

POWER, POOR RELIEF, AND SOCIAL RELATIONS IN HOLLAND FEN, c. 1600–1800*

STEVE HINDLE
University of Warwick

ABSTRACT. *In a recent contribution to the debate over the operational significance of the Old Poor Law, Peter Solar has argued that ‘the local financing of poor relief gave English property owners, individually and collectively, a direct pecuniary interest in ensuring that the parish’s demographic and economic development was balanced’. His survey of the implications of the attempt to maintain this equilibrium, however, fails to take account of the social and political relationships between rate-payers, rate-receivers, and parish officers. In seeking to integrate considerations of power into the analysis of the relief of the poor, by contrast, this paper locates social welfare provision in the context of the authority structures of several parishes in Holland Fen (Lincolnshire) over the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It emphasizes the role of the parish vestry in regulating and relieving the poor; demonstrates the extraordinary scale of poor relief in the local context; and argues that even in the open parishes of the Lincolnshire fenland, hostility to poor migrants could be marked, resulting even in the prohibition of the marriages of the poor. The politics of the poor rate implied the exclusion of poor strangers in the interests of relieving the ancient settled poor.*

While inequalities of *wealth and status* are the usual starting points for most discussions of local social relations in early modern England, asymmetries of *power* tend to be implied rather than explored.¹ Exponents of the ‘new social

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¹ See especially, amongst a substantial literature, Peter Laslett, *The world we have lost further explored* (London, 1983), chs. 1 and 2; Margaret Spufford, *Contrasting communities: English villagers in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries* (Cambridge, 1974), chs. 1–5; and Marjorie McIntosh, *A community transformed: the manor and liberty of Havering, 1500–1620* (Cambridge, 1991), ch. 2. Keith Wrightson and David Levine, *Poverty and piety in an English village: Terling, 1525–1700* (Oxford, 1995 edn), takes inequalities of wealth as its point of departure but is explicitly concerned with power relations in chs. 5–7. Historians of gender have been rather quicker to take issues of power on board. See Peter Rushton, ‘Property, power and family networks: the problem of disputed marriage in early modern England’, *Journal of Family History*, 11 (1986), pp. 205–19; and Susan

history' have been surprisingly reluctant to explore the implications of the truism, long recognized by social theorists, that there are few social relationships from which the 'power element' is wholly absent, and that (in turn) reciprocity is inherent in those power relations.² From the traditional perspective, the articulation of authority depends largely upon the ability of elites to apply coercive sanctions, and involves little more than the unilateral imposition of will by the institutions of church and state. By emphasizing the dichotomous relationship between governors and governed, and especially in failing to locate politics in their local social context, historians of 'popular culture' in particular have failed to get to grips with the full ramifications of social differentiation. In such accounts, therefore, early modern politics have very little 'social depth', and fail to take account of local authority structures.³ In two sub-disciplines of social history, however, the immense potential of this untapped line of inquiry has become evident. Historians of riot, and of crime, have emphasized the extent to which power and authority had to be socially negotiated, a process necessarily involving some form of reception or response by subordinate groups, groups which themselves might exercise authority in their own spheres of influence. Such discussions of the 'popular mentalities of subordination' have demonstrated that order and hierarchy were not simply monolithic structures from which there was only occasional dissent.⁴ On this terrain, each stroke of the historian's axe into the undergrowth of the past has revealed social relations to be more tangled than mythologized notions of community, obedience, and deference might suggest.⁵ Slowly but surely, therefore,

Amussen, *An ordered society: gender and class in early modern England* (Oxford, 1988). For a recent survey of the possibilities for exploring power issues in local context, see Keith Wrightson, 'The politics of the parish in early modern England', in Paul Griffiths, Adam Fox, and Steve Hindle, eds., *The experience of authority in early modern England* (London, 1996), pp. 10–46. For the late medieval context, see Christopher Dyer, 'Power and conflict in the medieval English village', in Della Hooke, ed., *Medieval villages* (Oxford, 1985), pp. 27–32.

² See, for example, the extracts from the writings of Georg Simmel, Max Weber and Hans Girth, and Cecil Wright Mills on power and authority, reprinted in Lewis A. Coser and Bernard Rosenberg, eds., *Sociological theory: a book of readings* (2nd edn, New York, 1964), pp. 124–34, 156–8.

³ Cf. Patrick Collinson, *De republica Anglorum: or, history with the politics put back* (Cambridge, 1990), p. 15.

⁴ Quoting Edward Thompson, *Customs in common* (London, 1991), p. 43. The scholarship on popular protest is now immense, and lacks an adequate synthesis, but the most significant contributions are E. P. Thompson, 'The moral economy of the English crowd in the eighteenth century', *Past & Present*, 50 (1971), reprinted in Thompson, *Customs in common*, pp. 185–258; John Walter, 'Grain riots and popular attitudes to the law: Maldon and the crisis of 1629', in John Brewer and John Styles, eds., *An ungovernable people: the English and their law in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries* (London, 1980), pp. 47–84; John Walter, 'A "rising of the people"? The Oxfordshire rising of 1596', *Past & Present*, 107 (1985), pp. 90–143; and David Levine and Keith Wrightson, *The making of an industrial society: Whickham, 1560–1765* (Oxford, 1991), pp. 375–427. The best introduction to the literature on crime and its implications is Joanna Innes and John Styles, 'The crime wave: recent writing on crime and criminal justice in eighteenth-century England', *Journal of British Studies*, 25 (October 1986), pp. 380–435.

⁵ For this metaphor, see Joyce Oldham Appleby, *Economic thought and ideology in seventeenth-century England* (Princeton, 1978), p. 19. Cf. Laslett, *World we have lost further explored*, pp. 3–8.

historians are coming to terms with the social implications of local power configurations.⁶

This essay seeks to extend such concern with local power relationships into the study of poor relief. Historians have only recently begun to come to terms with the extent to which the poor rate itself embodied parochial politics. Keith Wrightson's suggestion that the poor law provided an 'expression of communal responsibility yet a potent reminder of social distance' has been verified by Levine and Wrightson's own study of the Tyneside coalmining parish of Whickham, yet this remains the only detailed study of the impact of the poor law on local social and political relations.⁷ As Wrightson himself has recently pointed out, 'there was a complex local politics in the administration of the poor laws which has not yet been fully explored'.⁸ Brian Short has even provided a check-list of questions, remarking that 'the whole debate about "open" and "close" parishes ultimately revolves around the ageless issue of the wielding of power. Who had it and who used it? Who had it but wasn't bothered about exercising it? Who was answerable to it?'⁹

One way in which these questions might be answered is through the surviving records of vestries, the quintessential archive of local politics. As Fielding so evocatively put it in *Tom Jones* (1749), 'schemes have indeed been laid in the vestry which would hardly disgrace the conclave. Here is a ministry and here an opposition. Here are plots and circumventions, parties and factions, equal to those which are to be found in courts.'¹⁰ Fielding's satire of the vanity and ambition of the vestry has attracted little attention from historians.¹¹ Very few vestry minute books survive, especially in the seventeenth century, but where they do, they provide an invaluable record of decision making in the parish.¹² Such documents might be used in various ways: for the

⁶ The most provocative attempt to explore these issues is, of course, David Underdown, *Revel, riot and rebellion: popular politics and culture in England, c. 1603–1660* (Oxford, 1985).

⁷ Keith Wrightson, 'The social order of early modern England: three approaches', in Lloyd Bonfield, R. M. Smith, and K. E. Wrightson, eds., *The world we have gained: histories of population and social structure* (Oxford, 1986), p. 201; Levine and Wrightson, *Industrial society*, esp. pp. 344–59.

⁸ Wrightson, 'Politics of the parish', p. 22.

⁹ Brian Short, 'The evolution of contrasting communities within rural England', in Brian Short, ed., *The English rural community: image and analysis* (Cambridge, 1992), p. 40.

¹⁰ Henry Fielding, *The History of Tom Jones*, ed. R. P. C. Mutter (Harmondsworth, 1966), p. 137.

¹¹ The indispensable starting point remains Sidney and Beatrice Webb, *English local government from the revolution to the municipal corporations act: the parish and the county* (London, 1906), pp. 9–103, 146–276. Historians have been reluctant to follow in their footsteps. But see Jeremy Goring, 'The fellowship of the twelve in Elizabethan Lewes', *Sussex Archaeological Collections*, 119 (1981), pp. 157–72; Keith Wrightson, *English society, 1580–1680* (London, 1982), pp. 39–65, 149–82; Levine and Wrightson, *Industrial society*, p. 344ff; and Eric Carlson, 'The origins, function and status of churchwardens, with particular reference to the diocese of Ely', in Margaret Spufford, ed., *The world of rural dissenters, 1520–1725* (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 183–4. For the earlier period, see Beat Kumin, *The shaping of a community: the rise and reformation of the English parish, c. 1400–1560* (Aldershot, 1996), pp. 241–55; and for the later period, David Eastwood, 'The republic in the village: parish and poor at Bampton, 1780–1834', *Journal of Regional and Local Studies*, 12 (1992), pp. 18–28.

¹² Printed examples of vestry minute books include F. G. Emmison, ed., *Early Essex town*

analysis of office holding, of financial commitments, and of political participation in the local context. In some cases, however, the vestry minuted decisions which ramified far more widely than the annual grind of accounting and appointment, and which provide an invaluable entry-point for the analysis of parochial political culture.¹³ The following discussion of the politics of poor relief is based on a detailed analysis of the vestry minute books, and associated records, of the Lincolnshire parish of Frampton, comparing them (where appropriate) with the records of the nine other Holland Fen parishes with which it intercommoned.¹⁴ It argues, first, that community politics did not necessarily imply inclusive attitudes or consensus; second, that hostility to outsiders and to 'others' was not paradoxical since well-defended parishes were the inevitable consequence of the localized responsibility for poor relief; and third, that the politics of the poor rate were the politics of exclusion.

I

Two episodes, separated by some two centuries, vividly illustrate the slow yet painful process of economic change in early modern Frampton. On 10 December 1562, Christopher Loveless secured from the president and scholars of Magdalen College, Oxford, his manumission from the yoke and servitude of villeinage to the manor of Multon Hall. Loveless and his progeny purchased this 'inestimable benefit of liberty' for forty marks and several promises: to pray for the preservation of the college for ever; to pay his rents, suits and services every Michaelmas; and to render thanks for the college's clemency and compassion. Although paternalism had its price, thus was one bondman made free.¹⁵ Over 200 years later, on the night of 27 July 1769,

some evil disposed Person or Persons unknown did maliciously shoot into the dwelling-House of Mr John Yerburgh, at Frampton... , with a Gun or other Fire-Arms, loaded

meetings: Braintree, 1619–1636, Finchingfield, 1626–1634 (London and Chichester, 1970); *Churchwardens' accounts of Pitlington and other parishes in the diocese of Durham from AD 1580 to 1700* (Surtees Society 84, Durham, 1888); and William Hudson, 'Extracts from the first book of the parish of Southover', *Sussex Archaeological Collections*, 48 (1905), pp. 16–37.

¹³ The *locus classicus* is the fascinating range of issues dealt with by the Swallowfield town meeting. See Henry E. Huntington Library (HEH), San Marino Ca., MS Ellesmere 6162, fos. 34a–6a (I am grateful to Adam Fox for a xerox of this document); and Collinson, *De republica Anglorum*, pp. 30–2.

¹⁴ LAO Frampton PAR 10/1 (vestry minute book, 1597–1683), unfol.; 10/2 (vestry minute book, 1693–1771), unfol.

