

# 'I cannot keep my place without being deascent': Pauper Letters, Parish Clothing and Pragmatism in the South of England, 1750–1830

Peter D, Jones

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PETER D. JONES

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# ‘I cannot keep my place without being deascent’: Pauper Letters, Parish Clothing and Pragmatism in the South of England, 1750–1830<sup>1</sup>

PETER D. JONES

*Department of Medieval and Modern History, University of Birmingham,  
Birmingham B15 2TT*

**Abstract** This paper examines the issue of pauper agency under the old poor law. It relies on an examination of the ‘voice’ of paupers as it appears in a hitherto neglected source, pauper letters. The ‘face-to-face’ nature of poor relief has often been commented upon by historians, yet despite an ongoing historical preoccupation with all aspects of its administration, the question of how paupers actually interacted with, let alone were able to influence, the provision of that relief remains largely unexamined. Concentrating on requests for, or involving the issue of, clothing, this paper argues that paupers not only demonstrated a keen awareness of the imperatives underpinning relief policy in the locality, but also utilised aspects of many long-standing and powerful cultural discourses to strengthen their case for clothing relief.

## Introduction

This paper is about two things. Firstly, it is about the politics and practicalities of clothing the poor through the agency of the old poor laws in the agricultural south of England during the early nineteenth century. As such, it is concerned with the actual requests made for clothing in a selection of parishes in Berkshire and Hampshire, with the kinds of clothing items that were given as relief, and (to a limited degree) with the question of where parishes sourced that clothing. But it is also about a much wider and in many ways more contentious issue: the relationship between pauper agency, that is, the strategies used by paupers, and the giving and getting of relief under the old poor laws. Using clothing and clothing relief as the ‘lens’ through which to view this issue, it is possible to demonstrate that the poor were highly self-conscious and discriminating in their requests for relief from the parish, filtering their material and practical needs through a fine rhetorical mesh so that such requests to a greater or lesser extent fulfilled, or corresponded to, the expectations and imperatives of those in a position to grant or deny them. This is not to imply a *lack* of real material need on the part of paupers who made requests for relief including clothing: on the contrary, it will also become clear that something like a ‘crisis’ in the clothing of the labouring poor of England and Wales was evident to contemporaries from at least the last decades of the eighteenth century. Neither is it to suggest that requests for relief

which included the issue of clothing were purely a rhetorical or strategic tool, a way of gaining special favour with the vestry in order to extract what was desired. Rather, it is to demonstrate that paupers were aware not only of what kind of relief was most likely to be made available to them, but also of much wider cultural discourses on issues such as clothing, decency and propriety, and that this awareness inevitably fed into their dialogue with parishes, strengthening requests for much needed relief including that of clothing.

Non-elite clothing, and the clothing of the poor in particular, has enjoyed a significant upsurge in interest over the last few years.<sup>2</sup> So too has the subject of the 'agency' of the poor and the survival strategies they employed in order to make ends meet.<sup>3</sup> More recently, work has emerged which has begun to demonstrate the ways in which the parish poor both conceptualised and projected their own predicament as paupers.<sup>4</sup> This latter work is unprecedented, and it relies on a hitherto neglected source that gives the lie to the universal lament of social historians, that 'the voice of the poor themselves does not come to our ears'.<sup>5</sup> That source is the great body of letters from out-parish paupers to the overseers of their home parishes in which they requested relief, and which exist in their thousands in archives up and down the country. It is hard to understand why such a source should hitherto have been so neglected: the most likely reasons are a natural caution over what is a problematic and unsystematic source, and concerns over questions of 'authenticity' and representativeness.<sup>6</sup> One thing is for certain, however: now that they have been 'rediscovered' by historians, they point forcibly to ways in which we can, for the first time, begin to reconstruct the experiences of paupers during the delicate process of negotiating relief *in their own words*. As such, the following discussion relies heavily on the evidence presented by pauper letters from a selection of parishes in Berkshire and Hampshire, as well as those collected by Thomas Sokoll from Essex.<sup>7</sup>

