

---

# A Comparison of Poor Relief in Norfolk and Huntingdonshire\*

Prisca Greenhow<sup>1</sup>

---

## Abstract

*This paper is an examination of poor relief practice in the parish of Mattishall, Norfolk, in the first two decades of the eighteenth century, and a comparison of Mattishall with four parishes in Huntingdonshire. The main conclusion is that, unusually for a lowland parish, Mattishall kept a very tight rein on the amount of poor relief disbursed, not allowing it to rise even at times of economic hardship. Other parishes allowed the amount paid to increase, usually by paying wage subsidies or supplementary relief and thereby bringing a large proportion of the workforce within the ambit of the Poor Law, or more rarely by effectively replacing all income for a section of the working-age population.*

## Introduction

In September 1825 Robert Scarles wrote to his settlement parish of Mattishall from Colchester, to where he and his family had moved:

It is impossible Gentleman for me to support myself my wife and 5 children without your Assistance as I have an Afflicted Daughter and can get no employment for the others and but 11s 10 per week to Support them with and as Quarter day is so near at hand and I have not got 1s towards my Rent or Rates and allmost Everything I have got is on Pledge.<sup>2</sup>

Robert Scarles was a migrant pauper who moved from his last parish of settlement, Mattishall in Norfolk, to Colchester in Essex. He wrote a series of five letters ‘home’ between October 1824 and January 1826, the year in which he died, asking for help from the parish as he could not support his family during a time of severe economic crises. Very little has so far been written about the Old Poor Law in Norfolk and Mattishall was chosen as the focus for this study as the parish with the greatest number of Old Poor Law records surviving. Comparative material is drawn from four Huntingdonshire parishes: Huntingdon, Godmanchester, Brampton and Kimbolton, being parishes and indeed a county which has also received little attention in terms of the Old Poor Law. This article establishes the amounts of relief raised from taxpayers and examines who was expected to

---

\* <https://doi.org/10.35488/lps104.2020.24>

1 Prisca Greenhow: [Prisca.greenhow@btinternet.com](mailto:Prisca.greenhow@btinternet.com).

2 Norfolk Record Office (hereafter NRO) PO703/147/10.

## A Comparison of Poor Relief in Norfolk and Huntingdonshire

---

contribute. It also provides an analysis of the scale and trends of poor relief provided to both resident and non-resident poor from Mattishall, again comparing this with the parishes of Kimbolton, Godmanchester, Brampton and Huntingdon in Huntingdonshire.<sup>3</sup>

For the parish of Mattishall in Norfolk, the sources used for this article are to be found in the overseers' and churchwardens' accounts. Weekly dole lists are available for Mattishall for most quarters from April 1824 to January 1828 and for Mattishall migrants residing in Norwich they exist for 21 quarters from June 1820 to December 1831. Only 6 quarters are missing between June 1826 and December 1831, giving a very good picture of the patterns of regular relief given to the migrant poor. The figures returned to the parliamentary enquiry *Abstract of Returns Relative to the Expence and Maintenance of the Poor in England, 1804 & 1818* are used to establish the total annual expenditure per town/parish, how many poor were relieved permanently and occasionally, and the mean amount spent per pauper annually for the years 1803, 1813, 1814 and 1815.<sup>4</sup> The drawback of having a decade gap between two sets of figures is that we cannot know whether any changes were gradual or sudden or at what point in the decade they occurred. However, many of the changes are small suggesting that they can be usefully interpreted.

There is a complete accounts sheet for Mattishall for the quarter ending March 1825. All other accounts are simply two bundles of receipts dating from 1802 to 1838 and nine bundles of overseers' bills and vouchers dating from 1821 to 1833, all in no particular order. Within these are found some receipts and bills for items of clothing and material purchased as occasional and additional support for paupers. Throughout this study, use is made of all available sources to provide as broad a picture as possible. It is, however, unfortunate that no complete set of all sources covers any one given period. This means it has not been possible always to compare exactly like with like nor has it been possible to uncover the complete experience of poor relief over a specific timescale. The sources do, on the whole, tell us about how the poor law functioned for the poor who were resident within the parish. However, some of the sources, particularly the weekly relief lists, are equally a record for poor relief to the non-resident poor who lived elsewhere. Occasional payments were made to both the in-parish and the out-parish poor and, unless their names can be matched to other sources it is not always possible to know whether a recipient was living 'at home' or 'away'.

Other historians have made similar studies of other areas. Sokoll's study of Braintree and Ardleigh in Essex reveals that only a quarter of all household heads paid poor rates at all in 1796 and 70 per cent of these were farmers; there were virtually no rate payers from the lower social groups, illustrating the extent of the problem of poor relief.<sup>5</sup> He finds that

---

3 P. Greenhow, 'The Old Poor Law in Huntingdonshire (unpublished Master of Studies thesis, University of Cambridge, 2001).