¹⁵ Magdalen College Oxford Archives (MCOA) Multon 147. 'The fens from Norfolk to Northampton and the Lincolnshire marshes running from the Wash right up to Grimsby formed [an] area of large-scale survival' of serfdom into the late Tudor period. Diarmaid MacCulloch, 'Bondmen under the Tudors', in Clair Cross, David Loades, and J. J. Scarisbrick, eds., *Law and government under the Tudors* (Cambridge, 1988), p. 95. Loveless was not exceptional: Multon Hall serfs are referred to in a dispute of 1576–7; and Fulke Greville, lord of the manor of Stonehall in Frampton, charged his jury to present 'bond men of blude' in 1574. Public Record Office (PRO) E178/7064/3; E178/3040; British Library (BL) MS Egerton 2998, fos. 45v–6. I am grateful to Diarmaid MacCulloch for these references.

with Sluggs, which damaged the said House; and a threatening Letter was afterwards found in the Court-Yard of the said House, (supposed to have been dropt or left there by the said Person or Persons) which contained the Words and Letters following, viz. 'John Yar Brah this is to let you know that As you have used the Utmost of your power to persuade your Neighbours and knaves like your Self to Cheat the Poor of their Right Except a Reformation is heard of in the neighborhood that is but the begining of Sorow from your frind and wel wisher to Liberty & an open fen for Ever.'

Yerburgh, instrumental in the enclosure of Holland Fen, three times overseer of the poor of Frampton, and assessed for poor rates at 19d. on each of his 186 acres of pasture in 1769, was sufficiently incensed to offer a reward of £100 for information leading to the conviction of the offenders.¹⁶ Although enclosure too had its price, the fen on which the inhabitants of Frampton had eked out a marginal existence for hundreds of years was transformed almost overnight into the prairie of waving oats and cole seed of which entrepreneurs had long dreamt.¹⁷

The economy of Frampton was, therefore, highly traditional, permeated by the ambience of custom, yet nonetheless subject to enormously powerful forces of change. Late-liberated from serfdom and late-enclosed, the parish nevertheless offers an outstanding example of Edward Thompson's 'great arch' of social, economic, and political transformation in early modern England.¹⁸ It is only in the context of these gradual, epochal changes that the parochial politics of poor relief can be reconstructed. As Tawney long ago argued,

The treatment of persons in distress can (of all branches of administration) least bear to be left to the exclusive attention of poor law specialists because it, most of all matters, depends for its success upon being carefully adapted to the changing economic conditions, the organisation or disorganisation of industry, the stability or instability of trade, the diffusion or concentration of property, by which the nature and extent of the distress requiring treatment are determined.¹⁹

Accordingly, the following discussion of the economic context in which the Frampton vestrymen carried out their duties analyses first, the changing level of population; second, the distribution of property-owning and holding; and third, the significance of the Fenland economy.

Frampton lies in Kirton wapentake in North Holland, some two miles south of Boston. Throughout most of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries its area

¹⁶ *The London Gazette*, no. 10962 (1–5 Aug. 1769). LAO Frampton PAR 10/2, unfol. (meetings of 1735, 1745, and 1761); 13/1 (overseers account book, 1771–1808), unfol. (copy of the poor's rate 1772; accounts of 1774). See Edward Thompson, 'The crime of anonymity', in Douglas Hay, Peter Linebaugh, John G. Rule, E. P. Thompson, and Cal Winslow, eds., *Albion's fatal tree: crime and society in eighteenth-century England* (London, 1975), pp. 255–344.

¹⁷ For the long battle over the enclosure of Holland Fen, see H. C. Darby, *The draining of the fens* (2nd edn, Cambridge, 1956), pp. 48–58; Joan Thirsk, *English peasant farming: the agrarian history of Lincolnshire from Tudor to recent times* (London, 1957), chs. 1, 5, and 10; David Grigg, *The agricultural revolution in south Lincolnshire* (Cambridge, 1968), chs. 1 and 8; Keith Lindley, *Fenland riots and the English revolution* (London, 1982), pp. 54–5, 60–2, 105–6, 111–12, 140, 161–4, 258.

¹⁸ E. P. Thompson, 'The peculiarities of the English', reprinted in E. P. Thompson, *The poverty of theory & other essays* (London, 1978), p. 257.

¹⁹ R. H. Tawney, *The agrarian problem of the sixteenth century* (London, 1967 edn), p. 268.

was approximately 1,900 acres, although it was submerged with ten other ‘fen-edge’ parishes into the wider economy of Holland Fen, some 22,000 acres in extent. Both parish and fen were overwhelmingly pastoral: the parish field surveys of 1673 reveal only 125 acres of arable, and contemporaries described the fen as white with sheep.²⁰ A characteristically ‘open’ pastoral parish, its population grew very rapidly in the sixteenth century, but only very slowly (and erratically) thereafter. The seventy-one households listed in the 1524–5 lay subsidy suggest a population of approximately 337 souls. By 1563, there were 115 households listed, implying 564 inhabitants, an increase of some 67 per cent. The hearth taxes of the 1660s and 70s suggest a population of around 560, divided among some 130 households. But the century between the Elizabethan diocesan returns and the hearth taxes may well have been one of considerable demographic fluctuation, probably explained by a combination of famine, plague, and immigration. The parish register records some 128 burials in 1587, a fourfold increase on the average trend, and the vicar could only list forty-four communicants in his reponse to the diocesan survey of 1603. Although the population of the nineteen North Holland parishes (omitting Frampton) grew by only 3.8 per cent in the period 1603–76, the protestation return suggests the population of Frampton itself might have been restored to a level as high as 597 by 1641. The Compton census implies that the population had stabilized to about 495 inhabitants in 1676, though it subsequently dropped to the 110 households (473 inhabitants) estimated in 1723. The 1801 census gives a population total of 542 for the parish. The population of early modern Frampton therefore peaked in the 1640s, and was probably substantially lower in 1723 than in 1563, as the oscillating demographic curve of pre-industrial England experienced its last hiccup. Most Holland Fen parishes shared this demographic profile, although eighteenth-century rates of increase varied considerably (see table 1).²¹

²⁰ Based on an analysis of LAO Frampton PAR 18/4a–b (Acre Books, 1673); Arthur Young, *General view of the agriculture of the county of Lincolnshire* (London, 1813 edn), pp. 344–422.

²¹ Cf. Mary Dobson, ‘The last hiccup of the old demographic regime: population stagnation and decline in late-seventeenth- and early-eighteenth-century south-east England’, *Continuity & Change*, 4 (1989), pp. 395–428. This discussion assumes the following multipliers: 4.75 for the 1524–5 lay subsidy on the basis of the discussion in E. A. Wrigley and R. S. Schofield, *The population history of England, 1541–1871: a reconstruction* (Cambridge, 1981), pp. 567–684; 4.9 for 1563 on the basis of Alan Dyer, ‘The bishops’ census of 1563’, *Local Population Studies*, 49 (1992), p. 25; and 4.3 for the 1660s and dates thereafter suggested by Tom Arkell, ‘Multiplying factors for estimating population totals from the hearth tax’, *Local Population Studies*, 28 (Spring 1982), p. 57. I am grateful to Roger Schofield for help with these estimates. The fiscal and ecclesiastical records on which these estimates are based are PRO E179/136/329 (parliamentary lay subsidy, 1524–5); BL Harley MS 618, fo. 63 (Lincoln diocesan returns, 1563); *The state of the church in the reigns of Elizabeth I and James I illustrated by documents relating to the diocese of Lincoln, volume I*, ed. C. W. Foster (Lincoln Record Society, 23–4, Lincoln, 1924–5), p. 313; *Protestation returns, 1641–42: Lincolnshire*, transcribed by W. F. Webster (Nottingham, 1984), p. 10; PRO E179/140/754, 791, 805 (hearth taxes, 1662–70); *The Compton census of 1676: a critical edition*, ed. Anne Whiteman (British Academy Records of Social and Economic History, n.s. 10, London, 1986), pp. 307, 311, 345; *Speculum dioeceseos sub episcopis Gul: Wake et Edm: Gibson A.D. 1705–23, part I: archdeaconries of Lincoln and Stowe*, ed. R. G. Cole (Lincoln Record Society, 4, Lincoln, 1912), p. 49; and supplemented by *Lincolnshire Notes and Queries (LNQ)*, 1, p. 15; *VCH Lincolnshire*, II, p. 359.

Table 1. *Estimated demographic trends in Frampton and nine other Holland Fen parishes, 1524–1801*

Parish	1524	1563	1603	1665	1723	1801
Algakirke	—*	353	345	322	284	517
Brothertoft	—	88	197	176	258	102
Fosdyke	—	412	195	163	—	271
Frampton	337	564	—	563	473	542
Kirton	—	1,117	836	821	860	1,238
Skirbeck Quarter	—	—	180	107	—	171
Sutterton	233	328	432	335	344	737
Swineshead	741	1,019	1,500	796	688	1,555
Wiberton	195	264	398	340	602	477
Wigtoft	290	411	453	417	344	536
(Approx.) Total		4,556	3,799	4,042	3,853	6,146

* Blank cells indicate lack of reliable information on which to base an estimate.

Source: see n. 21 above: PRO E179/136/329; BL MS Harley 618, fo. 63; *The state of the church in the reigns of Elizabeth I and James I illustrated by documents relating to the diocese of Lincoln, volume I*, ed. C. W. Foster (Lincoln Record Society 23–4, Lincoln, 1924–5); PRO E179/140/754; *Speculum dioeceseos sub episcopis Gul: Wake et Edm: Gibson A.D. 1705–23, part I: archdeaonries of Lincoln and Stowe*, ed. R. G. Cole (Lincoln Record Society 4, Lincoln, 1912); *VCH Lincolnshire*, II, p. 359.

This demographic experience was bound to have considerable impact on local social structure. In Frampton in 1524–5, sixty-eight men and six widows paid a total of £14 4s 4d. in tax. Only five were assessed on land, an indication of the dispersed nature of property-holding in the parish. Of the remainder, fifty-three paid on goods, three on wages, and thirteen on earnings. Agriculture appears, therefore, to have been carried out with the assistance of thirteen labourers and only three servants in husbandry. The proportion of settled taxpayers in Frampton who were agricultural labourers (18.3 per cent) was therefore slightly higher than that for the fenland as a whole (16.1 per cent), although considerably lower than in the much larger parish of Swineshead (23.1 per cent). Indeed, adopting the categories devised by Wrightson and Levine, the distribution of wealth in the parish in the 1520s, especially in the prominence of a *stratum* of wealthy property-owners of middling status, was less akin to that of her fenland neighbours than it was to that of ‘precociously modern’ arable Terling (Essex) (see table 2). Other early sixteenth-century tax assessments confirm this picture.²² Even within this overwhelmingly pastoral

²² The different thresholds of the two lay subsidies of 1545 render comparison difficult, but PRO E179/137/405 suggests seventy-two taxpayers distributed among Wrightson and Levine’s four categories as follows: I (5.5%), II (43.0%), III (16.5%), IV (34.5%). PRO E179/137/437 lists only forty-two taxpayers, eighteen of whom are not listed in the former assessment. See R. W. Hoyle, *Tudor taxation records: a guide for users* (London, 1994), pp. 26–31.

Table 2. *Comparison of the distribution of wealth in Frampton and in five Holland Fen parishes,* 1524-5***

Category	Wealth assessment	Social position	No. of Frampton taxpayers	% of Frampton taxpayers	No. of Holland Fen taxpayers	% of Holland Fen taxpayers
I	£8-£54 land or goods	Gentry and very large farmers	10	14.1	59	15.6
II	Over £2-£8 land or goods	Yeomen, substantial husbandmen, and craftsmen	30	42.3	99	26.2
III	£2 goods	Husbandmen, craftsmen	17	23.9	123	32.5
IV	Under £2 land or earnings	Labourers, cottagers	14	19.7	97	25.7
Totals			71	100.0	378	100.0

Source: PRO E179/136/329; Wrightson and Levine, *Poverty and piety*, pp. 33-5.

* Frampton, Sutterton, Swineshead, Wiberton, Wigtoft.

** Excludes assumed servants.

economy, therefore, there were considerable variations in social structure between parishes.