Pauper letters are both eloquent and revealing of the ways in which the poor constructed their appeals to parish authorities. The dialogue between paupers and overseers was no less conditioned by expectation and convention than any other form of strategic dialogue: yet, as Thomas Sokoll points out, the voice of the poor in the letters was also curiously, almost uniquely, personal, even intimate.<sup>8</sup> Very often, in their idiomatic spelling and phraseology, the letters seem to record the 'voice' of the poor themselves, and for all that we must remain professionally detached from the source of our enquiry, it is just as important to hear that 'voice' in its own context. For the purposes of this study, it is also important to note that pauper letters are filled with requests for clothing, as well as references to issues *surrounding* clothing (or the lack of it) which clearly had a direct bearing on the nature of negotiations for relief. In fact the issue of clothing stands alongside references to illness and ill-health as one of the predominant motifs in the narratives of the out-parish poor, and one of the main purposes of this article is to explain why this should be the case.<sup>9</sup> 'Being hungry, what do people do,' asked E. P. Thompson, 'How is their behaviour modified by custom, culture and reason?'<sup>10</sup> His now famous injunction to historians to interpret, rather than simply describe, eighteenth-century food riots could just as well be applied to the requests of the early nineteenth-century poor for relief: being distressed and in great need, what did people do? How were their appeals for relief modified by custom, culture and reason; and, more pertinently, why were their requests filled with appeals for, and references to, clothing? These questions are at the heart of

what follows: this article is intended to be an exploration of meaning rather than simply an exercise in describing the needs and requirements of the poor under the old poor law. It will examine the meaning (or meanings) of references to clothing within the rhetorical and strategic requests of the poor for relief.

### **The moral charge: nakedness and interpretations of decency in pauper letters**

Although we are constantly expanding our knowledge of the operation of poor relief in the locality, we still know very little about the actual interface between paupers and parish officials under the old poor laws, or about the mechanics of negotiation.<sup>11</sup> We see glimpses of this process in qualitative records such as vestry minutes, but of course these are a loaded source, inevitably reflecting only one side of the argument. So we know that, just as with relief in general, the giving of clothing was very much a discretionary affair: in the New Forest parish of Fawley, for example, William Butler applied for two shirts from the vestry in January 1820, and 'he being a very old man the Vestry allows them'; George Keaton of Bucklebury was given a pair of shoes in 1823, 'he promising to keep from the parish some time'; Thomas Olden of Broughton was 'to have a shirt if he will promise the officer to leave of thieving'; and Betsy and Thomas Kingett, and Wm. Adcock of Botley were 'allowed each a new pair of half boots as a reward for their perseverance in [lamming] the straw and grass flat'.<sup>12</sup> These are essential insights into the application of relief policy in the locality as it related to clothing under the old poor law, of the carrots and sticks that were employed by officials in allocating relief in general and clothing in particular. On occasion it is even possible to see glimpses of the ways in which clothing (or its withholding) could be used as leverage by vestries to enforce their own economic or moral codes: at Fawley in 1819, John Bundy applied for a pair of Shoes, to which the vestry responded, 'not granted, keeps a dog'; at Ringwood in 1823, Elizabeth Walter requested several items including a shift, apron and gown, but she was refused and told, 'sell your cows'.<sup>13</sup> But on their own, vestry records inevitably leave half the story untold. Pauper letters provide a vital corrective to this kind of historical anopsia. They give us a unique insight into the operation of the poor laws from the point of view of the recipients, rather than solely from the perspective of the administrators. What they demonstrate is that negotiation was never *simply* a matter of economic or practical need and the fulfilment of that need. In fact, it is entirely possible that the observation of behavioural and linguistic protocols, and the wider cultural context within which relief was sought and given, were every bit as important as the demonstration of need in this process.

This becomes abundantly clear if we focus on rhetorical appeals for relief that include references to nakedness and inadequate or insufficient clothing on the part of paupers and their families. In this type of appeal, clothing, or the lack of it, is a *motif*. Often, relief in the form of clothing (or its cash equivalent) is not the actual focus of the appeal at all; rather a pauper's 'nakedness' or want of clothing stands as a cipher for extreme distress. It also reflects a much wider and deeper cultural preoccupation with clothing the poor throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries which, as John Styles has recently

demonstrated, had its roots in scripture and found tangible expression in the many formal and informal charities which were concerned with clothing the poor.<sup>14</sup> Thus, Elizabeth Gaines, asking for cash relief for her son (who, despite having a dependent family of his own, is reliant on his parents for support) is clearly aware of this wider context when she emphasises that:

It is not in our power to keep him with the income that my husband has and he have a fammely of small children of his own and he cannot think of distressing them in such a manner besides poor thing he is allmost naked to the world.<sup>15</sup>

The use of this kind of imagery, the motif of nakedness, is common in pauper letters, and this is nowhere better illustrated than in Thomas Sokoll's groundbreaking collection of 758 pauper letters from Essex, where it appears again and again: 'I have not Cloathing Enough to Cover my Nakedness . . . my children are almost naked', ' . . . if you would be so kind as to Send Me a trifull to put afue Clothes on my Boy Back as he is almost naked . . .', 'the boy is almost naked for want of clothes', 'if youe will Be So Good For to Send only 6 ShillinGs it will Git me somethnG to ware for I am nearly naked my Self'.<sup>16</sup> Though it may seem obvious, it is important to emphasise that nakedness in these letters was rarely, if ever, intended to reflect the literal condition of the pauper. Rather, it is a rhetorical device, as George Watson's letter from London to Colchester on behalf of his daughter and grandson demonstrates:

[They] are both at this time destitute they have not got a Second thing to put on she has only one Patch.d Gown and scarcely a bit of flannell the Childs Dress is what I bought him 2 years agoe and is now Quite worn out – I Put a New Pr. of Shoes on is feet Last Week stood me in 4s. but it is not in My Power to do more . . . I humbly hope no offence my Daughter has been begging of me to send her & Child home sooner than be both Naked as they are but I thought I had best Write to you Sir.<sup>17</sup>

On the one hand, Watson states that his daughter and grandson have ragged clothing to cover them, yet a few lines later he employs the rhetorical device of absolute nakedness to convey the seriousness of their predicament. But he also brings to the fore another common rhetorical strand in this type of appeal, and one that is perhaps more likely to have had a foundation in the actual material conditions of paupers and their dependents: that of being barefoot or without shoes.

A lack of shoes is a subject that appears at least as often in pauper letters as the motif of 'nakedness'. Sarah Christopher wrote to the overseers of Fawley that 'I ham so unwell and my foots is so Bad that I Canot get a bought an I canot Do without the same money I been Nott got a shoes to my foot'; and Sarah Meades wrote, also to Fawley, that 'I don't know how to come to Fawley again unless I come for good for I have no Shoes to ware'.<sup>18</sup> Mary House, appealing to her home parish of Pangbourne, states:

[I]t is impossible to support ourselves with my husbands industry and the small allowance I have more especially since the advance in the price of bread my children are barefoot for want of shoes and it is totally out of my power to buy them any.<sup>19</sup>

The image of the barefoot pauper, and in particular, the barefoot pauper *child*, was, as we shall see, one that was embedded in both popular and 'polite' discourse by the first decades

of the nineteenth century. In pauper letters, it stands alongside nakedness as a familiar cipher for absolute want. Once again, it is important to emphasise (and to demonstrate) that a lack of adequate clothing, and in particular a lack of shoes, was a very real concern to parishes as much as to paupers in the early nineteenth century. But, in the spirit of E. P. Thompson, it is equally as important to 'de-code' the messages contained in pauper letters in order to understand better the nature of the dialogue that surrounded the giving and getting of relief.<sup>20</sup>

The use of motifs such as nakedness and the barefoot pauper clearly had a particular resonance with those who were in a position to make decisions relating to relief: how better to evoke images of destitution and absolute need in the minds of a distant and 'battle-hardened' vestry? Stories of nakedness brought into play a number of important subsidiary narratives, not least relating to the issue of 'decency'. Clearly, nakedness implied a lack of 'decency' in a number of ways: the relative indecency of being unable to clothe oneself and one's family in the midst of plenty, and a forced reliance on clothes that in themselves were not 'decent', but also the absolute indecency of being forced out into the world without adequate covering for one's body. But as paupers were anxious to emphasise, this state of 'indecency' was neither their fault, nor was it any longer within their power to do anything about it at the point at which they appealed to the parish. Mary Head states that her children are shoeless, 'and it is totally out of my power to buy them any'; Elizabeth Gaines says that 'it is not in our power' to rectify her son's state of nakedness. As a result their appeal confers not only an economic, but also a *moral* responsibility on the parish to restore them to a state of 'decency' by clothing them properly. Clearly, paupers were aware when writing such letters that the strength of their appeal for relief lay as much in its rhetorical construction as in the demonstration of actual material need. But if we accept this, then it also raises the question of how far such appeals were *simply* a rhetorical device? How far was the reliance of paupers on culturally embedded images of nakedness and the barefoot child merely a means to an end, the favourable response from the vestry?

### **Clothing 'crisis': reality and perceptions**

The best systematic source for the household accounts of labouring families at the end of the eighteenth century can be found in two well-known works of early social analysis: *The Case of the Labourers in Husbandry* by David Davies, and *The State of the Poor* by Frederick Moreton Eden.<sup>21</sup> Between them, Davies and Eden collected 201 sets of accounts from parishes across England and Wales and 168 of these, or more than three-quarters, show labouring families at the end of the eighteenth century in deficit when household income is matched against yearly expenditure. What they also demonstrate is that clothing was by far the single largest category of expenditure for labourers after daily and weekly subsistence. At Crawley in Hampshire, for example, Davies found that for a family of six, yearly expenditure over and above weekly subsistence was as follows: Rent, £2 0s. 0d.; Fuel, £1 10s. 0d.; Clothing, £4 0s. 0d. At Kegworth, Leicestershire, Eden found that for a family of eight the figures were: Rent, £1 15s. 0d.; Fuel, £1 10s. 0d.; Clothing, £8 5s. 1½d., and the same proportions are more or less repeated throughout their figures.<sup>22</sup> In