4 *Abstract of the Answers and Returns made Pursuant to an Act, Passed in the 43rd year of His Majesty King George III, Intituled 'An Act for Procuring Returns Relative to the Expence and Maintenance of the Poor in England'*. House of Lords Sessional Papers 1805; *Abridgement of Abstract of the Answers and Returns made Pursuant to an Act, Passed in the Fifty-Fifth Year of His Majesty King George the Third, Intituled 'An Act for Procuring Returns Relative to the Expence and Maintenance of the Poor in England ...'*. British Parliamentary Papers 1818 XIX [C. 82].

5 T. Sokoll, *Household and Family among the Poor: the Case of Two Essex Communities in the Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries* (Bochum, Germany, 1993), p. 41.

working couples with children earned on average 9s a week (the highest earners were couples with four children earning 10s) whereas couples without children only earned about 5s and a single man might earn as little as 1s 6d. Each pauper household received approximately £13 in that year, when the average labouring family in Essex earned £30 3s 0d.<sup>6</sup> Steven King, in his regional comparative study, finds that overseers were willing to pay rents, to buy and distribute food, coals or wood, to pay off pauper debts and to spend considerable amounts on replacing and repairing clothing.<sup>7</sup> In the years of the highest expenditure (1815–1824), such transfers amounted to over one third of the total value of relief payments. In these years ‘the unpredictable pattern of need seems to have created a shift of resources away from regular pensions and towards substantial but impermanent “occasional” handouts’.<sup>8</sup> Samantha Williams’ comparative research on two parishes in Bedfordshire, Campton and Shefford, reveals that the nature of poverty had altered substantially by the 1830s.<sup>9</sup> With the emergence of a war-time economy and rapid price jumps between 1795 and 1801 in both Essex and Bedfordshire many more families received ‘targeted’ assistance from the parish, most for less than 10 weeks. Throughout the period, sons and daughters and young single women and men received substantial amounts of relief in the form of clothes and shoes (between 15 and 25 per cent of the total receipts). Whilst only the elderly received relief week in and week out, possibly to reduce labour competition as in Campton and Shefford, the able-bodied were now more likely to receive payments in each quarter and with a greater consistency.<sup>10</sup> This striking pattern of change supports the findings of George Boyer that falling real wages and rising parish wage supplements resulted in large increases in spending on the able-bodied after 1795.<sup>11</sup>

In his micro-study of Terling, Essex, between 1762 and 1834, Henry French finds a trend of rising proportions of weekly allowances and cash payments received by sons, daughters and married women of working age.<sup>12</sup> We might have expected the relief paid to wage earners to have been in the form of supplementary goods (‘enabling’ payments for clothing or shoes) or to meet the costs created by income interruptions (sickness, with the associated costs of food and drink). These were important to working men, but the predominance of cash payments implies that much of this money filled income deficiencies. The evidence from Terling reflects the findings of King, suggesting that after 1795 many of these additional recipients were able-bodied married men who turned to the parish (and were relieved by it) because their wages failed to keep up with war-time inflation and were depressed by post-war under-employment. Seasonal variation diminished over time

---

6 Sokoll, *Household and Family among the Poor*, p. 41.

7 S. King, *Poverty and Welfare in England, 1700–1850: a Regional Perspective* (Manchester, 2000).

8 King, *Poverty and Welfare in England*, p. 7.

9 S. Williams, *Poverty, Gender and Life-Cycle under the English Poor Law 1760–1834* (London, 2011), p. 28.

10 See S. Williams, ‘Poor relief, labourers’ households and living standards in rural England c. 1770–1834: a Bedfordshire case study’, *Economic History Review*, 58 (2005), pp. 485–519.

11 G.R. Boyer, *An Economic History of the English Poor Law, 1750–1850* (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 47–9.

12 H. French, ‘An irrevocable shift: detailing the dynamics of rural poverty in southern England, 1762–1834: a case study’, *Economic History Review*, 68 (2015), pp. 769–805, here at p. 774.

precisely because relief was received with increasing frequency throughout the year by the 1820s.<sup>13</sup> The changes in relief in Terling between 1762 and 1834 studied by French echo the results in Williams' Bedfordshire parishes and D.A. Baugh's figures for the cost of poor relief.<sup>14</sup> In Terling these payments equalled, on average, an adult, male weekly wage in Essex prior to 1795 and came to perhaps 70 per cent of that in the following two decades. In her study of Puddletown in Dorset (which she compares with Terling), Susannah Ottaway finds the figures support the general consensus that long-term parish relief was not particularly generous and was designed to provide support to single individuals rather than whole families; her findings also suggest that less regular sums had a different function.<sup>15</sup>