By the 1660s, however, taxation records demonstrate a proliferation of cottagers and small-holders in Frampton, a trend which seems to have been more marked there than in three of the other four Holland Fen parishes with which comparisons can be made over this century and a half (see table 3). Three-fifths of Frampton householders were assessed on one hearth only, and a further fifth on two hearths, in the hearth taxes of 1665, suggesting a distribution of wealth similar to those of rural Bedfordshire or Cambridgeshire.²³ This picture of the gradual emergence of a substantial group of cottagers and small farmers is confirmed by analysis of the parish acre books of 1673. These surveys are virtually complete for property-owners, listing over 98 per cent of the 1,920 rateable acres in the parish, rather less so for property-holders, since the failure to name tenants for the holdings in the West End of the parish omits one third of tenancies.²⁴ Nonetheless, the survey demonstrates that

²³ The profile suggested here supports Margaret Spufford's contention that 'the pattern of development in which the number of small farms increased over the seventeenth century may in fact have been typical of settlements in fen regions'. Spufford, *Contrasting communities*, p. 161.

²⁴ The parish acre books were drawn up in 1673 for use in compiling drainage assessments. LAO Frampton PAR 18/4a covers the Road End, Church End, Middlegate, and Sandholme (1,258 acres, or 65.5% of the 1920 rateable acres in the parish) and gives details of both landlords and occupiers. Volume 18/4b covers the West End (662 acres, or 34.5%) but unaccountably gives details of proprietors only. Slight damage to fols. 10-10v of the second volume render the entries for a few plots illegible. Hence the total acreage in the survey falls 25.5 acres (1.5%) short of the total acreage of the parish.

Table 3. *Hearth tax: comparative analysis of household distribution in ten Holland Fen parishes and other rural areas, 1662–74*

	% householders assessed on: (number of hearths)					Total number of households
	1	2	3–5	6–9	10+	
Holland Fen parishes 1665						
Kirton	47.1	28.3	21.0	4.2	0.5	191
Skirbeck Quarter	48.0	24.0	28.0	0.0	0.0	25
Wiberton	49.3	24.1	22.8	3.8	0.0	79
Algakirke	50.7	29.3	17.3	2.7	0.0	75
Fosdyke	55.2	23.7	18.4	2.6	0.0	38
Wigtoft	55.7	30.9	11.3	1.0	1.0	97
Sutterton	56.4	21.8	20.5	1.3	0.0	78
Frampton	60.3	19.8	18.3	1.5	0.0	131
Swineshead	61.6	22.2	13.5	1.6	1.1	185
Brothertoft	78.0	17.1	4.8	0.0	0.0	41
Holland Fen Average	55.6	24.6	17.1	2.2	0.4	940
Other rural areas						
Essex, 1669–70	48.0	18.5	25.3	6.3	2.1	20,897
Cambridgeshire (Part), 1674	50.0	29.9	16.5	2.7	1.0	5,377
Bedfordshire, 1669–70	62.1	17.7	16.2	2.8	1.2	7,730
Warwickshire, 1669–70	68.9	16.2	11.9	2.2	0.9	14,509
Herefordshire, 1664	73.9	13.2	10.3	2.0	0.6	11,034
Cheshire (Part), 1664	74.4	14.9	7.8	2.0	1.0	1,548

Source: Arkell, 'Regional variations', as reported in Levine and Wrightson, *Industrial society*, p. 157; PRO E179/140/754.

at the very least 72 per cent of tenants held less than fifteen acres, and even more strikingly that twenty-four tenants were cottagers, holding less than one acre (see table 4).²⁵

More striking still is the relatively diffuse nature of landownership. The four largest landowners accounted for only a third of the land in the parish between them, and three of these, the lords of the manors of Multon Hall, Stone Hall, and Earlsall, in the hands of Magdalen College, Oxford, the Lords Willoughby de Broke, and the earls of Bridgewater respectively, were not only non-resident, but extremely distant from the parish. The estate management of these landowners in Frampton can only be partially reconstructed. The fullest picture is provided by the surviving estate papers of Multon Hall. By the later seventeenth century, Magdalen was experiencing severe financial difficulties,

²⁵ These figures almost certainly under-estimate the number of small farms, since numerous small-holders (including the occupiers of over eighty-three acres and over seventy-six acres of the lands of the manors of Earlsall and Stonehall respectively) in the West End are omitted. Cf. the figures for five fenland manors in the early seventeenth century, where 77.7% of tenants held less than ten acres. Thirsk, *English peasant farming*, p. 41.

Table 4. *Landholding in Frampton 1672*

Range of holding size	No. of tenants	% of tenants	Extent of holdings	% of all holdings
Over 100 acres	2	1.5	232.25	18.5
60–100 acres	2	1.5	145.00	11.5
30–60 acres	6	5.0	249.50	20.0
20–30 acres	4	3.5	97.00	7.5
10–20 acres	18	15.5	260.75	20.5
5–10 acres	24	20.5	170.50	13.5
Less than 5 acres	60	51.5	103.00	8.0
Totals	116	100	1,258	99.5

Source: LAO Frampton PAR 18/4a, 4b.

and its stewards' working notes betray some confusion over the state of its Frampton copyholds.²⁶ Consequently, it attempted partially to index its income by linking a third of its rents to the price of corn: a series of notes on lands to which these 'corn rents' might be extended in the period 1665–70 includes tenancies in Frampton.²⁷ By the early eighteenth century, moreover, there were problems collecting rents from tenants suffering from the burden of high poor rates and land tax liability.²⁸ These economic problems were compounded by the constitutional crisis of the 1680s, the bursar bewailing that he had 'received no rents or had any fines come in' with tenants declining to renew 'for feare of false title' after James II's purge.²⁹ For the two remaining manors, the evidence is less detailed, with evidence only of sporadic intervention by landlords in the affairs of the parish. Earlshall was originally part of the honour of Richmond, passing to the crown with other Beaufort estates: in the early sixteenth century Lady Margaret Beaufort's administration was 'efficient and at times ruthless', her assiduity in collecting arrears from her Frampton lands echoing the vigilant and acquisitive policies of her husband. The manor subsequently passed first to the Egerton and thence to the Pelham families.³⁰ The 200-acre Stonehall demesne was part of the Willoughby

²⁶ MCOA EP/261/7 (memoranda concerning copyhold land and conveyances, 1649–60, about which inquiries are to be made in the manorial court, c. 1660).

²⁷ J. D. P. Dunbabin, 'College estates and wealth, 1660–1815', in L. S. Sutherland and L. G. Mitchell, eds., *The history of the university of Oxford, volume V: the eighteenth century* (Oxford, 1986), p. 272; MCOA EP/128/28.

²⁸ Outrents were denied by Multon Hall tenants both in 1667 and 1730. MCOA EP/128/20 (Christopher Wallis to Mr Childs, 7 Dec. 1667); EP/126/46 (Coney Tunnard to Mr Good, 30 Nov. 1730). The college's leading tenant in Frampton was four years in arrears by 1729. EP/128/22 (Coney Tunnard to Dr Butler, 15 Apr. 1728); EP/135/14 (Coney Tunnard to Mr Good, 19 July 1729).

²⁹ Dunbabin, 'College estates and wealth', p. 270.

³⁰ M. K. Jones and Malcolm Underwood, *The king's mother: Lady Margaret Beaufort, countess of Richmond and Derby* (Cambridge, 1991), p. 136; PRO SC6/Hen.VII/1771-3; SC6/Hen.VIII/6864. HEH MS Ellesmere EL 6748 is apparently a collection of Earlshall estate papers for the period 1561–1646.

inheritance, successively in the control of the Grevilles and the Verneys, the former at least having a formidable reputation for aggressive estate management.³¹ Fulke Greville surveyed his serfs in 1574 in order to discover 'what profytt will come if they were manumysed'. Fragmentary rentals of 1702 suggest that Stonehall revenues were being augmented in the late seventeenth century, the annual Verney income from 'old rents' in Frampton rising by some 18 per cent to almost £312.³² Whether such policies were generally characteristic of estate management in Frampton will be revealed only by more detailed analysis of the extensive Verney archive.

For all the paternalism that these landlords might on occasion display, the pattern of proprietorial attitudes to Frampton is therefore one of measured exploitation. There were repeated complaints about landlords' abuses in Holland Fen. So aggressive was the attitude of the farmer of Earlsall manor, John Chetham, that in 1575 vehement commoners' protests forced him to withdraw his beasts from common lands.³³ Even though the rectory of Frampton was hardly well endowed, the competition of interests to exploit its revenues exploded into an orgy of asset-stripping and litigation in 1619.³⁴ Despite the sporadic intervention of aggressive outsiders, however, Frampton was effectively self-governing. There were only two gentlemen resident in the 1540s, and at least twenty-four owner-occupiers in the 1670s.³⁵

This entire pattern of land-holding is explicable largely in terms of the fenland economy.³⁶ The inhabitants occupied numerous small pieces of arable land rendered fertile by the surrounding wetlands. Eight acres or even fewer might be sufficient to support a family, but it was access to the thousands of acres of pasture in Holland Fen on which Frampton inhabitants enjoyed common rights that proved critical. This diversified economy functioned not only through considerable numbers of dairy animals, but also through the catching of fish and wildfowl. The fen was crucial for the gathering both of fuel and of manure, the latter being sold at 4s. a bushel by the poor of Holland Fen in the late eighteenth century. Substantial numbers of the population depended

³¹ For Fulke Greville's estate management in the early seventeenth century, see R. A. Rebholz, *The life of Fulke Greville, first Lord Brooke* (Oxford, 1971), pp. 188–90; John Broad, 'The Verneys as enclosing landlords, 1600–1800', in John Chartres and David Hey, eds., *English rural society, 1500–1800: essays in honour of Joan Thirsk* (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 27–54, deals with the (unrelated) Verney family in Buckinghamshire. ³² BL MS Egerton 2988, fos. 45v–6, 110–11.

³³ BL MS Landsdowne 110, fo. 53; Thirsk, *English peasant farming*, pp. 38–9.

³⁴ PRO E134/17 Jas. I/Hilary 7.

³⁵ Since this figure for the number of owner-occupiers excludes the West End where no tenants' names were given, it is likely to be a significant under-estimate. LAO Frampton PAR 18/4a. PRO SC12/11/10, a military survey of the reign of Henry VIII, lists only John and Philip Claymond as resident gentry.

³⁶ The following paragraph is based on PRO E134/25&26 Eliz./Mich.30; E134/23&24 Eliz./Mich.15; E134/15 Jas.I/Easter 12; E178/4086; Gladys M. Hipkin 'Social and economic conditions in the Holland division of Lincolnshire, from 1640–1660', *Associated Architectural Societies Reports and Papers*, 40 (1930–1), pp. 136–256; Thirsk, *English peasant farming*, chs. 1 and 5; and Holmes, *Seventeenth-century Lincolnshire*, ch. 2. Cf. Spufford, *Contrasting communities*, ch. 5; J. M. Neeson, *Commoners: common right, enclosure and social change in England, 1700–1820* (Cambridge, 1993), chs. 2–6.

for a living on the commons alone, many having no arable at all, even in the Elizabethan period. By the 1670s, as we have seen, there were at least twenty-four cottagers holding no land at all in the field surveys, and the very low level of exemption from the hearth taxes suggests resources had been managed sufficiently well to prevent large numbers of them falling into acute poverty.³⁷

The centrality of the fen to the economy of Frampton explains the rioting and depasturing generated by enclosure proposals in the 1640s, and the fence-breaking, anonymous threats, and cattle-maiming consequent upon the enclosure of 1769, the latter even provoking the Hanoverian state to resort to the infamous Black Act for one of its final outings.³⁸ Such political flashpoints have inevitably fascinated historians, leading them away from the more characteristic yet subtle parish politics which bubbled away throughout the early modern period. The underlying fear of Frampton and other fen edge parish authorities was that the available common would be inadequate to support the population if the migration of paupers was not tightly regulated. That regulation was not the prerogative of the gentry, since although gentlemen owned land in the parish, they did not live there.