other words, when household income was insufficient to fulfil family need, as it appears to have been by at the least the last years of the eighteenth century, clothing was likely to be one of the first areas of expenditure to experience cutbacks. In fact, Davies states in his introduction to *The Case of the Labourers* that it was his observations in his home parish of Barkham in the mid-1780s that labourers' families were 'indifferently fed; badly clothed; some of the children without shoes and stockings' that led him to undertake his study in the first place.<sup>23</sup>

Davies and Eden's evidence for the late eighteenth century is confirmed elsewhere for the early nineteenth. In 1837, a clothier in Chichester stated:

I have for nine years carried on, in the city of Chichester, a general business of clothing for the labouring poor . . . upon inquiry, I not only found them worse clothed [at the end of that period], but full one-half of the number of children I was in the habit of shoeing were without shoes, which strongly reminded me of poor Irish children.<sup>24</sup>

The clothier attributed this situation directly to the operation of the New Poor Law, but while there does seem to have been some further deterioration in the clothing of the labouring poor after 1834, this was merely the continuation of a long downward trend. A decade earlier, for example, farmer Banyer of Buckden, reported:

I have enquired the price of a material article of expenditure, which is shoes, and I find that it is a very heavy expense upon the labourers; for instance, now it costs our men 30s. a year for shoes . . . my labourers are in the habit of saying that they feel the expense of shoes more than anything.<sup>25</sup>

Evidence of an increasing 'crisis' in clothing the poor can also be seen in the significant upsurge of formal and informal charitable bequests of clothes in the last quarter of the eighteenth century,<sup>26</sup> and it is interesting to note that in the period immediately before the Swing risings, the south of England saw a huge increase in such donations. In January 1830, for example, the Duchess of St. Albans distributed warm clothing to the poor of Brighton; Lady Shelley distributed 'clothing of every description' to the poor of Mansfield parish; Admiral Digby and Lady Andover gave out 'a quantity of warm clothing, counterpains &c. &c. to be made amongst the poor men and women of the parish of hermitage, Dorset'; and the inhabitants of West Meon 'subscribed upwards of forty pounds which has been applied to the purchase of blankets and clothing for the poor of that parish'.<sup>27</sup> Clearly, the use of the imagery of nakedness and inadequate clothing or shoes in pauper letters was far from being *merely* a rhetorical device. It reflected, to a greater or lesser extent, what were observably familiar conditions to many if not most parish officers in England and Wales by the first decades of the nineteenth century. This is a point of some importance, because despite the empirical foundation of such appeals there is no doubt that they were a powerful element in the rhetorical armoury available to paupers when claiming relief, and just as they would have lacked the practical power to move the vestry without material foundation, so they would have little rhetorical power if they existed in a cultural vacuum.

Claims of paupers for assistance that relied on the rhetoric of nakedness or being barefoot were made very much within a broad cultural discourse on the state of the poor, and on the uses and misuses of clothing more generally. On the one hand, images



of nakedness and bare feet were extremely familiar in popular culture as a way of conveying a picture of poverty and distress. Take, for example, the ballad 'Mechanics Lamentation':

Cold winter is here and things still getting worse,  
Makes one think Old England lies under a curse,  
Our children half naked, neither stockings nor shoes,  
Makes our hearts to bleed that we've no work to do.<sup>28</sup>

In 'Ye Tyrants of Old England', a similar story is told:

When we look upon our children, it grieves our heart full sore,  
To see them clothed all in rags, and we cannot get no more,  
With little meat in their belly they to their work must go,  
While yours do dress as manky as monkeys in a show.<sup>29</sup>

This is a thread we can follow in other forms of popular discourse too. John Styles has demonstrated how travellers to Scotland and Ireland emphasised the poverty and wretchedness of the inhabitants by referring to their bare feet and legs, and especially those of the children;<sup>30</sup> William Cobbett illustrated the growing agricultural depression by noting that 'as to the labourers, their bodies are clad in disgraceful rags';<sup>31</sup> and a correspondent to *The Times* in 1830 observed that agricultural labourers 'were a set of miserable-looking creatures, under-fed, feeble, without shoes, and altogether in a shocking plight'.<sup>32</sup>