### Poor relief raised from taxpayers

Policy is analysed by examining the amounts of relief raised from taxpayers and establishing, through information gained from the accounts, who was or was not expected to contribute. Richard Smith has noted from his study of Whitchurch in Oxfordshire, that in the late eighteenth century 'the modal weekly pension was such that it would have required a large number of very small and clearly supplementary pensions to have been paid'.<sup>16</sup> Such a finding is consistent with an increase of married couples with children requiring poor relief which Smith finds as a striking feature after 1770. Furthermore, he finds that the stabilisation of the values of weekly pensions suggests a decline in their real value given what is known about price movements at this time. This is also a period when overall Poor Law expenditure, after a period of stabilisation in the middle of the century, increased noticeably.<sup>17</sup> It is clear that the rise of overall expenditure was not the result of a growth in the size of the pensions paid to individuals. Smith suggests that, as the number of pensioners rose over the course of the late eighteenth century, given the population growth, it may have been that the capacity as well as the will of the rate-payers to keep up the level of pension payments was seriously over-stretched.<sup>18</sup> As Slack points out, it is often supposed that, as the eighteenth century progressed, many more labourers with large families may have needed relief, but this was increasingly supplementary in nature and, therefore, involved smaller sums of money.<sup>19</sup> Such a compositional shift in the character of pensions would have had the effect of holding the average pension amounts down.<sup>20</sup>

---

13 French, 'An irrevocable shift', p. 787.

14 Williams, 'Poor relief, labourers' households and living standards'; D.A. Baugh, 'The cost of poor relief in south-east England, 1790–1834', *Economic History Review*, 28 (1975), pp. 50–68.

15 S.R. Ottaway, 'Providing for the elderly in eighteenth-century England', *Continuity and Change*, 13 (1998), pp. 391–418.

16 R.M. Smith, 'Aging and wellbeing in early modern England: pension trends and gender preference under the English Old Poor Law,' in P.A. Johnson and P. Thane (eds), *Old Age from Antiquity to Postmodernity* (London, 1998), pp 64–95, here at p. 84.

17 See P. Slack, *The English Poor Law, 1531–1782* (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 29–34.

18 Smith, 'Aging and wellbeing in early modern England', p. 84.

19 Slack, *English Poor Law*, pp. 53–6.

20 Smith, 'Aging and wellbeing in early modern England', p. 84.

**Table 1** Mattishall poor rates and amounts collected, 1802-1804

Period	Rate	Amount received
Up to Midsummer 1802	2s 6d	£118 4s 8d
Michaelmas 1802 to Lady Day 1803	2s 6d	£317 15s 6½d
Michaelmas 1803 to Lady Day 1804	1s 9d	£222 0s 7½d

**Source:** Norfolk Record Office, Norwich, Mattishall overseers accounts, PD703/86

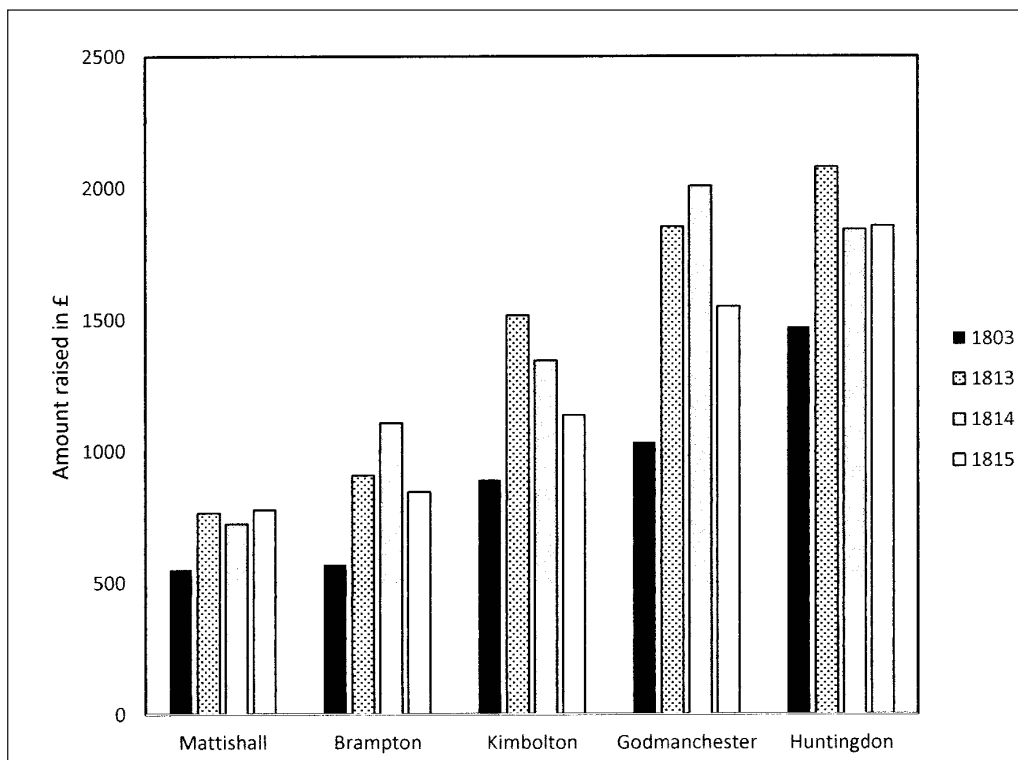
It is evident from an analysis of the levels of the poor rate charged and the poor relief given, that the relief base was fairly stable in Mattishall. Overall, the figures show a general pattern of increasing levels of occasional relief with a fairly static level of permanent relief. The three Huntingdonshire parishes, with the exception of Godmanchester, experienced a different relationship with relief as they saw decreases in occasional relief and increases in permanent relief. Godmanchester alone saw a massive rise in occasional relief with a corresponding stable permanent relief base. The comparison of the results of the experience of Mattishall with that of Whitchurch shows that Mattishall's permanent relief payments were not increasing over the short span analysed suggesting that their real value was decreasing. However, any shortfall was likely to be made up by charitable payments, sub-employment earnings or supplementary or occasional relief payments if the parish deemed the pauper deserving. Table 1 illustrates the income received from the poor rate in 1802, 1803 and 1804 as shown in the overseers' accounts for Mattishall. It shows an interesting increase during 1802 of the amounts collected despite the rate remaining the same. This must have continued into the following year as, despite the rate dropping, a relatively high amount was still collected. The implications of this must mean that the local economy was quite stable at this time, with adequate harvests and reasonable food prices making living costs affordable for more people, enabling both an increase in rate collection and a decrease in expenditure. This supports Sokoll's findings in Essex that, at other times, people were not necessarily poor through unemployment, but through extortionate living costs.<sup>21</sup>

