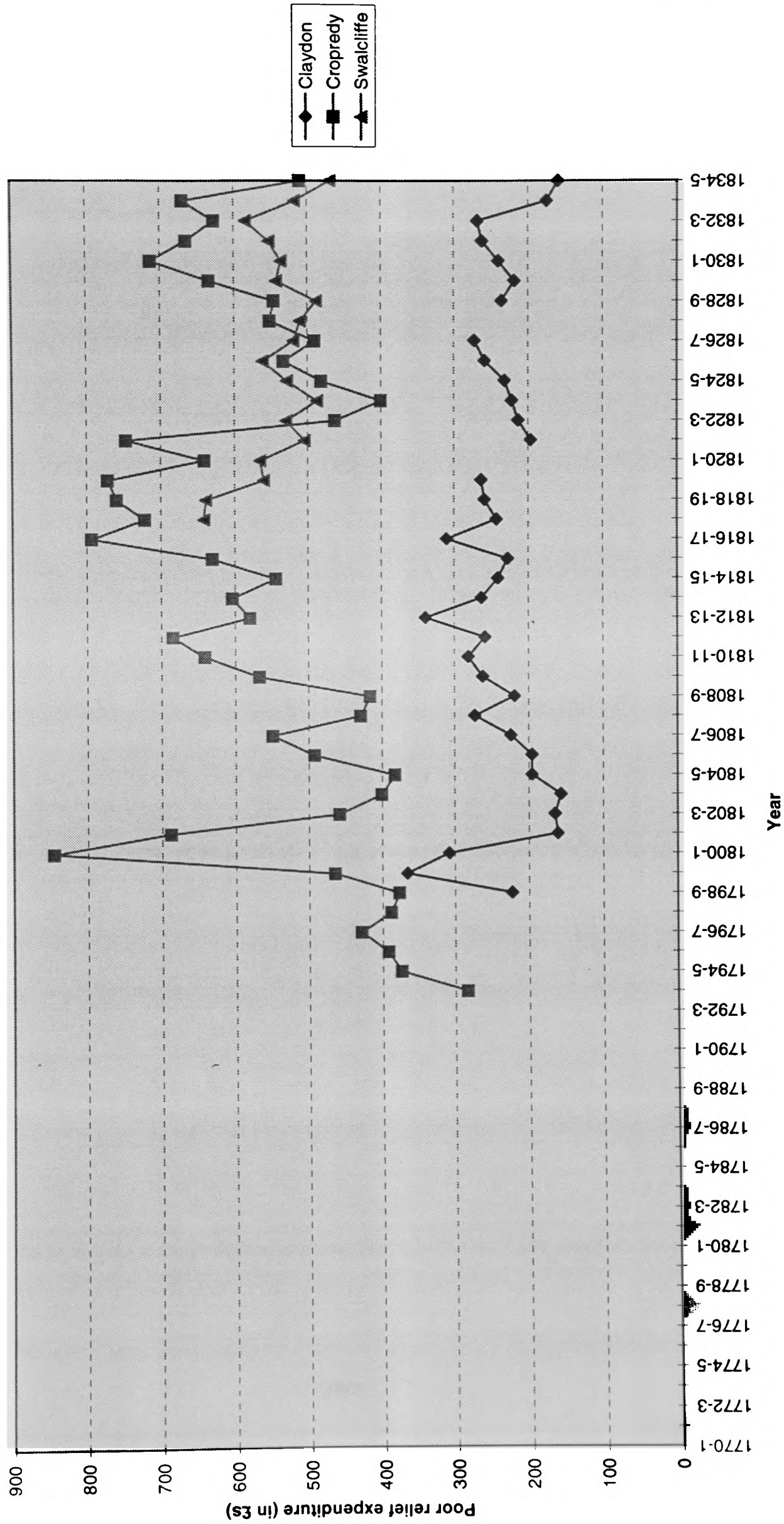
Poor relief expenditure in Bampton Hundred, 1770-1 to 1834-5

Sources: OA.Par.Burford,b.12; OA.Par.Brize Norton,b.8;OA.Par.Witney,b.14



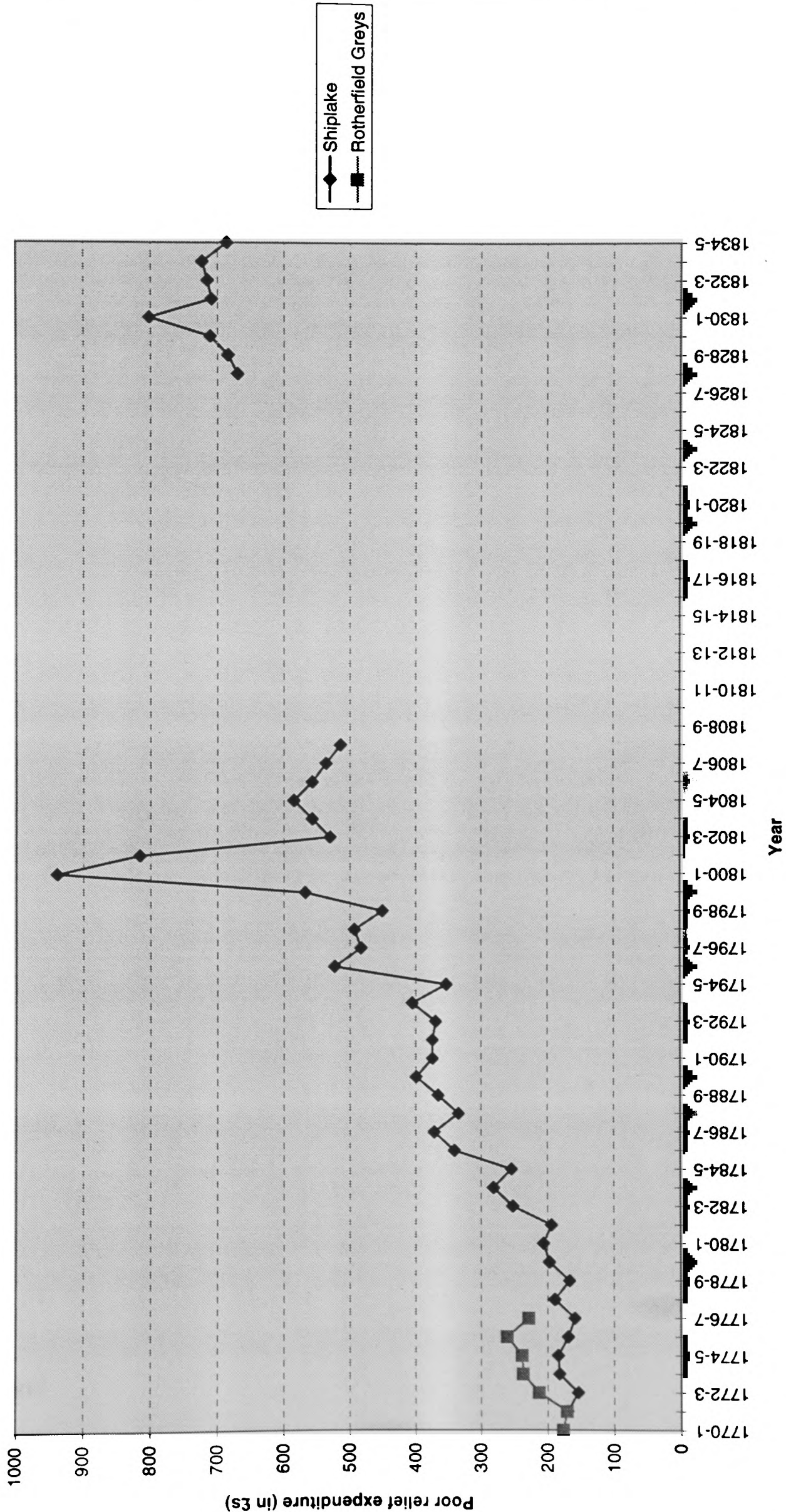
Poor relief expenditure in Banbury Hundred, 1770-1 to 1834-5