As the subsistence crisis deepened following the end of the French wars, images of ragged and barefoot labourers were increasingly juxtaposed with others that gave new emphasis to the concept of 'indecent' in relation to clothing. Ballads emerged that dealt not with labourers, but with their employers, mostly farmers, who, it was alleged, insisted on slavishly following the latest fashions. These evolved from a tradition of songs lampooning the perceived obsession of the servant class with the fashions of their superiors, and were therefore part of a much longer cultural discourse surrounding notions of 'correct' dress (embodied in the medieval Sumptuary Laws) that reflected anxieties about the instability of a hierarchy where nobody could be accurately identified simply by dress alone. But by the first decades of the nineteenth century the trope of the opulently dressed farmer and his family became a much sharper comment on the moral degradation of the new farming class whose taste for 'luxury' was indulged at the cost of labourers' distress, and it is important to note once again that clothing was absolutely central to this kind of demotic analysis.<sup>33</sup> As the depression in agriculture began to bite deeper and harder in the early 1820s, a degree of grim satisfaction crept into popular songs that farmers would be forced to curtail their extravagance and, as a result, return to more 'honest', 'decent' forms of dress:

... if they had gone on in their old fashioned way,  
They never would have had double rents for to pay,  
But they brought a new fashion to dress up so grand,  
And now they must work hard like another poor man.<sup>34</sup>

Unsurprisingly, Cobbett too held out the hope that farmers would be forced to adopt a more sober and, by extension, a more 'decent' sartorial code:

[O]ut of their ruin the small farmers will rise again into life. Yes, I *shall* see the scarlet hunting-coats stripped from the backs of the farmers. I *shall* see the polished boots pulled from their legs.<sup>35</sup>

Here, notions of 'decency' are indistinguishable from natural justice: it was clearly considered indecent for farmers to be sporting hunting coats and high boots while their labourers wore rags and went barefoot, and increasingly the motif of farmers forced by post-war hardship to adopt once again the 'modest' dress of their forebears became a cipher for the restitution of just social relations in the countryside. Cobbett merely echoed the popular culture of the time when he called for a return to a greater equality of dress between farmers and labourers.

Clearly, then, rhetorical appeals for relief that relied on images of nakedness and bare feet to convey a picture of absolute want were part of a complex and multi-layered dialogue between paupers and parish officials. They had their roots, not only in empirically observable conditions, but in a series of evolving cultural discourses that focussed a harsh and unremitting light on the causes of those conditions. They were strengthened as much by the implicit injustices and 'indecencies' that lay behind the degraded clothing conditions of labourers as they were by the explicit elucidation of the 'indecent' of being inadequately clothed. The simple fact is that across England and Wales many of the men behind the vestry table to whom such appeals were made were themselves tenant farmers, whether old- or new-fashioned, and they could not have been ignorant of the debate surrounding their conduct, much of the moral underpinning for which had a distinctly sartorial edge. But if paupers were relatively sophisticated in tapping into a broad range of cultural discourses to strengthen their moral case for relief, it can also be demonstrated that they were just as aware of the practical constraints on the giving of relief from the point of view of the vestry, the most important of which in the early nineteenth century was the spiralling cost of poor rates.

### **Getting paupers a place: service and the appeal to 'compassionate pragmatism'**

It has been well documented that the cost of relief in England, and in the south of England in particular, rose significantly from the last decades of the eighteenth century.<sup>36</sup> The subsistence crises in the mid-1790s and in 1800–1 caused significant short-lived 'spikes' in relief spending, but overall the trend was relentlessly upwards from before 1790 until its peak just after the French wars. By this time, it is no exaggeration to suggest that parishes were overwhelmed by the cost of relief, and one of the main consequences of this was the development, after 1818, of a range of cost-cutting measures.<sup>37</sup> Parishes became increasingly anxious to reduce costs by any means possible, and one of the ways they attempted to achieve this was by placing paupers, and particularly pauper children, into varying lengths of service within the parish. In many places, this amounted to nothing less than an informal 'roundsman' system, whereby pauper children were 'balloted' or allocated to local farmers and rate payers in order to get them off the parish books. In 1822, for example, the parish officers of Preston Candover resolved:

In consideration of five lads out of employ ... Thomas Wigg should go to Mr. Lunn, George Westbrook & James Watmore to Mr. Wm. Thorp, John Westbrook to Mr. B. Thorp and [blank] Aslett to Mr. Wm. Pitt each to remain in his respective situation till Michaelmas next.<sup>38</sup>

What is of particular relevance here is that parishes employed a very specific strategy to get paupers into service: they furnished and maintained them with sufficient quantities of good quality clothing. At Brede, as early as 1791, the workhouse master instigated a drive to get pauper children into service, 'and the parish of Brede to clothe him/her'.<sup>39</sup> By the 1820s, this practice was so widespread as to be completely unremarkable in the records: at Enborne, 'S. Sandford applied for clothes for his daugh. Eliza gone to service, agreed she shd. have a petticoat & pr. of stockings'; at Fawley, 'Tiller applies for the bastard child of her Daut. who is gone into Service – The Vestry allows her 10/- to provide her with a little Clothing'; at Minstead, 'Widow Oliver's daughter (Eling) to go to Mr. Wm. Cull's one month as a trial, and if he approves of her he is to take her one year for her clothes'.<sup>40</sup> The list could be extended almost indefinitely.