Figure 1 compares the amounts of money raised from poor rates in Mattishall and the comparative parishes of Brampton, Kimbolton, Godmanchester and Huntingdon. Although a 40 per cent increase in Mattishall over the 10 years between 1803 and 1813 seems rather high, it is considerably lower than the other parishes with which it is being compared which saw rises of 60–80 per cent. Such rises might indicate a greater number of rate payers or simply a greater charge on those paying poor rates. In the three years 1813–1815 Mattishall saw a nominal decrease followed by a nominal increase of two per cent overall. The comparative parishes also saw overall decreases over these three years of between 7 and 25 per cent indicating a reduction in the numbers of rate payers or possibly a reduction in the amount charged per ratepayer. The dates reflect the course of the Napoleonic Wars between 1803 and 1815 and the consequent 50 per cent rise in

21 Sokoll, *Household and Family among the Poor*, p. 225.

## A Comparison of Poor Relief in Norfolk and Huntingdonshire

**Figure 1** Total money raised by the poor rates in the years ending Easter 1803, 1813–1815: Mattishall and comparative Huntingdonshire parishes



**Sources:** *Abstract of the Answers and Returns made Pursuant to an Act, Passed in the 43rd year of His Majesty King George III, Intituled 'An Act for Procuring Returns Relative to the Expence and Maintenance of the Poor in England'*. House of Lords Sessional Papers 1805; *Abridgement of Abstract of the Answers and Returns made Pursuant to an Act, Passed in the Fifty-Fifth Year of His Majesty King George the Third, Intituled 'An Act for Procuring Returns Relative to the Expence and Maintenance of the Poor in England ...'*. British Parliamentary Papers 1818 XIX [C. 82].

the price of corn over that decade. That Mattishall's income from poor rates remained fairly stable in the whole decade, especially when compared with other parishes, indicates a stable number of ratepayers and a stable amount of poor rate collected. In this case there was also a stable number of poor persons relieved. Mattishall's ratepayers were supporting many in short-term need such as the seasonally unemployed or those suffering temporary hardship. This suggests the parish used some form of criterion to control who was eligible to receive poor relief, a matter which is not within the scope of this article to examine. This makes Mattishall different from the Huntingdonshire parishes, all four of which experienced substantial rises in the amount of money raised at a time when payments made per pauper were decreasing. So, in Huntingdonshire, more paupers were receiving less, and the increase in the number of paupers was, relatively, greater than the

decrease in the average amount received otherwise relief costs overall would not have risen. This picture is repeated in other areas which saw increased costs and increased numbers of claimants such as Williams' Bedfordshire parishes, where the rising costs were fuelled by a changing type of pauper which included families. That Mattishall saw no such rise in the numbers relieved raises the question of whether they were also different in the characteristics of the poor they did assist.

The overseers' accounts for 1825 list 154 people assessed to pay poor rates.<sup>22</sup> Of these, 129 had a property with a rateable value of up to £10 and 25 had a property with a rateable value of over £20. There were 51 people in the under £10 bracket who were receiving poor relief and none in the higher bracket. It seems a contradiction that people who were receiving poor relief were also being charged a poor rate. However, the poor rate was based on the value of property, not on income and income levels could potentially change.<sup>23</sup> So the poor were *charged* a poor rate even if they did not *pay* it. As is seen in accounts and in pauper letters the poor often applied for additional money to cover their poor rate bill and this request was often met. This, in fact, is still the case today; all householders are issued with a council tax bill and they might be eligible to receive some form of assistance towards this liability.

Nearly 75 per cent of people lived in property with a rateable value of less than £10. Accepting that those on poor relief were not paying poor rates then 33 per cent were not paying the poor rate leaving 67 per cent of parishioners paying it. This, however, does not mean they were all paying an equal amount. Only 25 people were living in property with a rateable value of over £20: these people, comprising almost 16 per cent of the population, were paying most of the poor rate. These figures correspond with Sokoll's findings in Ardleigh in 1795.<sup>24</sup> The poor rate assessments in Mattishall over a period of four years from 21 January 1830 to 21 December 1834 (being the only other years apart from 1825 that are available) reveal that, for most quarters in this period, a charge of 2s 6d in the pound was made. The 'extra' payments levied in 1832–1833 reflect the increasing price of corn and appear at the end of harvest.