Sources: OA.Par.Claydon,b.5,b.6; OA.Par.Cropledy,b.9-14; OA.Par.Swalcliffe,c.2



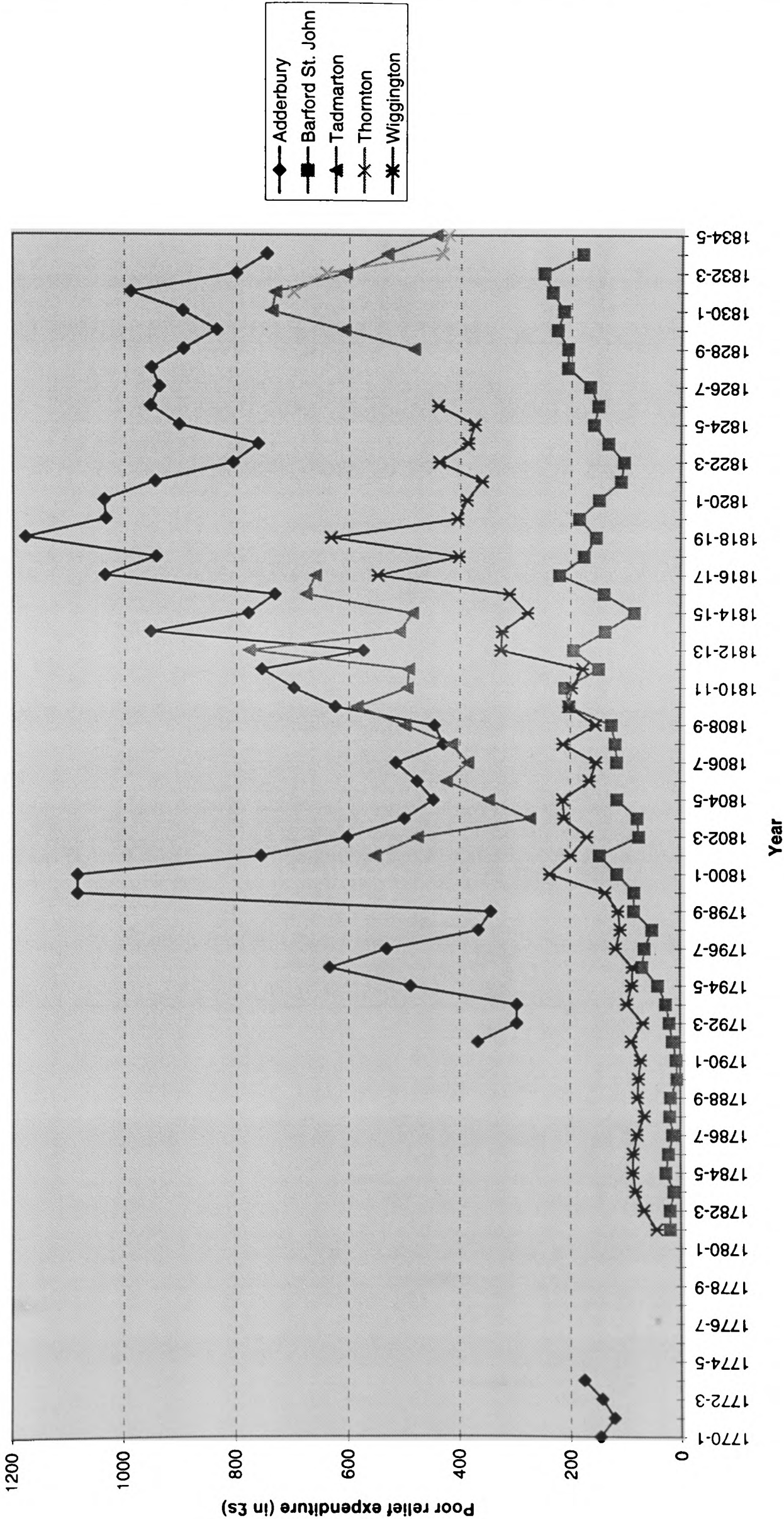
Poor relief expenditure in Binfield Hundred, 1770-1 to 1834-5

Sources: OA.Par.Shiplake,c.1-2,b.1; OA.Par.Rotherfield Greys,b.9-10



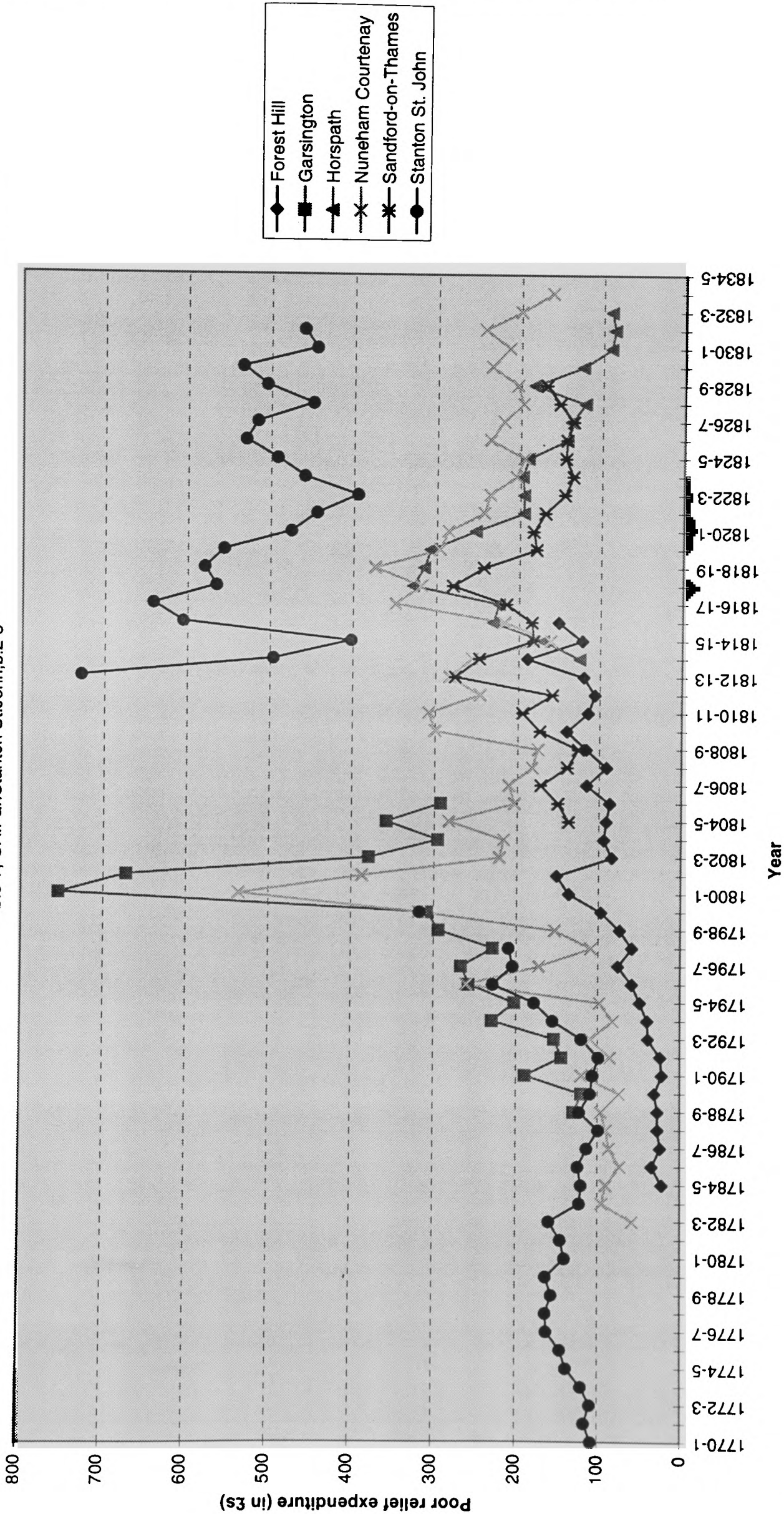
Poor relief expenditure in Bloxham Hundred, 1770-1 to 1834-5

OA.Par.Adderbury,b.5-9,c.2; OA.Par.Barford St.John,b.3-6; OA.Par.Tadmarton,b.4-6; OA.Par.Thornton,c.4; OA.Par.Wiggington,b.6-9



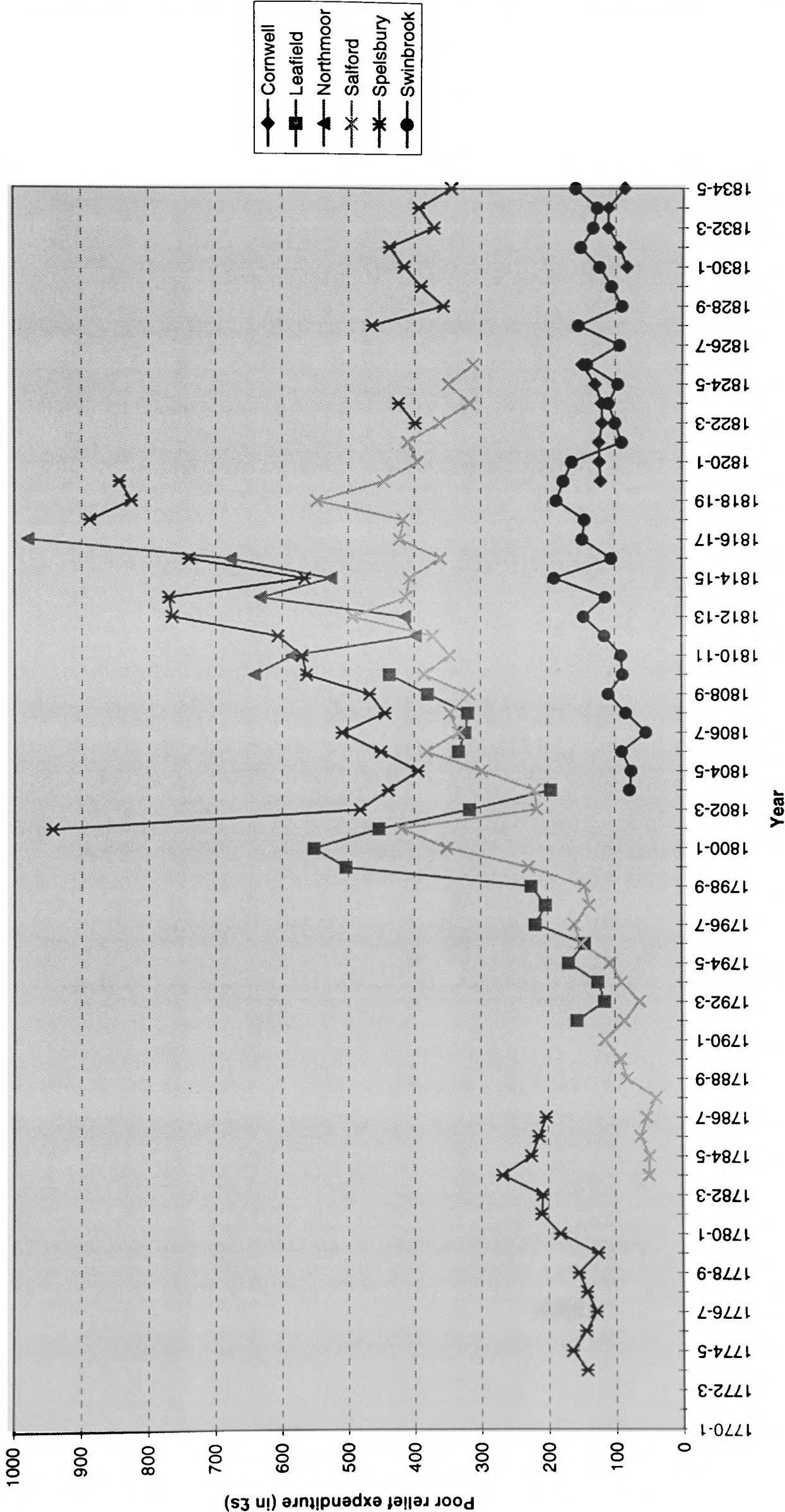
Poor relief expenditure in Bullingdon Hundred, 1770-1 to 1834-5