The farming population therefore enjoyed freedom to run their day-to-day affairs. The forum that enabled them to do so was the parish vestry, a body whose constitution remains obscure. Vestry minutes of the 1620s speak both of the ‘nomination’ and ‘election’ of officers, and variously refer to the constituency as ‘the minister and inhabitants’, ‘the minister and neighbours’, or the ‘inhabitants and parishioners’. Since ‘select’ vestries claimed to act on behalf of all their parishioners, however, their existence is not precluded by statements at visitations that officers had been chosen ‘by the parish’.³⁹ By the 1630s, Frampton vestry elections were conducted ‘according to our ancient custom’, itself a formulation which implies a departure from fully open or

³⁷ The three exemptions listed in PRO E179/140/754, the hearth tax of 1665, make up only 2.5% of the households in the parish. Of the 940 households in the ten rural Holland Fen parishes as a whole, eighty-three (8.8%) were exempt. PRO E179/334 contains a Frampton exemption certificate dated 7 Oct. 1670 and listing ten names only, less than 8% of households. Cf. the figures for exemption in other rural areas cited by Levine and Wrightson, *Industrial society*, p. 157, which range from 19.0% in part of Cambridgeshire to 38.6% in Herefordshire. See table 3. A schedule of hearth tax arrears in Kirton wapentake for 1665–6 lists twenty-five Frampton households, eight of them empty (suggestive of plague?), one of less than 20s. annual value, the remainder not subject to distress.

³⁸ For the disturbances of 1640, see Lindley, *Fenland riots*, pp. 111–12; for those of 1769, see J. L. and B. Hammond, *The village labourer, 1760–1832: a study in the government of England before the reform bill* (London, 1911), pp. 352–8; and Charles Brears, *Lincolnshire in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries compiled from national, county and parish records* (London, 1940), pp. 135–6. The Black Act was used to prosecute one James Rylatt of Chapel Hill, Swineshead, for shooting cattle and burning fence posts in the Holland Fen enclosures of Charles Anderson Pelham, esq., lord of the manor of Earlshall-in-Frampton. PRO PC/1/15/64, nos. 1–6 (Nov. 1770). See Edward Thompson, *Whigs and hunters: the origins of the Black Act* (New York, 1975), p. 247. I hope to return to the enclosure of Holland Fen on another occasion. For the subsequent tradition of agrarian protest in Lincolnshire, see T. L. Richardson, ‘The agricultural labourers’ standard of living in Lincolnshire, 1790–1840: social protest and public order’, *Agricultural History Review*, 41 (1993), pp. 1–19.

³⁹ Carlson, ‘Origin, function and status’, pp. 185–6.

democratic participation.⁴⁰ Whether or not the vestry was formally closed or 'select', active participation in its business was relatively circumscribed.⁴¹ In the period 1607–82, the records of sixty-four vestry meetings survive, with an average attendance of between eight and nine members. Only 164 vestrymen served in these years, thirty-three of them (20 per cent) serving more than five times. Indeed, three men performed more than twenty years' service. As few as seventy-six (46.5 per cent) served once only. If anything, participation grew even more circumscribed over time: the fifty-eight vestries for which records survive in the period 1693–1750 were comprised of 139 individuals, between ten and eleven of whom served at any one time. Of these, forty-three (31 per cent) served more than five times. The number attending only once had dropped to forty-six (33.0 per cent). On the single occasion where wider participation is indicated, in 1716, the signatures of six regular vestrymen are subscribed with the terse reference to 'near twenty more men that ran away to the alehouse before the work was half done'.⁴² A similar trend is evident in the profile of those serving as overseer of the poor: of the 110 who filled the office 1607–82, fourteen (13 per cent) did so more than once. By the later period, 1693–1771, the proportion of overseers serving more than once had risen to 21 per cent, with two men serving four times each. Detailed measurement of the social and economic status of vestrymen is possible only where attendance lists can be correlated with tax records. In the 1660s, thirty-eight individuals served on the vestry, seven of them attending more than half of the ten meetings. Of these thirty-eight, only five cannot be traced in hearth tax records. Of the remainder, twenty-eight were assessed on two or more hearths in the period 1662–70, and twenty-six contributed to the free and voluntary gift of September 1661, their demonstration of loyalty collectively amounting to £9 10s., or 70 per cent of the parish contribution. In the 1740s, thirty men served on the vestry, ten of them attending more than half the meetings. Thirteen of these vestrymen are listed in the window tax duplicate of 1751, contributing almost 40 per cent of the total raised. The average individual contribution of these vestrymen, at 12s., was almost three times greater than that for the parishioners as a whole, and almost four times greater than that for those who had not served on the vestry in the 1740s. The vestrymen were the 'better sort' of the parish as contemporaries understood that term.⁴³

⁴⁰ Cf. A. W. Ashby, 'One hundred years of poor law administration in a Warwickshire village', *Oxford Studies in Social and Legal History*, 3 (1912), pp. 1–188, at p. 43. The complexities of the meanings of 'inhabitants' and 'parishioners' in this context are explored in Webb and Webb, *English local government*, pp. 173–5.

⁴¹ The following discussion is based on an analysis of all those who signed or marked the vestry book to indicate their attendance at the annual Easter vestry meeting in the periods 1607–82, and 1693–1750. For the period 1751–71, only the names of overseers are entered in the vestry books. The 1660s sample has been correlated with PRO E179/140/805, 754, 791 (hearth taxes, 1662–70), and PRO E179/140/749 (free and voluntary present, 1661–62); that for the 1740s with LAO Holland quarter sessions land tax 1740–69 (Frampton window duplicate 1751).

⁴² LAO Frampton PAR 10/2, unfol. (3 Apr. 1716).

⁴³ See the discussion of the informal language of social description in the early seventeenth-century Lincolnshire fenland in Wrightson, 'Social order', at p. 183.

The vestry, therefore, dominated parish politics, and nowhere were they more assiduous than in the administration of poor relief, reviewing the accounts of the retiring parish officers and electing their successors at an annual meeting in the chancel of the parish church of St Mary the Virgin. The church still contains a fine medieval oak chest in which the vestry minute books were kept, with hasps for three padlocks.

II

The origins of formal poor relief in Frampton are shrouded in obscurity. A fragmentary account of disbursements suggests that churchwardens were providing cash relief for both natives and strangers in the late 1590s.⁴⁴ Although the parish papers contain no overseers account books prior to 1771, full vestry minute books survive in an almost uninterrupted series from 1597 into the nineteenth century. These imply that parish overseers first accounted for their expenditure in 1598, although the records of their submissions to the vestry become regular and standardized only in 1607. Thereafter, it is possible to reconstruct poor relief income and expenditure over the whole of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, enabling almost unprecedented consideration of the long-term institutionalization of relief in the rural context.⁴⁵ The most striking statistic to emerge from this analysis is the sheer scale of poor relief expenditure in Frampton: the *recorded* expenditure total for the period 1607–1799 was over £17,577, approximately equivalent to forty-three times the quota of the land tax in Frampton in 1798. Given that several years' totals are missing in the vestry book, the actual total expenditure in the period was probably between £19,000 and £20,000, or almost fifty times the 1798 land tax assessment.⁴⁶ That so much wealth could be locally redistributed in a parish whose population probably never exceeded 600 individuals demonstrates that economic growth 'enabled the country to afford substantial transfers of wealth from large numbers of respectable householders to the poor', and that (in turn) localized responsibility for poor relief made a powerful contribution to pre-industrial economic development in England.⁴⁷

Moreover, as table 5 emphasizes and figure 1 demonstrates, the sums expended increased considerably, if erratically, over these two centuries, even when price inflation is taken into account. Annual average expenditure rose

⁴⁴ LAO MISC DEP 259/4/1 (Frampton parish poor law papers), no. 1 includes payments to one Kayte More for a 'petye cowte' and to 'prowkteres' of London, Grimsby, and York.

⁴⁵ Based on an analysis of LAO Frampton PAR 10/1; 10/2; 13/1. No expenditure figures survive for the years 1612, 1617, 1630, 1640–2, 1645, 1647, 1650, 1676, 1683–92, 1696, 1707–8, 1776–7, 1793. Cf. the preliminary discussion of long-term expenditure patterns in the urban context (Norwich, 1621–1719) in Paul Slack, *Poverty and policy in Tudor and Stuart England* (London, 1988), p. 175.

⁴⁶ LAO KEST/IX (Kesteven (*sic*) quarter sessions land tax, 1798) suggests a total yield of £404.

⁴⁷ Slack, *Poverty and policy*, p. 207; Peter M. Solar, 'Poor relief and English economic development before the industrial revolution', *Economic History Review*, 48 (February 1995), pp. 1–22.

Table 5. *The dynamics of poor relief income and expenditure in Frampton, c. 1600–1800*

Decade	Average annual poor relief income	Average annual poor relief expenditure	Charity lands income as a proportion of expenditure	Average annual poor rate assessed	
	(£)	(£)	(%)	d. per acre	d. per £
1600–9	11	11			
1610–19	23	19			
1620–9	41	29			
1630–9	54	42			
1640–9	35	31			
1650–9	51	46	49	3	
1660–9	61	60	37	4	
1670–9	62	55	41	4	
1680–9	46	39	58	2	
1690–9	57	57	45	4	
1700–9	85	84	31	7	
1710–19	94	96	52	5	
1720–9	93	98	56	4	
1730–9	101	104	50	7	
1740–9	56	80	—	6	
1750–9	120	125	50	6	
1760–9	185	181	56	9	
1770–9	186	228	56		9
1780–9	252	249	37		15
1790–9	282	312	8		24

Source: LAO Frampton PAR 10/1–2.

from less than £19 in the 1610s to almost £42 in the 1630s, reaching its seventeenth-century peak of over £60 in the 1660s. Renewed growth occurred in the first four decades of the eighteenth-century, with annual average expenditure reaching £84 in the decade 1700–9, £96 in the 1710s, and £104 in the 1730s. Although the figures stabilized thereafter, the enclosure of both fen and parish in the 1770s and 80s caused annual relief expenditure to triple between 1750 and the end of the century, a trend which has been similarly documented for both late- and long-enclosed parishes in Oxfordshire, Bedfordshire, Essex, and Suffolk.⁴⁸ The most striking period of growth in ‘real’

⁴⁸ Decennial averages in table 5 compensate for missing years. Figure 1 represents actual expenditure indexed to 1607, and then calculates ‘real expenditure’ by deflating the figures for price trends in the Phelps-Brown, Hopkins real wage series, also indexed to 1607. For the series, see E. H. Phelps-Brown and S. V. Hopkins, ‘Seven centuries of the prices of consumables compared with builders’ wage rates’, in E. M. Carus-Wilson, *Essays in economic history*, II (London, 1962), pp. 179–96. For the comparisons, see Eastwood, ‘Republic in the village’, pp. 19–21; F. G. Emmison, ‘The relief of the poor at Eaton Socon, 1706–1834’, *Publications of the Bedfordshire*