### The scale of and trends in poor relief

Having established how much poor relief was raised and who paid it, we now turn to look at who received relief and how much they were allocated. David Davies' investigations of rural poverty for England in 1789 to 1790 analysed the yearly earnings and expenses of labouring families in agriculture, by family size, and showed that earnings as a percentage of expenses ranged from 79 per cent to 98 per cent with the larger families (two parents plus children) having a greater deficit of earnings.<sup>25</sup> By 1795, the yearly earnings and

---

22 NRO PD703/87 (overseers' accounts): Poor Rate Assessment 1825.

23 Slack, *English Poor Law*, p. 55.

24 Sokoll, *Household and Family among the Poor*, p. 225.

25 See D. Davies, *The Case of Labourers in Husbandry Stated and Considered* (London, 1795) (a recent electronic edition is available at <https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/case-of-labourers-in-husbandry-stated-and-considered/1FF593642798907B9E187CF5EB3F3F45> [accessed 20 June 2020]).

expenses as collected by Frederick Morton Eden showed an increase in the deficit for all but the smallest family unit (two parents and one child) whose income now exceeded expenditure by 111 per cent.<sup>26</sup> Davies devised a ‘tolerable comfort’ measure, being a minimum level of income required to live sufficiently without the need to request poor relief.<sup>27</sup> Eden’s budgets were collected during a period of severe economic stress and rapid wartime inflation. The outbreak of war with France coincided with poor harvests in 1793 and 1794, interrupting the supply of agricultural produce and forcing the price of wheat to rise. His data has been used by Carole Shammas to calculate the national daily calorific value consumed by the poor in this period, finding it to be 2,500 to 2,700 for an adult male.<sup>28</sup> This is unlikely to have been enough to enable men to undertake regular, heavy labour and would probably also have impacted on their health. William Tice, in his letter of January 1825, stated, ‘my Family is very unhealthy. . . . What they Eat & Drink, I and the rest of the family want the Truth of what is stated may Easily Ascertained by Wm Hector applying to his relation at Bury Flour three shillings a peck allone here and every thing else Equally high.’<sup>29</sup>

An analysis of figures returned to the parliamentary enquiry in the *Abstract of Returns Relative to the Expence and Maintenance of the Poor in England* for the years 1804 and 1818 is given in Figures 2, 3 and 4. It establishes the total annual expenditure per parish and how many poor were relieved permanently and occasionally for the years 1803, 1813, 1814 and 1815. The figures returned were not separated for in- and out-parish poor as the law did not allow for out-parish poor to be relieved whilst away from their settlement parish. We will see that Mattishall faced a different situation to other comparative parishes in this study and those that have informed the historiography more broadly as its costs and numbers of poor being relieved were not rising to the extent that they were in other places. This reiterates my earlier suggestion that Mattishall appears to have been controlling who was felt to be ‘deserving’ of relief. The dates covered are, at this stage, only the dates of the information returned to the parliamentary enquiry.<sup>30</sup>

This analysis reveals that Mattishall had a very different poor relief expenditure profile to comparative parishes studied by other historians. In the years 1813 and 1814, both Brampton and Godmanchester saw a rise in their poor relief expenditure whilst Kimbolton and Mattishall both saw a fall (Figure 2). In 1813, the numbers receiving

---

26 F.M. Eden *The State of the Poor or, an History of the Labouring Classes in England, from the Conquest to the Present Period*, 3 vols (London, 1799), p. iii, Appendix. XII, pp. cccxxxix–ccl. (A recent electronic edition is available at <https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/state-of-the-poor/FA782ADCBB254A258E53FC98FE090613>) [accessed 20 June 2020].