Sources: OA.Par.Forest Hill,b.3; OA.Par.Garsington,b.11; OA.Par.Horspath,b.4-5; OA.Par.Nuneham Courtenay,b.2-3,b.5; OA.Par.Sandford-on-Thames,b.6-7; OA.Par.Stanton St.John,b.2-5



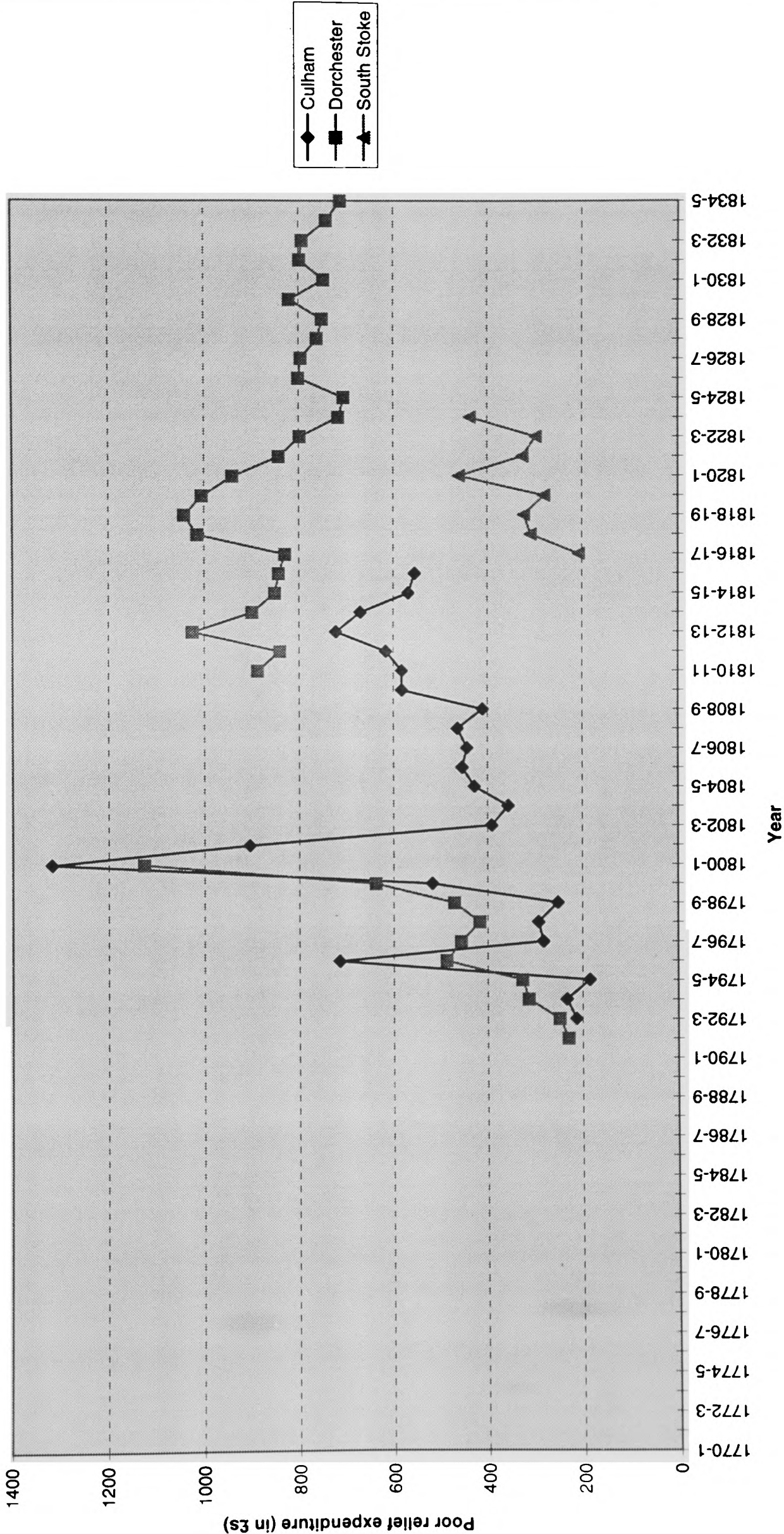
Poor relief expenditure in Chadlington Hundred, 1770-1 to 1834-5

OA.Par.Cornwell,b.4; OA.Par.Leafield,b.2; OA.Par.Northmoor,c.2; OA.Par.Salford,b.7-8; OA.Par.Spelsbury,b.5-7,f.1-5; OA.Par.Swinbrook,b.5



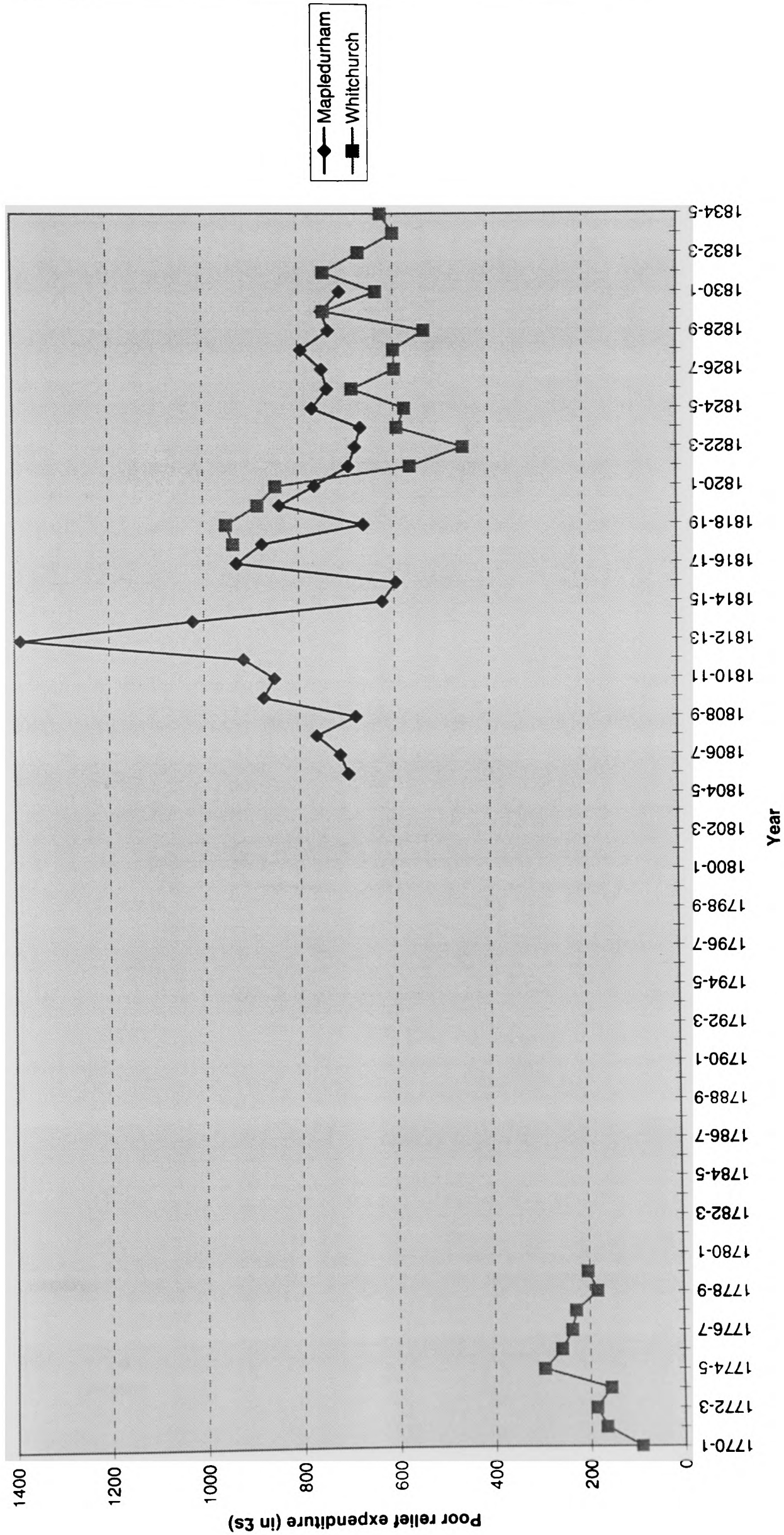
Poor relief expenditure in Dorchester Hundred, 1770-1 to 1834-5