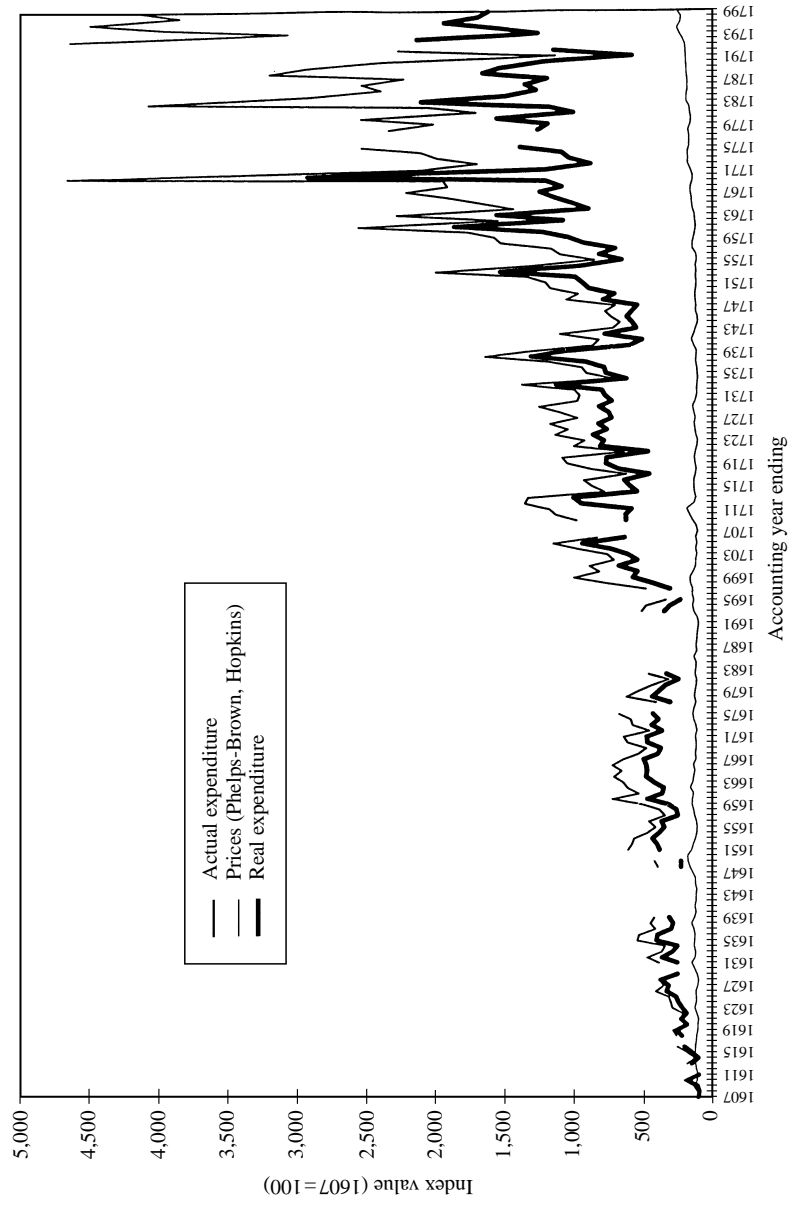


Fig. 1. Poor relief expenditure in Frampton (Lincs.), 1607-1799.

expenditure suggested by the Frampton figures, however, is the early eighteenth century, when the population of the parish was actually falling. This situation bears out Paul Slack's suggestion that national expenditure on the poor doubled in real terms between 1696 and 1750.⁴⁹ The equation of rising poor relief expenditure with population growth (and therefore, in turn, with increasing levels of immiseration) is evidently unsatisfactory, and ought to be modified in the light of our understanding of early eighteenth-century trends, both in the age-structure of the population and in 'expectations' of relief.⁵⁰

How was all this money raised? Frampton provides a particularly good example of the enduring significance of personal bequests for the relief of the indigent. Several charities had been established for the benefit of the Frampton poor, and their contribution to the multitude of resources which constituted their diverse economy proved to be substantial and enduring. Among the most important were the bequests of twelve acres of pasture by the yeoman Reginald Broughton in 1589; of £30 used to buy a cottage and an acre and a half of land by Alice Cony in 1601; and of 20s. yearly out of the estate of Robert Stubbs, a husbandman of neighbouring Swineshead in 1627. By the mid-1630s, Frampton charity revenues were also being drawn from lands in Wiberton.⁵¹ All these funds were administered by the vestry, but there were almost certainly other forms of charitable giving and other benefactions which occurred outside vestry control. Even so, the vestry's annual income from these charitable sources doubled from £4 in 1613 to almost £8 in 1619 before stabilizing at £22 during the period 1636–1708, and its collection was assiduously and sensitively supervised. In 1614, the overseers pursued one parishioner for £4 'arverages for the poor ground'; and in 1629, they spent over £17 in obtaining a chancery decree to enforce the terms of Broughton's request, even suing Richard Wellwick their colleague on the vestry in the process; in 1646, they increased the rent paid by the tenants of Broughton's charity lands by 8 per cent to 18s. per acre 'in consideration of some hard years last past' noting that this was 'to be no precedent'; in 1649, they saw fit to copy an extract from Stubbs's will into the vestry minute book.⁵² The generosity of these bequests and the considerable skill with which they were administered ensured that poor rates could be kept to a minimum. Indeed, the yield of charity lands exceeded the sums raised by taxation in at least sixteen years during the period 1636–1700,

Historical Record Society, 15 (1933), pp. 1–98; and K. D. M. Snell, *Annals of the labouring poor: social change and agrarian England, 1660–1900* (Cambridge, 1985), pp. 88–91.

⁴⁹ Paul Slack, *The English poor law, 1531–1782* (London, 1990), p. 32. Cf. Tom Arkell, 'The incidence of poverty in England in the later seventeenth century', *Social History*, 12 (Jan. 1987), pp. 23–47. Impressionistic evidence suggests that 'after the Restoration the poor rates increased alarmingly in some [Lincolnshire] villages'. Brears, *Lincolnshire*, p. 82.

⁵⁰ Slack, *English poor law*, p. 33.

⁵¹ The records of these Frampton charities survive as LAO MISC DEP 496/6–9 (Cony), 10–11 (Stubbs), 12 (Broughton), 13–14 (Wiberton lands).

⁵² LAO MISC DEP 496/11 (copy of chancery decree, 11 May 1629); Frampton PAR 10/1, unfol. (5 Apr. 1614, 1 Apr. 1646, 19 Apr. 1649).

and contributed as much as 46 per cent of all poor relief expenditure in the second half of the seventeenth century.⁵³ Accordingly, average annual poor rates never exceeded 4d. per acre in any decade during the seventeenth century, and reached 6d. per acre only in the exceptional years 1664, 1666, and 1675.

In the very last years of the century, however, poor relief expenditure rose sharply: the annual average spent for the period 1700–9 was a 47 per cent increase on that of the preceding decade. Poor rates rose to 7d. per acre in 1699, 8d. in 1701, and 10d. in 1705. Correspondingly, the yield of the charity lands in 1700–9 fell to less than a third of the necessary expenditure. Faced with such rising expenditure, the leading rate-payers in the parish proposed a drastic solution, the enclosure of some ten acres of waste ground ('the Holmes') in order that it might be profitably rented. Fifty-five 'principal inhabitants and others' accordingly drafted petitions to each of the three manorial lords, suggesting that since the Holmes 'now lyeth in common by trespasses from other neighbouring towns... and is eaten up and consumed and turns to no manner of account' either to their lordships or to the inhabitants, its enclosure would be 'of considerable advantage towards the relief and maintenance of the poor people of the parish'.⁵⁴ That the desire to keep the rates down lay behind this proposal is demonstrated by the fact that of the fifty-five petitioners, thirty-three were elected to the vestry (twenty-three of them serving as overseers of the poor) in the period 1693–1723. Only one answer to these petitions survives: the steward of Magdalen College, Oxford, deciding that since the enclosure was 'no prejudice' to their chief tenant, the president and scholars would not only consent but would also waive the thirty shillings expenses of securing a formal grant under the college seal.⁵⁵ He had apparently been persuaded that the 'little common' was 'of no more use to [Frampton] than any other parish' since it lay adjacent to Holland Fen, and knew that the other lords had already consented to 'so good an undertaking'.⁵⁶ Such paternalism was probably underpinned by pragmatism: if poor rates could be brought down, the college might succeed in augmenting its rental income. Within four years, therefore, the Holmes had been enclosed and rented out, augmenting the charity income by £25 annually. The scheme produced its desired effect, at least in the short term: poor rates fell back to late seventeenth-century levels, saving Frampton rate-payers as much as 3d. per acre per annum at a time of rising expenditure.

⁵³ Cf. the recent analyses of the significance of sources of welfare aid other than the parish rate in both early modern and nineteenth-century England: John Walter, 'The social economy of dearth in early modern England', in John Walter and Roger Schofield, eds., *Famine, disease and the social order in early modern society* (Cambridge, 1989), pp. 75–128; and Peter Mandler, 'Poverty and charity in the nineteenth-century metropolis: an introduction', in Peter Mandler, ed., *The uses of charity: the poor on relief in the nineteenth-century metropolis* (Philadelphia, 1990), pp. 1–37.

⁵⁴ The petitions survive as LAO MISC DEP 259/4/2/1 (to Dr John Verney, lord of the manor of Stonehall), 2 (to John, duke of Newcastle, lord of the manor of Earlsall); MCOA EP/128/23 (to the reverend master and fellows of Magdalen College, Oxford). The fifty-five subscribers are identical in each case, although eight of them marked rather than signed each petition.

⁵⁵ LAO Frampton PAR 17 (James Almont to Dr Greathead, 14 Apr. 1708).

⁵⁶ MCOA EP/126/42 (Thomas Sooley to James Almont, 17 Nov. 1707).

It did not, however, reduce the volatility of the rate: annual assessment ensured that rates could rise rapidly from one year to the next in the eighteenth century just as they had in the seventeenth: they doubled 1678–9, 1718–19 and 1736–7; more than doubled 1698–9, 1723–4, and 1732–3; quadrupled in 1745–6 and 1748–9; and more than quadrupled in 1762–3.⁵⁷

Rates hovered around 6d.–7d. per acre over the period 1730–69, and then jumped sharply in the 1770s as a consequence of the enclosure of Holland Fen. Indeed, the highest per acre rate ever recorded in the vestry book was 19d. in 1769, the year the fen was closed. Whether the sponsors of the enclosure genuinely believed that ‘improvement’ would ultimately decrease poor rates, or whether their objective was simply to raise rents, is unclear.⁵⁸ As it turned out, poor rates increased from 9d. in the £ in the 1770s to 15d. in the 1780s and 24d. in the 1790s, a sum met by tenants now also paying increased rents to their landlords, the tenants almost certainly passing on the increased costs to their sub-tenants.⁵⁹ Charles Anderson Pelham, ‘one of the richest commoners in England’, rented out the common lands granted him in the enclosure of Holland Fen for £510 annually in 1773–4. Little wonder that his flocks, herds, and fences should be the object of the attentions of animal-maimers and rioters.⁶⁰

Reconstruction of how the sums raised were spent is much more difficult, especially for the period before overseers account books survive (from 1771). Although they should not be used uncritically, the early nineteenth-century poor law returns suggest that in 1802–3, of a total parish population of approximately 540, 36 persons (22 of whom were children) were regularly relieved outdoors, and a further 15 residents were occasionally relieved. To these can be added 8 individuals in the workhouse and 10 persons relieved not being inhabitants: all this at a cost of some £422, raised by a rate of 63d. in the £ (over 26 per cent) of rental value, before the costs of settlement litigation are taken into account. The expenditure on the poor per head of population in Frampton was therefore almost twice the national and county average.⁶¹ In the absence of a more detailed breakdown of expenditure before this date, however, it remains uncertain whether substantial spending on the poor was

⁵⁷ Cf. Walter, ‘Social economy of dearth’, pp. 117–18.

⁵⁸ Broad, ‘Verneys’, pp. 27–54.

⁵⁹ Cf. Snell, *Annals*, pp. 194–209. For the transition from rates calculated per acre to those calculated per £ rental value, see Edwin Cannan, *The history of local rates in England* (2nd edn, London, 1912), chs. 3–4; and K. D. M. Snell, ‘Settlement, poor law and the rural historian: new approaches and opportunities’, *Rural History*, 3 (1992), pp. 161–2.