27 Davies, *The Case of Labourers in Husbandry*, 383.

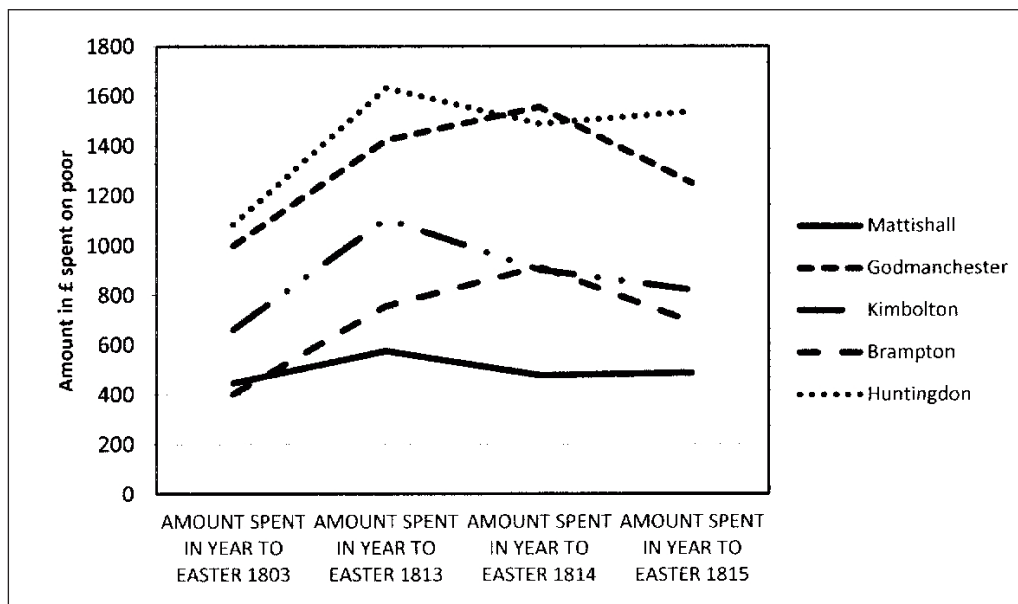
28 C. Shammas, *The Pre-Industrial Consumer in England and America*, 2nd edn (Los Angeles, CA, 2008). See also R. Floud, R.W. Fogel, B. Harris, and S.C. Hong *The Changing Body: Health, Nutrition and Human Development in the Western World since 1700* (Cambridge, 2011), pp. 151–69 for a summary of other work on the calorific value of the food available to working people in England and Wales.

29 NRO PD703/147/5.

30 Historians such as Smith and French begin their analysis from these dates as it was a legal requirement for parishes to make these returns. However, prior to 1803, figures are patchy and vary between locations subject to the record-keeping interests and abilities of each parish.



Figure 2 Amount spent on the poor (in £), 1803 and 1813–1815: Mattishall, Norfolk, and four parishes in Huntingdonshire



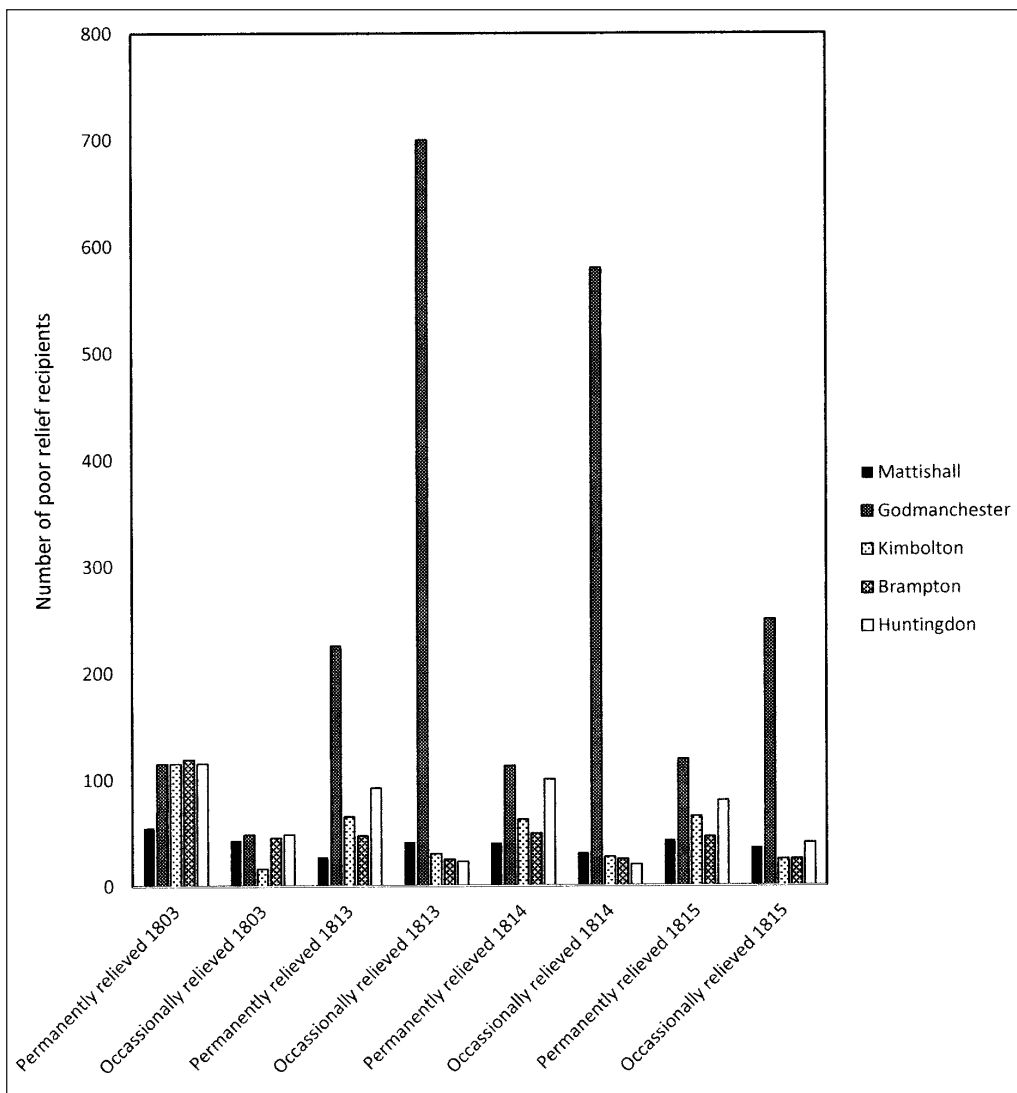
**Sources:** *Abstract of the Answers and Returns made Pursuant to an Act, Passed in the 43rd year of His Majesty King George III, Intituled 'An Act for Procuring Returns Relative to the Expence and Maintenance of the Poor in England'*. House of Lords Sessional Papers 1805; *Abridgement of Abstract of the Answers and Returns made Pursuant to an Act, Passed in the Fifty-Fifth Year of His Majesty King George the Third, Intituled 'An Act for Procuring Returns Relative to the Expence and Maintenance of the Poor in England ...'*. British Parliamentary Papers 1818 XIX [C. 82].