Sources: OA.Par.Culham,b.6; OA.Par.Dorchester,b.7-9; OA.Par.South Stoke,c.8,b.12



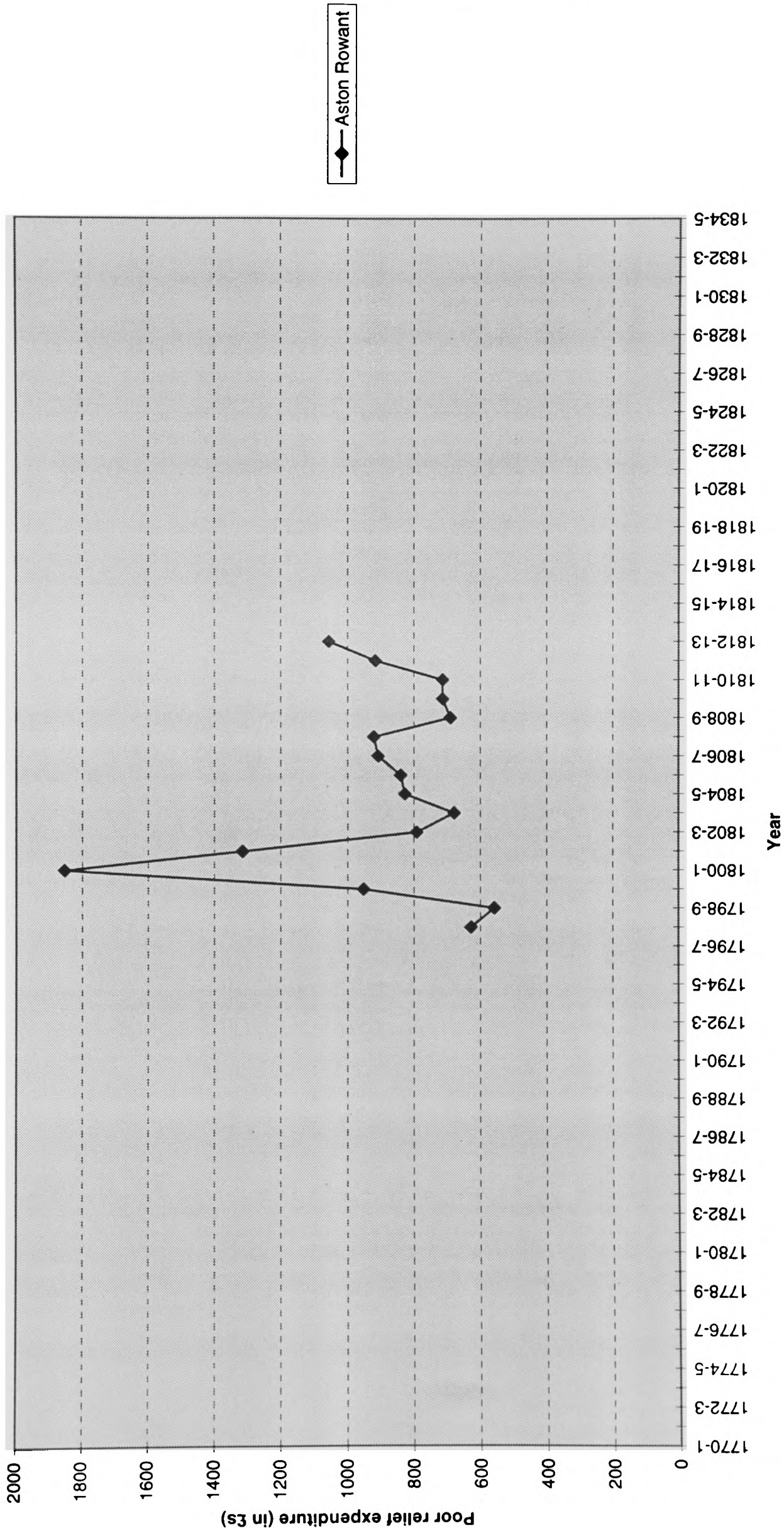
Poor relief expenditure in Langtree Hundred, 1770-1 to 1834-5

Sources: OA.Par.Mapledurham,b.4; OA.Par.Whitchurch,c.5-6



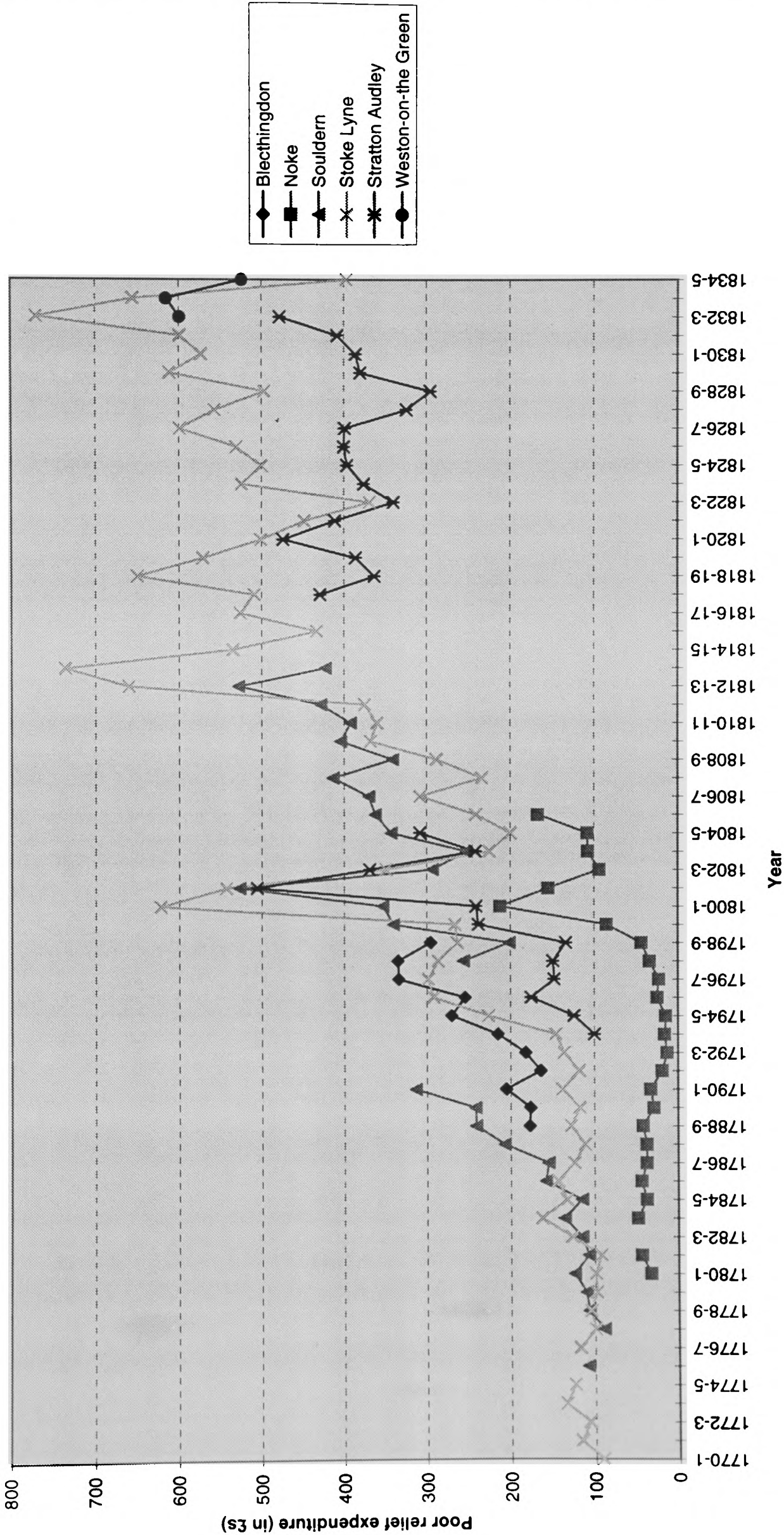
Poor relief expenditure in Lewknor Hundred, 1770-1 to 1834-5