Elsewhere, I have described this practice as an example of the 'compassionate pragmatism' of parishes when faced with increasing pauper numbers and spiralling costs.<sup>41</sup> As the example of Brede demonstrates it was certainly not unique to the 1820s. It has its roots in the long-established practice of clothing apprentices, and particularly pauper apprentices, at indenture, as this letter from Thomas O'Farrell to the overseers of Wallingford illustrates:

Gentlemen I have en quired into the affair concerning the girls cloths and she declar'd before Mr. Thomas Blissett ... that she resd. no more than one shift ... Mr. Brathwaite says the Parish stands charg'd 40 shillings for cloths for her, but that money was not layd for her when she came to me ... [I]t was [not as] if there was aney such money layd out when she went to Mrs. Costards for Mrs. Costard told me that she was all [dirtied] up with varment and nasteyness and that she would not undertacke another such a pase of work for 5 pound ... all the cloths she had when she was bound both good and bad is not worth 20 shillings ... Mr. Tuckwell promised me in my house she should have a handsome gound for Sundays and other things in proportion but she have not resd them ...<sup>42</sup>

O'Farrell's letter is interesting on three counts: first, it shows that an agreement was made on her being bound that the girl should come with a full set of clothes to the possible value of forty shillings; second, that the girl was first bound to a Mrs. Costard, and that part of the reason she was passed on was because she was covered with 'Varmet and nasteyness' when she arrived; and third, that not only was she expected to have clothes fit for service, but she was also expected to bring with her a 'handsome gound' for Sundays.

By the 1820s parishes had become much more systematic in clothing paupers, and particularly pauper children, not only for apprenticeship, but for service. But they had also become far more pragmatic. This was, after all, a strategy that was being used increasingly to *lower* the rates, and a wardrobe (such as the one outlined above) costing forty shillings was clearly a considerable sum for the parish to outlay in more than the most exceptional circumstances. By the nineteenth century, the figure was more likely to be ten or twelve shillings, although the vestry was also far more likely to make an explicit cost benefit analysis when making such a decision. At Ampport, for example, eight specific amounts are registered for clothing pauper children for service between 1809 and

1820: the mean figure is eleven shillings, nine pence and three farthings, the mode is ten shillings and sixpence and the highest amount is twenty shillings<sup>43</sup>. At Fawley, seven amounts are registered between 1820 and 1823: the mean is just under eleven shillings and sixpence, the mode is ten shillings and the highest amount is twenty shillings, although in this last case the vestry was keen to specify that it 'agrees to allow [the child] 12/- at present and if she goes on well to be advanced 8/- more'.<sup>44</sup> At Hungerford, it was 'Ordered that James Woodley have 1 pr. of shoes & a jacket and if he does not continue in his situation the jacket and shoes to be returned to the parish officer'; similarly, at Bishops Waltham:

The Widw. Others be allowed 10s./- for cloathing for her daughter Hannah on her going to a place at Southampton but if she leaves her place in less than two months the 10s./- to be stopt from her weekly allowance.<sup>45</sup>

A further feature of this practice was that children already in service, and therefore no longer technically paupers, were given clothing to remain there, reflecting the anxiety of parishes to keep paupers off the books once they had been found a place: 'Agreed that Wm Burton do continue Eliz. Connor to Lady Day next provided the parish allow her cloaths and he will buy her a pair of shoes'.<sup>46</sup> Clearly, parishes saw the temporary or semi-permanent lodging of paupers, and especially pauper children, in service as a very important strategy in mitigating ever-increasing costs, and it was a practice that had at its heart the exchange of relief in the form of clothing, or its cash equivalent.