⁶⁰ Pelham contributed at least £50 to the common fund for the prosecution of enclosure rioters. LAO YARB/5/2/1/5, pp. 25, 31. For Pelham, see L. Namier and J. Brooke, eds., *The House of Commons, 1754–1790, II: members A–J* (London, 1964), pp. 22–3.

⁶¹ *Abstract of the poor*, Parliamentary Papers (PP), 1803–4, xiii, pp. 266–7, 290–1, 714–15. The expenditure figures per head of population are (England and Wales) 9s. 7d., (Lincolnshire) 9s. 8d., (Frampton) 17s. 7d. A similar state of affairs prevailed at Brampton (Oxfordshire), see Eastwood, ‘Republic in the village’, p. 19. For the problems of definition in the returns of 1802–3, see J. D. Marshall, *The old poor law, 1795–1834* (London, 1968), pp. 23–32. David Eastwood, *Governing rural England: tradition and transformation in local government* (Oxford, 1994), pp. 41–2, is cautiously optimistic about their value.

indicative of a severe burden of poverty or of a liberal regime of social welfare provision.

Some light is thrown on this issue by consideration of the enforcement of the other provisions of the Elizabethan poor laws. Of all the terms of 43 Eliz. I. c. 2, the setting of the poor on work has generally been regarded as the least successful.⁶² In Frampton, the employment of this ‘badly-managed pool of labour’ was attempted early in the seventeenth century. The overseers’ receipts in 1622 were described as being raised by ‘stock and sessment’ and those in 1624 by ‘stock and town rent’. By 1625 the overseers were able to pass ‘three stone of hemp’ to their successors, and £10 was raised ‘for the town stock’ in 1626. The scheme was in full swing by 1631 when the overseers laid out almost £5 ‘for the workhouse with stuffe and other implements and hemp and flax drest and undrest’ and a further £5 for ‘clothing the poor and other charges in making [coats]’. The inventory for the workhouse included sixty-seven pounds of hemp and flax, three stone of undressed femple, and nine pounds of ‘dressed flax teare’. In 1632, 163 pounds of teare hemp, of which twenty pounds was already spun into yarn, was passed over at the end of the year. Only very small sums were actually raised by the sale of this cloth and yarn: the income from hemp sales in 1636 was only 12s. 3d. The sums available to spend on new stock consequently fell to £7 in 1639 and £4 in 1644. By the end of the 1640s the scheme appears to have collapsed, and there are no further references to the parish workhouse until the eighteenth century. When it burnt to the ground in 1753, the churchwardens had to reimburse John Hudson both for ‘getting the goods out of the poor house and lodging the poor people’ while it was rebuilt.⁶³

The binding out of pauper apprentices seems to have been more successful, though here too parish policy fluctuated according to the perceived burden on the poor rate. Ninety-six children were bound out in the period 1678–1772, seventy-five of them in the period 1703–44.⁶⁴ Before 1710, the contracts usually involved a commitment of funds, ranging from £3 (for an apprentice to a Wiberton thatcher) to £15 (for an apprentice to a Skirbeck wheelwright), by the overseers and churchwardens to the new master. In a community habituated to low rates, however, apprenticeship to a distant master in a skilled trade was a luxury the vestry decided it could ill-afford. From 1710 to 1728, therefore, the vestrymen embarked on a policy of simple agreements with prominent Frampton farmers or graziers, many of whom had recently sat (or were shortly to sit) on the vestry, and no sums changed hands. Fifty (52 per cent) of the surviving apprenticeship contracts were drawn up in this eighteen-year period.⁶⁵ Such informal local agreements were cheaper in the short term,

⁶² Anthony Fletcher, *Reform in the provinces: the government of Stuart England* (New Haven, 1986), pp. 212–15. The following paragraph is based on the entries for the years 1620–40 in LAO Frampton PAR 10/1, unfol.

⁶³ LAO Frampton PAR 7/3, unfol., v.

⁶⁴ The following paragraph is based on LAO Frampton PAR 13/7 (apprenticeship indentures, 1678–1772). For the context of this policy, see Snell, *Annals*, ch. 5. The high number of orphaned children is probably explained by the impact of epidemic disease in the early eighteenth-century wetlands. See Dobson, ‘Last hiccup’.

⁶⁵ Cf. G. C. Edmonds, ‘Accounts of eighteenth-century overseers of the poor of Chalfont St Peter’, *Records of Buckinghamshire*, 18 (1966), p. 9.

but the parish retained responsibility for the individuals concerned after the apprenticeship was completed. Although a formal contract with a distant master required payment of an initial premium, it held out the promise that the apprentice would gain a settlement elsewhere. In 1732, therefore, the vestry again agreed 'to putt out the towns children by way of assessments yearly, the bargains or agreements to be made only' by the overseers and churchwardens together with 'four more of the principal inhabitants'.⁶⁶ By the 1760s they again resorted to cash undertakings, sending orphans as far afield as Nottingham as apprentice framework-knitters. The overall pattern is of a policy periodically reviewed in the light of the vestry's assessment of its immediate financial priorities, supporting Peter Solar's argument that 'the local financing of poor relief gave English property owners, individually and collectively, a direct pecuniary interest in ensuring that the parish's demographic and economic development was balanced'.⁶⁷

But it is in the hostility to those who were not settled members of the community that the severity of Frampton poor law administration is most clearly demonstrated. Churchwardens' expenses in the 1750s included sums for days spent searching for 'vagabonds', and 'lous fellers'.⁶⁸ Hunting high and low in the fen was, however, only the beginning of the project of exclusion: surviving quarter sessions records for eighteenth-century Lincolnshire suggest that the churchwardens and overseers of Frampton were equally vigorous in their judicial attempts to defend the parish from poor migrants. In the period 1710–70, the parish was party to twenty-nine separate appeals over the outcome of contested settlements and removals.⁶⁹ The maintenance of well over fifty individuals was at stake in these cases. In a very few instances, those removed out of the parishes were notorious rogues or vagrants. Margaret MacDonall, arrested by the constable of Frampton in March 1719, had 'come out of Scotland with her husband in the late rebellion' only to see him hanged at Preston, and had been begging ever since. Robert Nixon's route to the parish was even more circuitous: born in Bowcastle (Cumberland) he had been transported to Virginia for seven years by the justices at Carlisle, and since his return had worked in Norfolk and Suffolk.⁷⁰ Others were simply the victims of circumstance: John Melton, aged sixty at the time of his examination in 1758, had been a Frampton parish apprentice, sent to the service of a Scarborough seaman. When the mariner's ship was lost, he was forced onto the open road, gaining casual work in Spalding, finally being forced through illness to abandon his wife and children there in an attempt to return to his home parish.⁷¹

The vast majority of settlement cases, however, were highly localized disputes between Frampton and the neighbouring parishes, parish officers

⁶⁶ LAO Frampton PAR 10/2, unfol. (25 May 1732). ⁶⁷ Solar, 'Poor relief', p. 16.

⁶⁸ LAO Frampton PAR 7/1 (scrapbook of churchwardens accounts), fos. 27, 28, 29, 30. The accounts for 1753 and 1756 also include sums for days spent searching for sailors, perhaps suggesting press gang activity.

⁶⁹ Based on an analysis of LAO Holland Sessions Records (HSR), 1703–1803.

⁷⁰ LAO HSR 1719/45; 1753/37.

⁷¹ LAO HSR 1758/39.

scrambling to avoid liability for those whose place of settlement was in doubt. Joseph Bradshaw had lived in Frampton by virtue of a certificate from Kirton for thirty-five years: he was nevertheless removed back there in 1741 presumably because he was about to become chargeable. While John Sivers of Frampton was imprisoned pending bastardy proceedings in 1741, his wife and four children were rapidly removed to Kirton despite the fact that they had lived in Frampton 'by certificate' for twelve years.⁷² Most usually, it seems, litigation between Frampton and its neighbours turned on the issue of whether or not a servant had acquired a legal settlement in the parish of his or her apprenticeship. The Frampton overseers' assiduity in appeals paid off: of the nine decisions they sought to overturn at quarter sessions, they were successful in five, and appealed a further two as far as the assizes. But settlement litigation was itself expensive: the parish officers spent almost £55 (or almost 11 per cent of their poor relief expenditure) on 'suits of law and removal of paupers' in 1802–3.⁷³ In this single year at least, therefore, Frampton's emphasis on exclusion seems to have been more marked than most other Holland Fen parishes (see table 6), only two parishes spending a higher proportion of their totals on contesting settlement.⁷⁴

In two respects, however, the evidence for the politics of exclusion drawn from the Holland sessions records and the parliamentary *Abstracts of the poor* is inadequate. In the first place, those settlements and removals that proved contentious were only a proportion of those that were executed without litigation. As the fragmentary bundle of orders surviving in the parish archive suggests, many others were carted across the parish boundary without appeal.⁷⁵ In the second place, there is good evidence of a consistent policy of exclusion operating in the parish well before the legislation of 1662 became operative. The early seventeenth-century tendency of parishes to refuse entry to those who could not or would not guarantee to indemnify the parish should they become chargeable has not been systematically explored by historians, although it was apparently common in both town and countryside.⁷⁶ It was

⁷² LAO HSR 1741/175; 1741/131; 1741/105.

⁷³ *Abstract of the poor*, PP, 1803–4, xiii, p. 266. This figure was hardly exceptional, the average annual expenditure on settlement litigation for the years 1812–15 being £49 6s. 8d., or 10% of expenditure on relief. *Abstract of the poor [1813–15]*, PP, 1818, xix, pp. 236–7.

⁷⁴ *Abstract of the poor*, PP, 1803–4, xiii, p. 266. As Snell, *Annals*, p. 18 n. 5 points out, however, a single removal might generate expenses of over £20 by the end of the eighteenth century. It therefore seems that only one or two contested removals in any single year might be sufficient to stretch parish resources severely.

⁷⁵ LAO MISC DEP 259/4/1, nos. 2–7 are settlement certificates and removal orders which do not appear to have been contested.

⁷⁶ But see now Steve Hindle, 'Exclusion crises: poverty, migration and parochial responsibility in English rural communities, c. 1560–1660', *Rural History*, 7 (Autumn 1996), pp. 125–49, and references there cited. The practical impact of the 1662 legislation has, however, provoked considerable controversy. See James Stephen Taylor, 'The impact of pauper settlement, 1691–1834', *Past & Present*, 73 (November 1976), pp. 42–74; Norma Landau, 'The laws of settlement and the surveillance of immigration in eighteenth-century Kent', *Continuity & Change*, 3 (1988), pp. 391–420; Norma Landau, 'The regulation of immigration, economic structures and definitions of the poor in eighteenth-century England', *Historical Journal*, 33 (1990), pp. 541–72;

Table 6. *Comparative analysis of the 1803–4 poor law returns for ten rural parishes in Holland Fen (by rank order of proportion of poor law expenditure spent on settlement litigation, 1802–3)*

Parish or township	I		II		III	IV		V		VI
	s.	d.	£	s.		s.	d.	£	s.	
Wiberton	08	11	224	14	477	09	5	38	17	17.3
Skirbeck Quarter	07	7	208	04	171	24	4	25	0	12.0
Frampton	05	3	476	10	542	17	7	54	14	11.5
Fosdyke	03	11	175	17	271	13	0	19	7	11.0
Algakirke	03	10	332	13	517	12	10	18	3	5.5
Wigtoft	06	10	399	07	536	14	11	19	18	5.0
Swineshead	03	11	641	04	1,555	08	3	21	14	3.4
Sutterton	03	3	292	11	737	07	11	6	6	2.2
Kirton	06	3	943	09	1,238	15	3	8	6	0.9
Brothertoft	01	2	33	14	102	06	7	0	5	0.7
Holland Fen Average	05	5	328	06	615	12	2	21	5	5.7

Key (*AR* = *Abstract of returns*).

I: poor rate in the pound (£), for the year ending Easter 1803 (*AR* col. 3).