Source: OA.Par.Aston Rowant,c.11



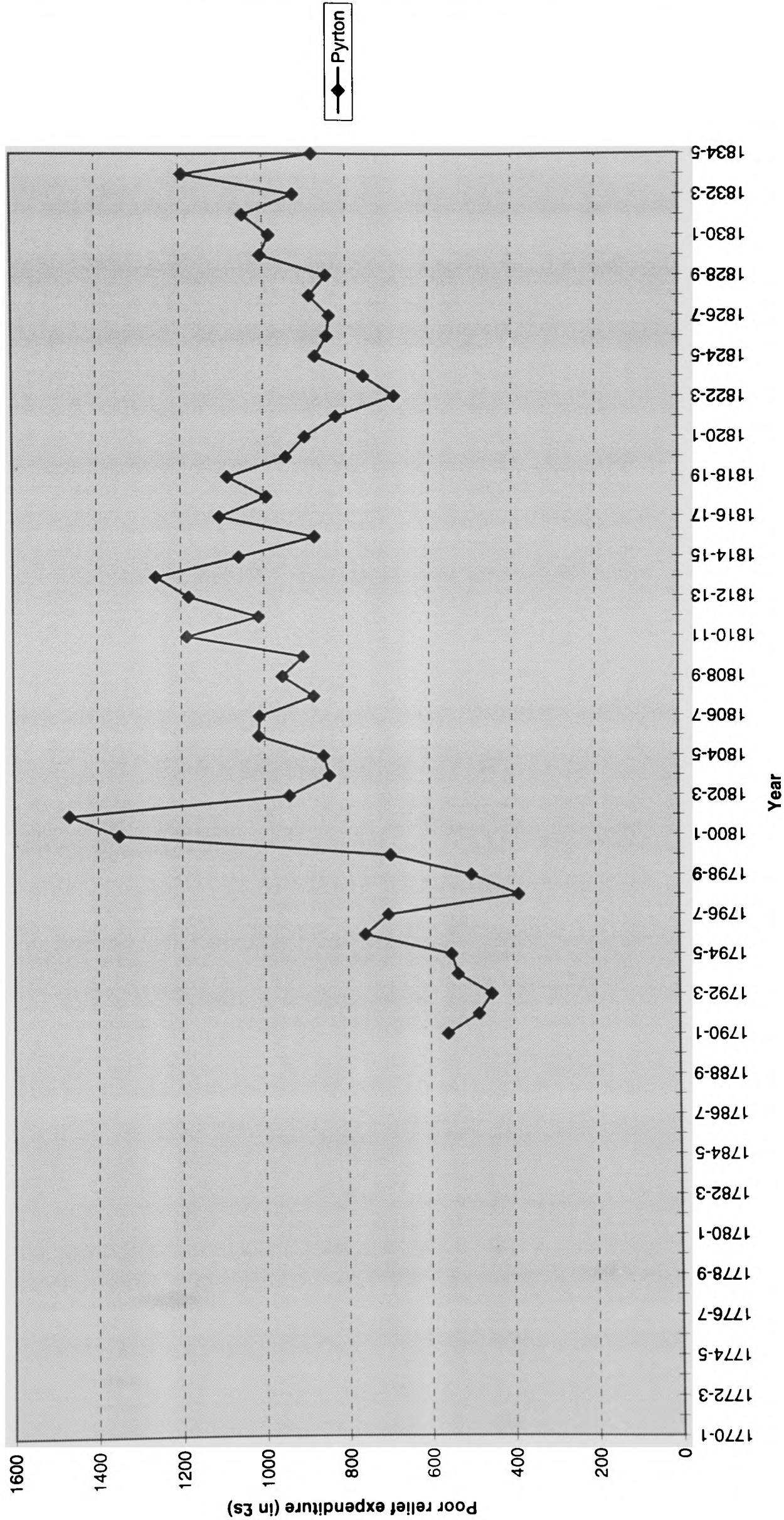
Poor relief expenditure in Ploughley Hundred, 1770-1 to 1834-5

Sources: OA.Par.Bletchington,b.6; OA.Par.Noke,b.3; OA.Par.Souldern,b.8-10; OA.Misc.Dew.II/2-3,Misc.Cor.I/1-4; OA.Par.Stratton Audley,b.1-2; OA.Par.Weston-on-the-Green,c.3



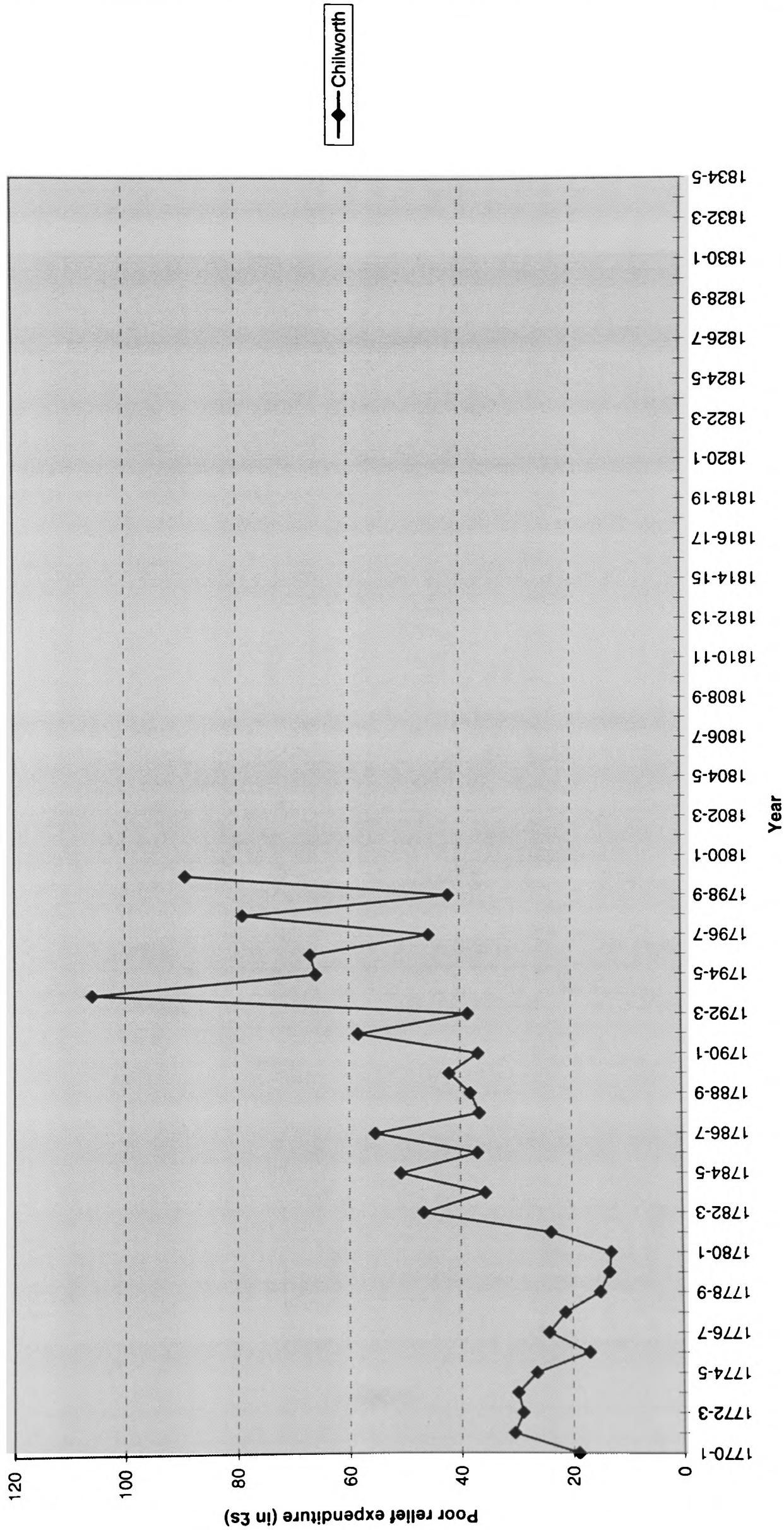
Poor relief expenditure in Pyrton Hundred, 1770-1 to 1834-5