permanent relief from Godmanchester doubled from its level in 1803 before returning to its previous level the following year, whilst the number in receipt of occasional relief that year soared to 14 times the 1803 figure, making the number in receipt of occasional relief that year three times that of those in receipt of permanent relief. The number of those in receipt of occasional relief did drop in 1814 and again considerably in 1815, though it remained twice as high as the number in receipt of regular relief, suggesting that rising numbers of working-aged people were receiving occasional assistance in times of hardship but not being placed on weekly relief (Figure 3). By contrast, in Kimbolton and Mattishall in 1813 and 1814, the numbers of both regular and occasional relief recipients remained fairly static, suggesting that the same people were receiving it. In other words, in these parishes supplementary payments were to top up income rather than to replace it. Williams finds that only the elderly in the Bedfordshire parishes of Shefford and Campton continued to receive regular relief, whilst she and King both find an increase in the numbers of poor receiving occasional payments.<sup>31</sup> In contrast, French finds it is the

31 Williams, 'Poor relief, labourers' households and living standards'; King, *Poverty and Welfare in England*.

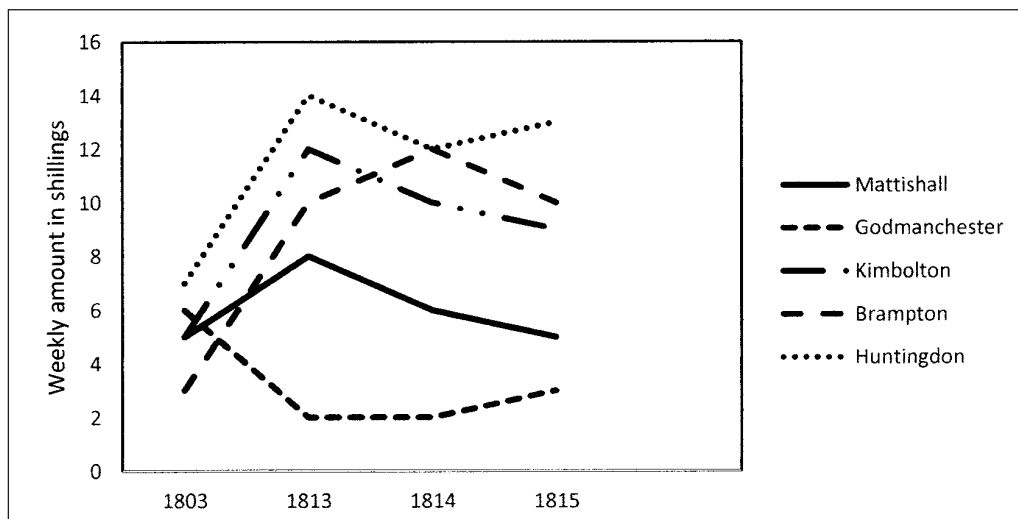
## A Comparison of Poor Relief in Norfolk and Huntingdonshire

**Figure 3** Numbers of poor permanently and occasionally relieved, 1803 and 1813–1815: Mattishall, Norfolk, and four parishes in Huntingdonshire



**Sources:** *Abstract of the Answers and Returns made Pursuant to an Act, Passed in the 43rd year of His Majesty King George III, Intituled 'An Act for Procuring Returns Relative to the Expence and Maintenance of the Poor in England'*. House of Lords Sessional Papers 1805; *Abridgement of Abstract of the Answers and Returns made Pursuant to an Act, Passed in the Fifty-Fifth Year of His Majesty King George the Third, Intituled 'An Act for Procuring Returns Relative to the Expence and Maintenance of the Poor in England ...'*. British Parliamentary Papers 1818 XIX [C. 82].