II: total expenditure on account of the poor for the year to Easter 1803 (*AR* cols. 4+5).

III: population total, 1801 census (*VCH Lincs.*, II, p. 358).

IV: per capita expenditure on poor relief (II divided by III).

V: expenditure in suits of law, removal of paupers and other expenditure (*AR* col. 5).

VI: proportion of expenditure spent on settlement litigation (II divided by V).

Source: *Abstract of the poor*, PP, 1803–4, xiii, p. 266; *VCH Lincs.*, II, p. 358.

evidently operative in Frampton as early as the second decade of the seventeenth century: the manorial jury of Multon Hall ordering in 1616, and again in 1617, that ‘noe man or woman shall take any person or persons into the town wch is like to be chargeable to the towne unlesse he or she shall put in bonds to the inhabitants for the towne discharge or they shall forfeit to the lord of the manner £5’, singling out one Richard Ayre to ‘avoid and discharge the towne of Thomas Poynton and his wife and his children and his mother before the first of December next’ likewise on pain of £5.⁷⁷ The scheme appears to have enjoyed some success: in 1625 alone the new overseers received three bonds of indemnity from their predecessors, under the terms of which Frampton residents undertook that their lodgers or inmates should never become

K. D. M. Snell, ‘Pauper settlement and the right to poor relief in England and Wales’, *Continuity & Change*, 6 (1991), pp. 375–415; Snell, ‘Settlement, poor law and the rural historian’; and Norma Landau, ‘Who was subjected to the laws of settlement? Procedure under the settlement laws in eighteenth-century England’, *Agricultural History Review*, 43 (1995), pp. 139–59.

⁷⁷ MCOA EP/84/25; 84/24 (Multon Hall (Frampton) court rolls 1616–17).

chargeable to the parish. By 1654, the policy had been intensified: the vestry nominated *six* headboroughs to 'looke to it that no stranger come to inhabit... without [their] general consent' and ordered that 'if any shall bring in any without their consent' where 'there is not a competent estate and sufficient bond given by the stranger that comes in to save the town from charge' the guilty party was to forfeit £20. Each of the six men appointed had served both as overseer and as churchwarden in the years preceding this decision.

But perhaps the most telling example of the politics of poor relief came with the prohibition of the marriages of the poor.⁷⁸ Evidence of such a policy is by definition extremely difficult to come by, since the poverty of bride and groom was not among the justified canonical grounds for objecting to marriage banns. One wonders, therefore what lay behind the ambiguous memorandum to which the minister (Samuel Cony) and churchwardens of Frampton subscribed on 29 May 1642:

the banes of matrimony between John Hayes and Ann Archer both of this parish were three severall tymes on three severall sundayes or holy dayes published in the parish church of Frampton without contradiction save only the first time they were published they were forbid by one Robert Pimperton of the parish of Kirton who was then requested and so the other two tymes of publishing. It was openly desyred that he bring witnesses to prove there was some just cause why they might not lawfully be joined but yet he hath not done it, and so we know not why wee may not lawfully proceede to marriage, except he presently prove an impediment or put in a caution to do it.⁷⁹

Pimperton's reasons for forbidding the banns are unspecified in the minute book, but they must be interpreted in the context of one other fragmentary piece of evidence describing the refusal of marriage banns in Frampton. Samuel Cony, minister of Frampton, whose duty it had been to record the objection to the Hayes marriage in 1642, noted in the parish register in January 1654 that when 'the intentions of a marriage' between Edward Marten and Jane Goodwin were published, John Ayre, Thomas Appleby, and William Eldred 'in behalf of them selves and other of the inhabitants' objected on two grounds. First, it seems, Marten's employment and marital history was in question: although he had been in service both in neighbouring Algakirke and Frampton, it was uncertain 'where he has lived before that time nor what hee is, either a maryed or single man'. They argued that the marriage should be deferred until such time as Marten could certify the truth of these matters. Second, however, was the question of Marten's current economic status:

for aught they knew and as they verily believed hee was a very poore man and that hee had not then any house to live in, and therefore they did desire that he might ere he wur married gett some sufficient man to be bound with him to secure the town from any

⁷⁸ All the discussions of this problem are very brief, but it has massive implications for our understanding of local social and political relationships. For a full discussion, see Steve Hindle 'The problem of pauper marriage in early modern England' (The Alexander Prize Essay), *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 6th ser., 8 (1998).

⁷⁹ LAO Frampton PAR 10/1, unfol. (29 May 1642).

charge by him or his whom they consider they were not bound to keepe hee being till he lately crept into [the parish] a poor stranger to us.⁸⁰

These objections (at the very least) delayed and (probably) prevented both Hayes and Archer, and Marten and Goodwin, from celebrating their marriages in the parish, thereby denying them participation in the ritual of inclusion intended to symbolize their entry into settled adult membership of the community. They also marked a drastic reversal of attitudes towards marriages in Frampton: Cony's predecessor Gabriel Colinge had supplemented the meagre income of his living by celebrating marriages clandestinely. In 1634, Colinge had been summoned before the vicar general of the diocese to answer for fourteen such offences, and fined £7. By contrast, Cony not only insisted upon marriage 'publicly in the face of the church and in the presence of both parties', but was also prepared to tolerate the use of the calling of the banns for objections other than those dictated by canon law.⁸¹

The quasi-formal inhibition of the marriages of the poor was far from unknown in rural England during the seventeenth century, and reflects a growing preoccupation with the limits of parochial responsibility. Its implications could be disastrous, and not just for the individuals concerned. John Walter, for example, has argued that it was the inability to marry and settle in their own secure holdings that drove the poor husbandmen of Oxfordshire to foment sedition on Enslow Hill in the long wet summer of 1596.⁸² Rigorous control of marital opportunity was clearly one strategy through which parishes sought to inhibit entitlement to poor relief. But just who was responsible for these decisions? The language used in the fragmentary documentary references to the practice is highly ambiguous: (in Finchingfield, Essex) 'the townsmen', (in Terling, Essex) 'the parish', (in Upminster, Essex, and Frampton) 'the inhabitants', and (in Stockton, Worcestershire, and North Bradley, Wiltshire) 'the parishoners', were variously described as the authors of the policy.⁸³ This terminology implies that such decisions were made and executed consensually by the whole or the majority of the local community. But the language conceals as much as it reveals, perhaps as it was intended to. 'The parishe' denoted the vestrymen in this context, just as 'the inhabitants' denoted 'the best (or long established) inhabitants'. In both cases 'we may be sure that these labourers meant the notables of the parish concerned, in particular the ministers and parish officers'.⁸⁴ Wrightson and Levine's scepticism is borne out by the order

⁸⁰ LAO Frampton PAR 1/1, unfol. (Jan. 1654).

⁸¹ LAO Cj/24, fo. 125 (12 Feb. 1634). At a time when £30 was probably considered an adequate parochial living, the vicarage of Frampton was worth only £20 a year. PRO E134/17 Jas.I/Hilary 7. The desire to reduce the temptation for the minister to take fees for clandestine marriages may well have lain behind the vestry's decision to augment the vicar's stipend after the Restoration. LAO Frampton PAR 10/1, unfol. (1 Apr. 1674).

⁸² Walter, 'A "rising of the people"?'', pp. 123–5.

⁸³ Emmison, ed., *Early Essex town meetings*, p. 117; Wrightson and Levine, *Poverty and piety*, pp. 80, 133; J. W. Willis-Bund, *Worcestershire county records: calendar of the quarter sessions papers, volume I: 1591–1643* (Worcester, 1900), pp. 266–7; Martin Ingram, 'The reform of popular culture? Sex and marriage in early modern England', in Barry Reay, ed., *Popular culture in seventeenth century England* (London, 1985), p. 145.

⁸⁴ Wrightson and Levine, *Poverty and piety*, p. 133.

of the town meeting at Swallowfield (Wiltshire) in 1596 that all vestrymen ‘have an especyall care to speake to the mynyster to stay the maryage of such as wolde mary before they have a convenient house to lyve in according to their callynge’.⁸⁵ The use of the terms ‘the parish’ and ‘the inhabitants’ are therefore significant precisely because they made an exclusive social institution (the structure of local office holding) sound like an inclusive one. Moreover, it is arguable that communal rhetoric of inclusion succeeded only in making the institutions and attitudes it served more exclusive.

The description of the prohibited marriage between Marten and Goodwin is, therefore, particularly remarkable. First, the question of the illegality of the informal prohibition of marriage was side-stepped by raising the possibility that Marten might be a bigamist, in which case the objection was sound in the eyes of both criminal and ecclesiastical law.⁸⁶ Second, the explicit reference to Marten’s poverty and his status as a stranger presented in so direct a manner brings us face to face with the ‘social cleavage’ between those who paid the rate (the ‘other inhabitants’ in whose behalf Appleby, Ayre, and Eldred had spoken) and those who were considered likely to be a charge upon it.⁸⁷ Of course, a harsh ‘exclusionist’ line on the migrant poor might well win the support of the settled poor, but the enforcement of parochial endogamy would by definition cut across local friendships and courtships, especially amongst the young, and have a disproportionate effect upon those who were not able to find sureties. It is significant, moreover, that the objectors were, almost inevitably, the most experienced office holders in the parish; Ayre had served twice, the others once each as overseer, and the three had thirteen years’ service as churchwarden between them. All three were among the headboroughs appointed to police the taking of inmates the following year. The success of their objection almost certainly depended on the collusion of their clergyman. Indeed, the role of the minister in framing the record of this objection is crucial: a graduate of that puritan seminary, Emmanuel College, Cambridge, Cony probably knew that an objection justified purely on economic grounds was illegal: at least one minister found himself in the church courts for such a decision. Perhaps the mention of bigamy was his gloss on the debate, possibly explaining why a decision which would probably otherwise have gone unrecorded found its way into the parish register, stark testimony to the redefinition of community boundaries implied by the recognition of settlement and entitlement.⁸⁸

⁸⁵ HEH MS Ellesmere 6162, fo. 36.

⁸⁶ Cf. John Johnson, *The clergy-man’s vade mecum* (London, 1709 edn); BL MS Additional 32512, fo. 128v.

⁸⁷ Quoting Levine and Wrightson, *Industrial society*, p. 352.

⁸⁸ William Jackson, clerk of North Ockendon (Essex), was presented at Romford in 1636 for inviting objections to the banns on the grounds of poverty. W. J. Pressey, ‘Essex affairs matrimonial (as seen in the archdeaconry records)’, *Essex Review*, 69 (1940), p. 86. For Cony, see J. and J. A. Venn, *Alumni Cantabrigienses* (Cambridge, 1922), Part 1, vol. 1, p. 379; and for puritanism in the Lincolnshire fens, see H. Hajzyk, *The church in Lincolnshire, c. 1595–1640* (Ph.D. thesis, Cambridge, 1980), pp. 344, 357–60, 364, 462–6; and M. Spurrell, *The puritan town of Boston* (History of Boston ser. 5, 1972), pp. 1–23.

That such redefinition should be so pronounced even in a pastoral fenland parish is remarkable, and calls into question the predictive capacity of the distinction between open and closed communities.⁸⁹ The terms of the calculus employed by churchwardens and overseers depended not only upon the desirability of low poor rates, but also on the demands of the local labour market. Although it was undoubtedly the case that Frampton smallholders might flourish because the fen provided livings for those without much land, rate-payers evidently had divided loyalties.⁹⁰ When it was feared that the fen was suffering from overuse, especially at times of marked population growth, regulation of pasturing or peat-digging might seem desirable, but it might also provoke immiseration, an increased burden on the poor rate, or even the loss of tenants altogether. At other times, when economic fortunes were dislocated by the demands of war in the 1640s and 50s, or by enclosure and its associated pressures from 1769, there might be greater unanimity, the rate-payers covenanting together to keep costs down by excluding the migrant poor, restricting access to the fenland community itself, and to the entitlement it implied.⁹¹ After all, the fen could hardly be described as one of the industrious cottage economies of which so much has recently been made, and the opportunities for migrant labour, especially for women and children were limited.⁹² Furthermore, the heterogenous demographic trends for the Holland Fen parishes in the eighteenth century suggest that several variables might have governed inter-parochial relations in this period, including not only the zeal of individual vestrymen, but also clerical leadership, the breadth and depth of political participation, and the highly localized patterns in the distribution of wealth.