Sources: OA.Par.Pyrton,c.4-9



Poor relief expenditure in Thame Hundred, 1770-1 to 1834-5

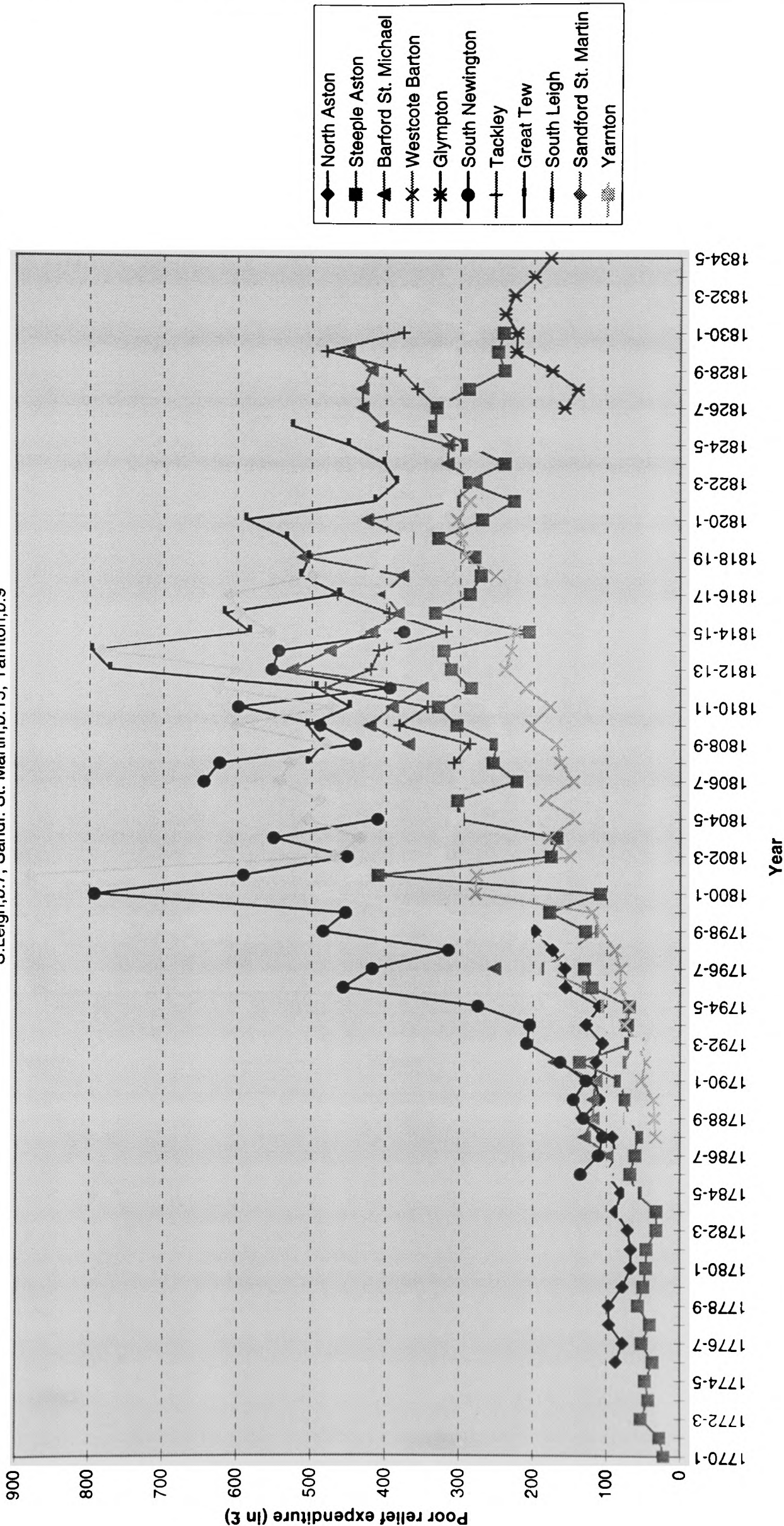
Source: OA.PAR.171/5/1F1/1



Chilworth

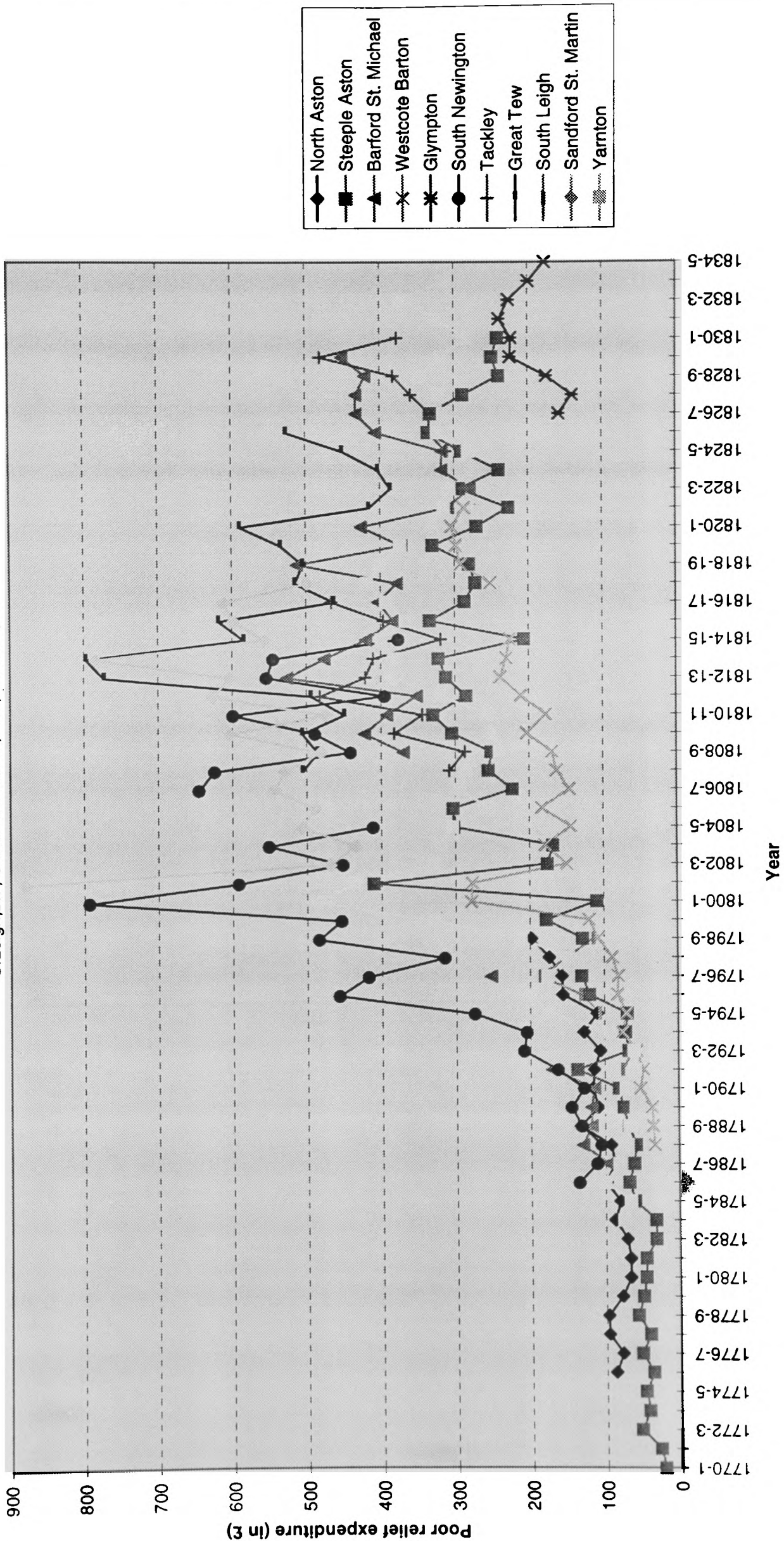
Poor relief expenditure in Wootton Hundred, 1770-1 to 1834-5

Sources: OA, Par. N. Aston, b.2; St. Aston, e.2; Barf. St. Mich., b.6-9; W. Barton, b.5; Glympton, b.1; S. New., b.11-12; Tackley, b.11-12; Grt. Tew, e.4, b.2; S. Leigh, b.7; Sandf. St. Martin, b.15; Yarmton, b.9



Poor relief expenditure in Wootton Hundred, 1770-1 to 1834-5

Sources: OA.Par.N.Aston,b.2; St.Aston,e.2; Barf.St.Mich.,b.6-9; W.Barton,b.5; Glympton,b.1; S.New.,b.11-12; Tackley,b.11-12; Grt. Tew,e.4,b.2; S.Leigh,b.7; Sandf. St. Martin,b.15; Yarnton,b.9



Appendix 2

Spelsbury Wood Jan: 6. 1777

Spelsbury
No in No in
Jan: last year
Year this Year N-D

M. Bowley	6	x	6	6-0
J. Bowley	3	x	3	3-0
Monshaw	5	x	5	5-0
G. M. Bowley	3	x	3	3-0
Mason	4	x	4	4-0
Thornett	6	x	5	5-0
Dilla	4	x	4	4-0
Gilkins	5	x	5	5-0
Gulings	0	x	0	0-0
Painbow	5	x	3	3-0
Mander	6	x	6	6-0
J. Margetts (Carpenter)	7	x	0	6-0
W. Taylor	2	x	2	2-0
Boal	5	x	4	4-0
Archer	3	x	2	2-0
Joyce Dyer	2	x	2	2-0
E. Savage	1	x	1	1-0
Hawkins	1			
J. Bryon	1			
Mar. Touch	3	x	3	3-0
Sharks	6	x	5	5-0
Williams	1	x	1	1-0
Mary Innes	2	x	2	2-0
Ann Morgan	2	x	2	2-0
Ann South	1	x	1	1-0

Taston Castle	5	x	5	5-0
Ball	7	x	7	7-0
Croft	6	x	7	7-0
Lamprey	6	x	5	5-0
Langstone	1	x	1	1-0
Aliu Faulkner	2	x	2	2-0
Smith	5	x	6	6-0
Har. Margetts	5	x	0	3-0

Taston Continued

J. Margetts Jan	5		
Ann Lindsey	x	1	1-0
Coney	x	6	6-0
West	x	2	2-0
Gumutt	5		
Mraginton	2		
Fullwell			
Pannerman	x	2	2-0
Grace	4		
Ann White	1		
Hen: Croft			
Wharton	x	1	1-0
Jane Boal	x		2-0

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List of the Poor of Spelsbury

Jan: 14th. 1770

Martha Touch	x 2	2
Sarah Bryon	x 1	1
Joyce Dyer ^{Wage}	x 2 3	3
Ann Touch	x 2	2
Mi: Cowley	x 6	6
Matt. Sparks	x 5	5
Ed: Inshaw	x 5	5
Sam: Ipsand	x 3	3
Wm: Boel	x 3	3
Ann Morgan	x 2	2
Wm: Taylor	x 2	2
Tho: Margetts	x 9	9
Tho: Dilla	x 4	4
Mra: Mander	x 5	5
In: Gilkins	x 4	4
Wm: Gubinge	x 0	0
Rich: Paimbow	x 3	3
In: Thornett	x 5	5
Tho: Pison	x 4	4
Geo: Nicholls	x 3	3
	<u>76</u>	

Tho: Baylis	x 2	2
Wid: Pad	x 1	1
Anth: Mobley	x 3	3
Tho: Archer	x 3	3
Hawkins	x 1	1
In: Williams	x 1	1
Matt: Jones	x 2	2