**Figure 4** Mean amount of relief (in shillings per week) received per pauper, 1803 and 1813–1815: Mattishall, Norfolk, and four parishes in Huntingdonshire



**Sources:** *Abstract of the Answers and Returns made Pursuant to an Act, Passed in the 43rd year of His Majesty King George III, Intituled 'An Act for Procuring Returns Relative to the Expence and Maintenance of the Poor in England'*. House of Lords Sessional Papers 1805; *Abridgement of Abstract of the Answers and Returns made Pursuant to an Act, Passed in the Fifty-Fifth Year of His Majesty King George the Third, Intituled 'An Act for Procuring Returns Relative to the Expence and Maintenance of the Poor in England ...'*. British Parliamentary Papers 1818 XIX [C. 82].

working-aged poor that became the main relief recipients in Terling, Essex, pushing the aged off regular relief.<sup>32</sup> The mean amount of relief received per pauper in Brampton and Godmanchester rose between 1813 and 1814, whilst in Kimbolton and Mattishall in these years it fell further suggesting Mattishall and Kimbolton were keeping careful control on whom they allocated relief to. The average annual amount of relief received per pauper in Mattishall in 1813 amounted to more than £20 (Figure 4). This is considerably higher than Sokoll's finding of £13 in Essex where most paupers were receiving regular relief with supplementary relief in addition. Furthermore, much of Huntingdonshire received considerably more than Mattishall, with Huntingdon providing an average of £36 per year per pauper. This suggests that Huntingdon was, in fact, replacing the whole income of most paupers, which is reflected in the rising numbers of poor in receipt of regular relief. Taking into account the static number of regular relief recipients in Mattishall, the parish was replacing an average of approximately half the income of the labouring poor.

<sup>32</sup> French, 'An irrevocable shift', p. 787.

### Conclusion

The findings in this article are that Mattishall, unlike many other areas, did not provide regular poor relief to all claimants with settlement in this parish. It is also evident that Mattishall was not entirely alone in these practices, although no other historian has demonstrated this. It is clear from this study that Kimbolton in Huntingdonshire had similar policies to Mattishall. So, whilst this article has found a very different picture in the parish of Mattishall compared to that of parishes studied by other historians, it has also identified a comparable parish; Kimbolton in Huntingdonshire.

The relationship between regular relief and occasional relief in Mattishall was compared with the findings of Williams for two Bedfordshire parishes and with French for Terling in Essex.<sup>33</sup> An analysis was also made of weekly relief paid to Mattishall residents and compared with that paid to Norwich's non-resident poor to evaluate whether there was a difference in treatment of paupers depending on their location. Mattishall differed from many other parts of the country as both regular and supplementary relief payments were less frequently given. The parish of Mattishall saw a small increase in the amount of poor relief expenditure over the period 1803–1815 along with a stable number of paupers being relieved and a minimal annual mean increase per pauper. This illustrates the parish's policy of strictly controlling poor relief expenditure. Either the parish did not consider the working-aged person as 'deserving' of regular relief or they could not afford to pay this. They were prepared or able to make occasional payments to tide the poor through the times of under-employment or illness.

Boyer's conclusion that the overall per capita expenditure plateaued across the period and did not increase substantially after 1795, whilst the numbers receiving relief rose dramatically, did not apply in the parish of Mattishall where both expenditure and numbers of those relieved remained constant.<sup>34</sup> This was also seen in the comparative parish of Kimbolton, whereas Boyer's findings were replicated in the other comparative parishes of Huntingdonshire. In Godmanchester, in a space of ten years, there was a massive rise in number of paupers receiving occasional relief. Boyer's study also reflects an increase in supplementary payments rather than of regular relief. This concurs with Sokoll's finding where there were many more people receiving relief in Essex, but they were mostly receiving occasional or supplementary payments, suggesting this area was more willing or able to make relief payments to the working-aged poor.<sup>35</sup> The lack of available work or makeshift enterprises meant many parishes were providing supplementary poor relief. Williams finds in her study of two Bedfordshire parishes that in this period more families were receiving relief.<sup>36</sup> French's study of Terling finds that an increasing number of working-aged people, especially men, required regular relief. As these are the groups of labouring poor who ought

---

33 Williams, *Poverty, Gender and Life-Cycle*; French, 'An irrevocable shift'.

34 Boyer, *Economic History of the English Poor Law*, p. 29.

35 Sokoll, *Household and Family among the Poor*.

36 Williams, *Poverty, Gender and Life-Cycle*, p. 58.

to have been able to work and therefore not to require regular relief, it must be concluded that these parishes were more willing to provide regular relief in the form of wage subsidies.

King's suggestion of a regional divide is evident in this article with all studies concerned with levels of relief in lowland parishes, with the exception of Mattishall, having provided increasing relief of either or both regular and occasional types.<sup>37</sup> Therefore, Mattishall was almost alone in the lowland area in not seeing an increase in relief payments. The only other parish in Norfolk for which evidence exists to suggest that relief was being controlled in this way is Watton. In Huntingdonshire, the only parish is Kimbolton. Mark Neuman's study of Berkshire is the only other study in the lowland region to identify this.<sup>38</sup> It is very clear that isolated lowland parishes were controlling the allocation of poor relief in a way that was more in line with parishes in the north. It seems unlikely that the economy would be markedly different in these isolated parishes in the lowland region, therefore, another explanation for these differences must be sought.

---

37 King, *Poverty and Welfare in England*.

38 M. Neuman, *The Speenhamland County: Poverty and the Poor Laws in Berkshire, 1782–1834* (New York, 1982).