The boundaries of ‘community’ in Frampton were therefore subject to definition and redefinition in various ways during the early modern period. The physical limits of the parish were transformed not only by the enclosure of the Holmes and ultimately of Holland Fen, but also by the encroachments of the sea. The reclamation of salt marshes created difficulties in the identification of the parish bounds as early as the sixteenth century. The parish ‘rambling’ or perambulation, once a circuit of the old sea wall, took a different route by

⁸⁹ For a critique of the ‘predictive capacity’ of the distinction between ‘open’ and ‘closed’ parishes, see Sarah Banks, ‘Nineteenth-century scandal or twentieth-century model? A new look at “open” and “close” parishes’, *Economic History Review*, 41 (1988), pp. 51–73.

⁹⁰ A similar situation existed in the fenland economies of Stow Bardolph and Wimbotsham (Norfolk). See Amussen, *An ordered society*, pp. 20–2. Clive Holmes, ‘Drainers and fenmen: the problem of popular political consciousness in the seventeenth century’, in Anthony Fletcher and John Stevenson, eds., *Order and disorder in early modern England* (Cambridge, 1985), pp. 190–4, discusses the rash of disputes created by increased pressure on the resources of the Lincolnshire fenland in the early seventeenth century.

⁹¹ For a similar coalescence of interests among rate-payers at a time of economic distress in the parish of Timworth (Suffolk), see Peter King, ‘Legal change, customary right, and social conflict in late eighteenth-century England: the origins of the great gleaning case of 1788’, *Law and History Review*, 10 (Spring 1992), pp. 4–9.

⁹² Jan de Vries, ‘The industrial revolution and the industrious revolution’, *Journal of Economic History*, 54 (June 1994), pp. 249–70.

1624: now ‘not any went on the marshes except some boyes in sport ranne down the sea banke’.⁹³ These geographical developments were paralleled by the social and symbolic differentiation of the deserving and the undeserving. Coats provided for the industrious poor in the parish workhouse by 1630s would have been badged under the terms of the statute of 1697.⁹⁴ In the period 1648–1766, the overseers raised over £126 by clapping the parish brand on, and selling off, the goods of at least forty paupers: they saw fit to record the names of only ten of them. By contrast, they assiduously noted the names of the six benefactors who bequeathed sums (totalling less than £24) to the overseers. Even the language used to describe untrustworthy outsiders subtly emphasizes the process of moral differentiation of ‘inhabitants’ and ‘strangers’: the prohibition of Edward Marten’s marriage is articulated by a rhetoric redolent of fear of infiltration by ‘poor strangers crept amongst us’. By the mid-eighteenth century these values imbricated the political culture of the entire community. To its own, the parish could be generous enough: the rogation-tide festivities of 1746, bringing the parish together in an atmosphere of carnival and celebration, cost £6 10s. But even in those rites of inclusion there were distinctions to be made. For Christmas communion that year, churchwardens chose to spend 4s. on wine for the ‘inhabitants’ but 6s. 8d. on sack for the ‘poor’.⁹⁵ Odious or not, this distinction symbolizes the asymmetry of power that lay at the very heart of institutional poor relief.

III

The evidence of the Frampton vestry book therefore demonstrates the complexity of the matrix of institutional and ideological instruments that constituted the parish in early modern England. Indeed, four dimensions of the ‘political culture’ of the ‘parish state’ might be identified.⁹⁶ First and foremost, vestry authority was an expression of *politics*, an instrument used in the pursuit, maintenance, and control of power. Second, however, the vestry was an institution of *government*, and therefore both subject to the recognized or customary obligations and rights of rulers and ruled, and responsible for the execution and maintenance of law. Third, the parishes of early modern England, like all political or governmental institutions, were underpinned by a

⁹³ PRO E178/4086, m. 32 (deposition of James Garrard of Frampton, yeoman, 21 June 1624).

⁹⁴ 8 & 9 William III c.11. In Frieston, half a dozen miles from Frampton, the overseers were ordered in 1737 not to pay ‘any collection to any of the Poor but such as constantly bear a badge on the sleeve of their upper garments denoting them paupers’. Brears, *Lincolnshire*, p. 82.

⁹⁵ Cf. J. S. Craig, ‘Co-operation and initiatives: Elizabethan churchwardens and the parish accounts of Mildenhall’, *Social History*, 18 (October 1993), p. 376.

⁹⁶ The idea of the ‘parish state’ originates with John Clare, ‘The parish: a satire’ (c. 1820–9), in *The early poems of John Clare, 1804–22: volume II*, ed. Eric Robinson and David Powell (Oxford, 1989), especially ll.1220–369, at pp. 742–8, and has been most successfully explored in the work (much of it yet unpublished) of Peter King. See his ‘Edward Thompson’s contribution to eighteenth-century studies: the patrician-plebeian model re-examined’, *Social History*, 21 (May 1996), pp. 215–28 and ‘Property, power and the parish state in eighteenth-century England’ (unpublished paper).

value system or *ideology*. This might be derived from the formal tradition of political philosophy or might equally express a less systematic political mentality constructed from the practicalities of governance, reflecting those everyday norms and values which Susan Reynolds has termed key political ideas.⁹⁷ In exploring this dimension of parochial political culture a great deal more will need to be learned about changing conceptions of charity, especially in the eighteenth century.⁹⁸ The fourth, and perhaps the decisive, element in any definition of *early modern* political culture is the diffused and extensive nature of power structures, the social and political space through which authority was transmitted.⁹⁹ Early modern England was a relatively centralized but by no means a bureaucratized polity, and its political culture was contingent upon the participation of agencies, officers, institutions, and individuals at many social levels and in many widely dispersed geographical situations.¹⁰⁰ Further work on the politics of poor relief might profitably explore each of these spheres of political culture.

In the last analysis, however, the politics of poor relief were contingent on a more obvious problem: the allocation of entitlement necessarily involved a struggle over scant resources.¹⁰¹ Even in an ‘open’ parish, entitlement had to be regulated. ‘The paradox of the old poor law’, it has been argued, ‘was its remarkable sensitivity to local need and its harsh attitude to outsiders’.¹⁰² To the familiar, neighbourhood needy, parish relief could be ‘benevolent and sympathetic’:¹⁰³ both the sheer scale of expenditure, and the lists of industrious

⁹⁷ Susan Reynolds, *Kingdoms and communities in western Europe, 900–1300* (Oxford, 1984), *passim*.

⁹⁸ The essential starting point remains John Bossy, *Christianity in the west, 1400–1700* (Oxford, 1985), pp. 140–52. On the eighteenth century in particular, see A. W. Coats, ‘The relief of poverty, attitudes to labour, and economic change in England, 1660–1782’, *International Review of Social History*, 21 (1976), pp. 98–115; Daniel Baugh, ‘Poverty, protestantism and political economy: English attitudes towards the poor, 1660–1800’, in S. B. Baxter, ed., *England’s rise to greatness, 1660–1783* (Berkeley, 1983), pp. 63–107; and Mary Fisell, ‘Charity universal? Institutions and moral reform in eighteenth-century Bristol’, and Tim Hitchcock, ‘Paupers and preachers: The SPCK and the parochial workhouse movement’, both in Lee Davison, Tim Hitchcock, Tim Keirn, and Robert B. Shoemaker, eds., *Stilling the grumbling hive: the response to social and economic problems in England, 1689–1750* (Stroud, 1992), pp. 121–44, 145–66.

⁹⁹ Michael Mann, *The sources of social power, volume I: a history of power from the beginning to AD 1760* (Cambridge, 1986), pp. 7–8. For an interesting attempt to explore the relationship between economic and social power, landownership and the physical environment, see C. K. Rawding, ‘The iconography of churches: a case study of landownership and power in nineteenth-century Lincolnshire’, *Journal of Historical Geography*, 16 (1990), pp. 157–76.

¹⁰⁰ For attempts to reconceptualize the nature of the early modern English polity, see Michael J. Braddick, ‘Discussion: state formation and social change in early modern England: a problem stated and approaches suggested’, *Social History*, 16 (January 1991), pp. 1–17; and Steve Hindle, ‘Aspects of the relationship of the state and local society in early modern England with special reference to Cheshire, c. 1590–1630’ (Ph.D. dissertation, Cambridge, 1993), ch. 1.

¹⁰¹ Adrian Leftwich, ‘Politics: people, resources and power’, in Adrian Leftwich, ed., *What is politics? The activity and its study* (Oxford, 1984), pp. 62–84.

¹⁰² Peter Rushton, ‘The poor law, the parish and the community in north-east England, 1600–1800’, *Northern History*, 25 (1989), p. 152.

¹⁰³ Quoting W. Newman-Brown, ‘The receipt of poor relief and family situation: Aldenham, Hertfordshire, 1630–90’, in R. M. Smith, ed., *Land, kinship and life-cycle* (Cambridge, 1984), pp. 419–20.

poor surviving from the early years of the seventeenth century complete with itemized payments in cash and kind to those considered deserving, are vivid enough indication of the paternalistic principles upon which the system depended. The complexities of this ideology should not, however, be underestimated. Paternalism might itself be pragmatic, since for overseers themselves facing the possibility of parish dependency in old age, provision of pensions for the elderly was a form of social insurance for their own futures. Furthermore, this governmental ethos evolved in the context of the emerging ideology of the poor themselves, especially the view that outrelief was their customary right.¹⁰⁴ To those regarded as strangers, moreover, the institutional structures of the poor law could be hostile and even punitive. The surviving orders and payments for the whipping of the vagrant masterless poor of the seventeenth century, and the removal orders of the eighteenth, are eloquent testimony of the grudging, mean attitudes of the vestry. But there was no paradox at work here. There was not, indeed could not be, any tension between these two sets of attitudes: the one presupposed the other.

The politics of the poor rate were arguably the most significant of those at work in early modern England. They were ubiquitous, yet multivalent, growing out of the local social and economic context, and developing variously as wider processes of change were refracted through local prisms of power and conflict. To neglect them is not only to demean those who made their own history in their own terms, to forget that in their daily lives English men and women themselves had to manage inequalities of power, it is also deeply damaging to the historical project of ‘understanding ourselves in time’.¹⁰⁵ The nature and genesis of the authority structures – both the rhetorics and repertoire of rule – which co-ordinate our own social experience, are by definition vital aspects of what we ought to know about ‘modern’ political culture, especially since so many of those structures are invested with (often ‘invented’) traditional meanings.¹⁰⁶ The appeal to such apparently immutable categories as ‘the parish’ and ‘the inhabitants’, for example, often disguises their highly pliable nature, for these were terms whose meanings were subtly transformed as the structures of local authority developed from the overseers of the Elizabethan period to the ‘parish states’ of Georgian England. The realities of social relations revealed in such a ‘political’ approach to the poor laws continue to resonate in our own time, retaining their strength precisely because they are too little known or understood.

¹⁰⁴ For poor relief as a form of insurance, see Solar, ‘Poor relief’, pp. 7–12. For the view that the poor came to regard outrelief as a customary right, see Snell, ‘Pauper settlement’, pp. 400–1; and Solar, ‘Poor relief’, p. 6.

¹⁰⁵ Laslett, *World we have lost further explored*, p. 274.

¹⁰⁶ Eric Hobsbawm, ‘Introduction: inventing traditions’, and David Cannadine, ‘The context, performance and meaning of ritual: the British monarchy and the “invention of tradition”, c. 1820–1977’, in Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *The invention of tradition* (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 1–14, 101–64.