Poor of Vastone

Har: Margetts	x 2
Ann Lindsey	x 1
Mary Counce	x 2
Tho: West	x 2
In: Margetts	x 5 ¹ / ₄
Tho: Coney	x 5
Tho: Grimuth	x 3
Wm: Harris	x 4
Sam: Hall	x 6
Alice Faulkner	x 2
Mary Evans	x 2
In: Croft J. & J	x 7
In: Betteridge	x 7
Ja: Smith	x 5
	<u>53</u>

Fullwell	
Wm: Grace	3 x 3
Mary Panner	x 1
Ann White	x 1
Jas: Wraginton	x 2
Ely: Burden	x 2
Mary Lampray	5 x 4
In: Castle	5 x 5
Jas: Wharton	1 x 1
Wm: Faulkner	2 x 2

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List of the Poor of Spelsbury

Jan: 14th 1770

Martha Touch	x 2	2
Sarah Bryon	x 1	1
Joyce Dyest ^{Wage}	x 2 3	3
Ann Touch	x 2	2
Mi: Conley	x 6	6
Matt. Sparks	x 5	5
Ed: Inshaw	x 5	5
Jam: Ipsand	x 3	3
Wm: Boel	x 3	3
Ann Morgan	x 2	2
Wm: Taylor	x 2	2
Tho: Margetts	x 9	9
Tho: Dilla	x 4	4
Mra: Mander	x 5	5
In: Gilkins	x 4	4
Wm: Gulings	x 0	0
Rich: Paimbow	x 3	3
In: Thornett	x 5	5
Tho: Pison	x 4	4
Geo: Nicholls	x 3	3
		76
Tho: Baylis	x 2	2
Wid: Pad	x 1	1
Anth: Mobley	x 3	3
Tho: Archer	x 3	3
Flawkins	x 1	1
In: Williams	x 1	1
Matt: Jones	x 2	2

Poor of Taston

Har: Margetts	x 2
Ann Lindsey	x 1
Mary Coombe	x 2
Tho: West	x 2
In: Margetts	x 5 4 4
Tho: Coney	x 5
Tho: Grimuth	x 3
Wm: Harris	x 4
Ham: Hall	x 6
Alice Faulkner	x 2
Mary Evans	x 2
In: Croft J. & J	x 7
In: Betteridge	x 7
Ja: Smith	x 5
53	
Fullwell	
Wm: Grace	3 x 3
Mary Panner	x 1
Ann White	x 1
Jas: Praginton	x 2
Ely: Burden	x 2
Mary Lampray	5 x 4
In: Castle	5 x 5
Jas: Wharton	1 x 1
Wm: Faulkner	2 x 2

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An Account of Spelsbury - poor
Collection Peoples Names. Childrens Age. N. Has.

S.	D.	Peoples Names.	Childrens Age.	N. Has.
2	0	Matt. Sparks & w.	16, 12, 10, 8, 2.	7
		John. Williams		1
		John. Thornot & w.	18, 14, 12, 8, 6, 2.	8
4	0	Tho. Nixon & w.	13, 11.	4
		Tho. Lilla & w.	14, 12, 9.	5
		John. Gilkins & w.	15, 12, 9, 7, 2.	7
		Will. Gobhings & w.	19, 18, 17, 15, 9, 9, 6, 4, 2.	11
		Rich. Rainbow & w.	14, 11, 9.	5
		Charles. Mander Jr.		1
		Charles. Mander Jr & w.	3, 3/4.	4
		John. Woodford.		1
		Henry. Bailys & w.	21,	3
		Tho. Margets & w.	12, 10, 8, 6, 4,	7
		Tho. Gimmatt & w.	17, 12, 3,	5
3	6	Will. Taylor & w.		2
		Will. Bowel Stroder	16, 14, 12, 7, 4,	5
		Edw. Henshaw & w.	10, 7, 4,	5
		Tho. Archer & w.	14, 9,	4
2	0	Mich. Cowley & w.	18, 15, 13, 11, 9, 7,	8
		Ann. Morgan	1,	2
		Widow Dyer	21,	3
1	0	Ann. South	19, 16,	3
8	6	Martha South	11, 9,	3
		Edw. South		1
		Widow Trakner	13, 7,	3
		Elizabeth Trakner		1
1	6	Widow Bryan		1
		Elizabeth Trakner		1
3	0	Her Husband Runaway		1
		Tho. Bailys	Bro. with an Orde	1

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OA 9/4

Gentlemen,

The Oxford Canal Company have been informed, that in several parishes in which they are considerable contributors towards the relief of the poor, the practice of employing roundsmen prevails to such an extent, that some of the farmers get their work done almost entirely by roundsmen; and from the enquiries they have made, they find that this is in some degree the case at Cropredy. As this system is not only injurious to them, but is, as they conceive, of bad consequence to the poor, they have desired me to inform you, that in parishes where it is persevered in, they shall think it necessary to appeal against the allowance of the Overseers accounts, on that ground; and I am directed to request, that you will be so good as to read this letter at your Vestry, that their determination may be generally known in the parish. I am, Gentlemen,

Your very obed^t servantThos. Jones
Banbury 5 Feb^y 1816.

OA/9/3

Copy Feb 4th - 1818
Sir

The mystery of Housewren is
now carried to such a mischievous
height in this Parish, that it is
very necessary some steps should
be taken to put a stop to it. I
have therefore / as I am prevented
from attending the Vestry on Friday
thought right to address this letter
to you, & to request that you
would have the goodness to lay
it before the meeting. The evils
attending the House are so ap-
parent that it is needless to dwell

on them, & I had hoped that the good sense of the principal Landholders of this Parish would long ago have seen the necessity of getting rid of it. If the system is resumed in the Canal Company's case, I understand, determined to appeal against the rate, & they have certainly good grounds for so doing, as a great proportion of what they now pay goes not to the support of the poor, but to defray the expenses of Labour. It is also very clear that in this Parish if every one would employ labourers in proportion to the quantity of Land he may occupy there would

be very few left unemployed & those
would be proper objects for Parish
relief. I therefore beg to state that
from this time I will not employ
any Roundsmen, & I have taken
this resolution from a firm per-
suasion that the system is
highly injurious both to ^{the} La-
bourners & the Farmers, in the
welfare of both of whom in this
Parish (I hope I need not assure you
& the meeting) that I feel a very
lively interest. I am Sir
Your sincere friend
John Ballard.

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Abstract of the Returns made by the Overseers of the Poor

PP 1804 (II), Abstract of the Poor, 1802-3

PP 1817 (VI), Report from the Select Committee appointed to consider of the poor laws

PP 1818 (XIX), Abstract of the Poor, 1812-15

PP 1821 (IV), Abstract of poor rate returns

PP 1822 (V), Abstract of poor rate returns

PP 1823 (V), Abstract of poor rate returns

PP 1824 (VI), Abstract of poor rate returns

PP 1824 (VI), Report from the Select Committee on labourers' wages

PP 1825 (IV), Abstract of poor rate returns

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PP 1834 (XXVII-XXXVIII), Report from His Majesty's Commissioners for Inquiring into the Administration and Practical Operation of the Poor Laws

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PP 1801 (II), Enumeration Abstract

PP 1812 (XI), Enumeration Abstract

PP 1821 (XV), Enumeration Abstract

PP 1831 (XVIII), Enumeration Abstract

OA. Oxfordshire Archives

Overseers' accounts

Bampton Hundred

Par.Burford, b.12 (1809-20)

Par.Brize Norton, b.8 (1826-36)

Banbury Hundred

Par.Claydon, b.5 (1797-1818), b.6 (1818-37)

Par.Cropredy, b.9 (1793-1801), b.10 (1801-8), b.11 (1808-14), b.13 (1820-7), b.14 (1827-36)

Par.Swalcliffe, c.2 (1817-36)

Binfield Hundred

Par.Rotherfield Greys, b.9 (1769-78), b.10 (1819-35)

Par.Shiplake, c.8 (1682-1700), c.9 (1736-70), c.1 (1771-1797), c.2 (1797-1808), b.1 (1827-1835)

Bloxham Hundred

Par.Adderbury, c.2 (1734-75), b.5 (1791-1802), b.6 (1803-8), b.7 (1808-22), b.8 (1822-9), b.9 (1829-34)

Par.Barford St. John, b.3 (1781-1808), b.4 (1808-23), b.5 (1823-32), b.6 (1832-34)

Bloxham III/4 (1774-1812)

Par.Tadmarton, b.4 (1801-14), b.5 (1814-19), b.6 (1828-36)

Par.Thornton, c.4 (1831-6)

Par.Wiggington, b.6 (1716-89), b.7 (1789-1802), b.8 (1802-17), b.9 (1817-26)

Bullingdon Hundred

Par.Forest Hill, b.3 (1784-1816)

Par.Garsington, b.11 (1788-1806)

Par.Horspath, b.4 (1748-90), b.5 (1813-33)

Par.Nuneham Courtenay, b.2 (1782-1814), b.5 (1814-32), b.3 (1832-5)

Piddington P.C.I/1(1800-8)

Par.Sandford-on-Thames, b.6 (1804-18), b.7 (1818-29)

Par.Stanton St. John, b.2 (1764-1800), b.3 (1811-19), b.4 (1819-22), b.5 (1822-5), b.6 (1825-6)

Chadlington Hundred

Par.Cornwell, b.4 (1819-36)

Par.Leafield, b.1 (1740-60), b.2 (1791-1811)

Mil.V/i/1 (1824-8), Mil.V/i/2 (1828-31), Mil.V/i/3 (1831-4) (Milton-under-Wychwood)

Par.Northmoor, c.2 (1809-18)

Par.Salford, b.7 (1782-1804), b.8 (1805-26)

Par.Spelsbury, b.5 (1773-87), b.6 (1799-1809), b.7 (1809-20), f.1 (1822-3), f.2 (1823-4), f.3 (1827-30), f.4 (1830-3), f.5 (1833-5)

Par.Swinbrook, b.5 (1803-35)

Dorchester Hundred

Par.Culham, b.6 (1792-1816)

Par.Dorchester, b.10 (1681-1744), b.11 (1748-68), b.7 (1771-1802), b.8 (1810-27), b.9 (1827-36)

Par.South Stoke, c.8 (1810-11), b.12 (1815-26)

Ewelme Hundred

Par.Swyncombe, b.10 (1821-30)

Langtree Hundred

Par.Mapledurham, b.3 (1693-1735), b.4 (1805-31)

Par.Whitchurch, c.3 (1665-1705), c.4 (1705-44), c.5 (1744-80), c.6 (1817-35)

Lewknor Hundred

Par.Aston Rowant, c.11 (1797-1813)

Pyrton Hundred

Par.Pyrton, c.4 (1787-1808), c.5 (1808-15), c.7 (1815-24), c.8 (1824-34), c.9 (1834-5)

Ploughley Hundred

Blackthorn III/i/1 (1793-9), Blackthorn III/i/2 (1799-1804), Blackthorn III/i/3 (1804-8), Blackthorn III/i/4 (1808-23)

Par.Bletchingdon, b.6 (1787-9)

Par.Islip, b.10 (1713-85)

Par.Noke, b.2 (1728-50), b.3 (1780-1808)

Par.Souldern, c.5 (1728-45), b.8 (1775-97), b.9 (1797-1806), b.10 (1806-15)

Misc.Dew.II/1 (1760-75), Misc.Dew.II/2 (1775-89), Misc.Dew.II/3 (1789-1800),

Misc.Cor.I/1 (1800-16), Misc.Cor.I/2 (1816-24), Misc.Cor.I/3 (1824-31), Misc.Cor.I/4 (1831-5) (Stoke Lyne)

Par.Stratton Audley, b.1 (1792-1804), b.2 (1817-33)

Par.Weston-on-the-Green, c.3, (1831-6)

Thame Hundred

PAR171/5/1F1/1 (1696-1737, 1752-1818) (Chilworth)

PAR171/5/2F1/1 (1815-25), PAR171/5/2F1/2 (Great Milton)

Wootton Hundred

Par.North Aston, b.6 (1775-1800)

Par.Steeple Aston, e.2 (1757-1810), b.7 (1811-31)

Par.Barford St. Michael, b.6 (1786-97), b.7 (1808-23), b.9 (1823-31)

Par.Westcote Barton, b.5 (1787-1814), b.6 (1814-22)

Bladon P.C.II/i/1 (1806-16)

Par.Glympton, b.1 (1826-36)

K/II/a/2 (1778-1814), K/II/a/3 (1814-35) (Kidlington)

Par.South Leigh, b.7 (1712-1800)

Par.South Newington, b.11 (1785-97), b.12 (1797-1814)

Par.Sandford St. Martin, b.15 (1801-18)

Par.Tackley, b.11 (1807-18), b.12 (1824-31)

Par.Great Tew, e.4 (1807-18), b.2 (1818-26)

Woot.P.C.IV/iii/2 (1731-62), Woot.P.C.IV/iii/3 (1762-79), Woot.P.C.IV/iii/4 (1810-20), Woot.P.C.IV/iii/5 (1820-6), Woot.P.C.IV/iii/6 (1826-8), Woot.P.C.IV/iii/7 (1828-9), Woot.P.C.IV/iii/8 (1829-31), Woot.P.C.IV/iii/9 (1831-5) (Wootton)

Par.Yarnton, b.9 (1783-1809), b.10 (1809-36)

Poor rate assessments

Par.Cropredy, b.15

Par.Pyrton, c.2 (1768-81), c.3 (1791-1818), c.10 (1827-35), d.1 (1835-6)

Vestry minutes

(* Select Vestry minutes)

Bampton Hundred

Par.Bampton, c.8 (1792-1858) *

Par.Burford, c.35 (1827-35) *

PAR248/2/A1/1 (1819-94) (Standlake) *

Par.Witney, b.14 (1793-1823)

Bloxham Hundred

Par.Adderbury, e.1 (1813-23)

Bullington Hundred

Par.Cuddesdon, d.1 (1821-34) *

Par.Elsfield, e.1 (1822-8) *

Par.Stanton St. John, e.7 (1821-34) *

Chadlington Hundred

Par.Enstone, e.10 (1822-6) *

Par.Spelsbury, e.2 (1822-8) *

Par.Taynton, b.5 (1807-26)

Dorchester Hundred

Par.Dorchester, c.8 (1742-96), e.3 (1796-1806), b.4 (1800-8), e.1 (1821-34) *

Ewelme Hundred

Par.Warborough, e.3 (1821-26) *

Pyrton Hundred

Par.Pyrton, e.4 (1777-1816)

Ploughley Hundred

Par.Finmere, e.1 (1817-29)

Thame Hundred

PAR171/2/A1/1 (1821-6) (Great Milton) *

Wootton Hundred

Par.Deddington, b.22 (1819-44) *

Par.Eynsham, e.1 (1782-1836) *

Par.South Newington, d.2 (1821-30) *

Woot.P.C.I/i/1 (1821-34) (Wootton) *

Par.Yarnton, d.3 (1811-17)

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Par.Charlbury, b.8/9 (1820), b.8/2 (1815-34)

Par.Claydon, c.3 (1806-24)

Par.Cropredy, c.10 (1799-1835)

Binfield Hundred

Par.Rotherfield Greys, b.11 (1684-1804), c.9 (1701-1829), c.10 (1750-1816)

Bullingdon Hundred

Par.Horspath, c.10 (1786-1828)

Pyrton Hundred

Par.Pyrton, c.12 (1762-1835)

Ploughley Hundred

Par.Souldern, c.7 (1802-1832)

Thame Hundred

PAR.171/5/3/A/1 (Great Milton 1738-1833)

Misc. Poor Law Papers

Par.Cropredy, c.9, item OA/9/10 Justices' allowance scale (17 October 1812)

Par.Cropredy, c.9, item OA/9/5 Justices' allowance scale (14 November 1812)

J.XV1a/3.Pellatt.XV/V12 List of votes at Cropredy vestry (c.1819)

Tithe Maps

311 Pyrton 1850 (award and map)

354 Standhill 1840 (award and map)

Dillon Papers

Dil.I/j/27 Women's bill for weeding the corn in 1790

Dil.I/i/7a Survey of Dillon Estate in Spelsbury (1817)

Dil.I/l/33v Farm accounts on Ditchley Estate (1801)

Dil.II/a/1a Levy for the poor of Spelsbury (1738)

Dil.II/a/1e Descriptions of Fulwell, Taston and Spelsbury (c.1730)

Dil.II/d/1a Levy for the poor of Spelsbury (1795)

Dil.II/d/a-e Misc. papers (1738-1803), including poor rate (1738) and List of the Poor (1777, 1778, 1803)

Dil.II/g/1-2 Extracts from will of John Carey (1702)

Willoughby Papers

Wil.IX/3 Replies to questions sent by Board of Agriculture (Late 1793)

Misc. Documents

Misc.Will.I/1 Diary (21 January 1793 to 8 October 1799) (probably of Revd. John Russell Greenhill of Cottisford)

Mil.VII/10 Details of an agreement reached between Milton-under-Wychwood parish vestry and Thomas Hunt to contract out the poor (1 August 1817)

Par.Pyrton, b.9Memories of Rev. William Buckle, Vicar of Pyrton (1787-1832)

Enclosure Awards

QSD.A.85 (Cropredy)

QSD.A.88 (Dean)

QSD.A.45 (Pyrton)

QSD.A.B (Spelsbury)

QSD.A.116 (Stoke Lyne)

Quarter Session records

Minute Books, QMI/5 (1786-96), QSMI/6 (1796-1802), QSMI/7 (1803-10), QSMI/8 (1810-15), QSMI/9 (1816-23), QSMI/10 (1823-30), QSMI/11 (1830-4), QSMI/12 (1834-9)

Oxford County Library

JOJ Jackson's Oxford Journal (1780-1835)

PRO Public Record Office (Kew)

HO 40 Series (Correspondence on disturbances)

HO 52 Series (Correspondence on disturbances)

MH12 (Local reports to Poor Law Commissioners)

piece 9577 Banbury Union (1834-6)

piece 9637 Chipping Norton Union (1834-6)

	piece 9658	Headington Union	(1834-6)
	piece 9689	Henley Union	(1834-6)
	piece 9732	Thame Union	(1834-6)
	piece 9753	Witney Union	(1834-6)
	piece 9775	Woodstock Union	(1834-6)
MH32	(Inspectors' Correspondence)		
	piece 34	Richard Hall	(1834-6)
IR 18	(Tithe Files)		
	piece 7612	(Bainton)	
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