Unsurprisingly, paupers were well aware of this particular parish imperative, and this is vividly demonstrated in pauper letters. Harriott Hughes wrote from her lodgings on Doctors Commons, London, to her home parish of Pangbourne in 1827:

[B]eing so very short of things at first, [I] must beg of you to send me some shoes and stockings and changes – as I cannot keep my place without being deascent . . . if I am obliged to leave my place we must both come down again which is what I should not wish to do if I can help it, but I have no chance of an other place if I cannot keep this, pleas let me hear from you very soon.<sup>47</sup>

It is clear that the request for clothes for (or to remain in) service formed a pivotal part of the strategy of out-parish paupers. Harriot Hughes' letter contains the veiled threat that without the requested clothing she would be forced to leave her place, and as a result would have to return to her home parish as a permanent pauper. Once again, this is a common thread (and threat) in the letters, and one that was not confined to the nineteenth century. As early as 1755, Henry Young wrote to his home parish of Wallingford to say that:

This comes to desier the ffavour of your goodness ones more towards my poor daughter Rachell which now are [off] her Unkles at London have sent for her but being so bear in Lining & stockings & shoes I have not wherewith in ye hole world to helpe her & they desiers I would send her up Preaty Clane [clean] which good gentlen be so mercifull at this time it may be ye making of ye poor girle & intier Ridanced ffrom you.<sup>48</sup>

Paupers were well aware that if they could demonstrate a direct link between the relief they requested from the vestry and the securing of a place in service, the vestry was far more likely to look favourably on them than otherwise. By the 1820s, this kind of request is not only commonplace, but routine in the letters of the out-parish poor: 'we have got

places for our two eldest daughters but they are very bad off for clothes and should be very sorry they should lose their situations on that account', wrote James Sykes to the overseers of Tilehurst; 'unless they can afford me something to find [my son] in Cloths so that I may make him a little decent to get him into a Place off my Hands I must and will send him down on the Parish Hands', threatened Arthur Tabrum to the overseer of Chelmsford.<sup>49</sup>

As John Styles has pointed out, 'cleanliness' and 'decency' were terms that were widely used throughout the eighteenth century to describe the clothing of others, and they carried with them not only a practical connotation, the need to ensure basic cleanliness for health, but a moral one, analagous to Wesley's injunction to 'Everywhere recommend Decency and cleanliness – Cleanliness is next to Godliness'.<sup>50</sup> When paupers like Henry Young and Arthur Tabrum used these terms, they were clearly aware, not only of their wide cultural usage, but also of the moral weight they carried. Yet in this context, to be decently clothed is not only to be in a morally desirable state, wherever the responsibility may lie, but also to be quite literally 'fit for service'. Like many other value judgements involved in the process of negotiating relief, notions of 'decency' were flexible and were carefully constructed depending on the precise conditions under which they were applied. Paupers, no less than parish officials, were aware, not only of the humanitarian responsibility that vestries had for the welfare of their poor, but also the likely constraints on that humanitarianism. Once again, this is not to deny the actual material needs experienced by paupers when resorting to relief. It is demonstrably true that masters did expect their servants to arrive 'decently', or 'Preaty Clane' as Henry Young put it, and with clothes fit for service. But this does not mean that their requests can be shorn of all rhetorical or strategic content or viewed simply as a looking glass in which is innocently reflected the material needs of would-be servants. Instead, we need to give paupers credit for being fully engaged in the process of negotiating relief, of being 'present at their own making' as paupers, to paraphrase E. P. Thompson once again.<sup>51</sup> As historians of a new and exciting demotic source, pauper letters, we could (and no doubt will) find ourselves caught up in long debates about how, and how accurately, they reflect the material needs of paupers, and even whether or not we do those paupers a disservice by suggesting that they dissembled, strategised or calculated in their construction to gain favour with the parish authorities. But we must not lose sight of the fact that they *were* undoubtedly a rhetorical source, that paupers *were* engaged in negotiating relief, and that by the 1820s they were likely to be both experienced and sophisticated at doing so. In fact, they had to become experts in this process because, not in spite, of the very real economic and material distress that they experienced in the first third of the nineteenth century, and one of the ways they manifested this was by demonstrating that they were acutely aware of parish imperatives when it came to allocating relief and, to a greater or lesser extent, tailoring their requests accordingly.

### **Clothing, service and 'parish pragmatism' in action: the case of Ringwood**

I have looked elsewhere at some length at the clothing that was given by the vestry at Ringwood during this period, and it would be inappropriate to go over the same ground

at any length.<sup>52</sup> But Ringwood is particularly useful for a study of this kind, not because it is exceptional in the nature or quantity of clothing it gave as relief, in fact, the evidence suggests precisely the opposite, but because the existing records are particularly rich, and highly differentiated. For example, the parish officers at Ringwood compiled a 'Wants Book' between 1814 and 1829 in which were recorded the details of all requests by the outdoor poor for targeted relief (that is, relief in kind; or, to put it another way, all relief other than subsistence payments in cash). The two volumes that comprise the Wants Book enable us to calculate that clothing and household textiles, including bedding, constituted ninety-two per cent of all requests for relief in kind during this period.<sup>53</sup> But the Ringwood parish records contain a wealth of other detailed information which is of direct relevance to this study, and which sheds new light on the practice of placing paupers out to service. For example, the vestry minutes show that by 1790, Ringwood had itself already established the system of balloting pauper children to various employers from the workhouse. They record a meeting on the 4th October:

Held this day in order to place out by Ballott sundry poor children now residing in the parish Workhouse of Ringwood aforesaid, the under-mentioned children were accordingly placed out in maner following (that is to say) . . . [ten children named].<sup>54</sup>

By the 1820s, it is clear that there was a regular traffic of pauper children between the workhouse and various masters in the parish. This is made clear in the rough workhouse minutes, which survive for the period between 1826 and 1830. These record all the day-to-day transactions within the workhouse, but by far the single largest category of entry is devoted to the discharge of pauper children to service, and their subsequent readmission.<sup>55</sup> The case of Louisa Isaac is by no means unusual: in the ten months between October 1828 and July 1829, she was discharged to Farmer Brown's for two months then readmitted to the workhouse; two months afterwards she was discharged to service at Mr. Troubridge's and readmitted five months later; finally she was discharged to service at Mr. Short's in July and readmitted a month later.<sup>56</sup> Unfortunately, this is where the records end but her case does serve to illustrate the significant 'traffic' that existed between paupers and various places of service. The Ringwood Wants Book gives many examples of clothing being given to pauper children explicitly to get them into, or to keep them in, service: in May 1818, Mr. Baily was given '20s. to put his son apprentice'; in April 1819, James Gibbs was allowed 'clothing for daughter to go to service'; and in June 1828, Mr. Roberts was given a 'frock, shift, shoes and stockings . . . for daughter to go to service'.<sup>57</sup> But directly attributable entries such as these are almost certainly the tip of the iceberg: at least one third of all relief applications in the 'Wants Book' explicitly relate to clothing for children, and it is certain that a high proportion of these relate to clothing for work or service.

It should be noted that there is something of a paradox here: historians have amply demonstrated that yearly service in agriculture was in significant decline by the early years of the nineteenth century, especially in southern England, and among the most plausible reasons given for this were the desire of parishes to prevent servants from gaining settlement by service and the changing attitude of farmers and their families towards boarding labourers.<sup>58</sup> The 'changing fashions' of farmers has already been hinted

at above, and much contemporary comment was focused on the refusal of farmers, and in particular, their wives, to put up with young servants under their roofs any more. In 1828, John Ellman of Glynde, Sussex, gave voice to this concern, saying: 'I am sorry to say . . . they think it a great trouble to have two or three servants in the house to attend to, which their grandmothers did not'.<sup>59</sup> Yet precisely during this period of significant decline, there seems to be real evidence of vestries, presumably made up in large part by farmers themselves, making ever greater efforts to board out their own dependent paupers, and particularly children, in order to get them off the parish books, and of being prepared to invest significant quantities of clothing (or its cash equivalent) in order to do so. Most, if not all, of the male children put out to service in the parishes mentioned above would have been destined for agricultural labour. While it appears that this was not always, nor even predominantly, for the full yearly period, and while the fact that these were parish paupers meant that no further settlement would be created in the parish by service, it is interesting to note that living-in service was, under specific conditions, still a highly favoured option for the local poor, even for those who were supposedly so vociferously against it. Once again, we are confronted by the 'compassionate pragmatism' of vestries caught between the rock of a humanitarian duty towards the poor, and the hard place of exponentially rising poor rates.

But the issue of the pragmatic parish becomes even more urgent when we look, not at what was being *given* to paupers by way of clothing relief in Ringwood after 1818, but at what was being *taken* from them in return for that relief. For Ringwood, it seems, required not only its indoor, but its unemployed outdoor poor to work for a living, and what they seem to have worked at most diligently, at least between 1817 and 1823, is the production and repair of shoes.<sup>60</sup> In the single year of 1818, for example, outdoor paupers made and repaired shoes to the value of £135 1s. 9d., the cash equivalent of 285 pairs of shoes at a rough figure of seven shillings a pair. This represents almost two hundred pairs of shoes more than was given as outdoor relief in that year. If we add to this quite remarkable productivity the fact that at any one time between one-half and one-third of the able-bodied poor inside the workhouse were engaged in the making of yarn, and the making and mending of cloth and clothes,<sup>61</sup> what becomes clear is that what John Styles has termed the parish's 'involuntary consumers' were also, in Ringwood at least, its 'involuntary producers'.<sup>62</sup> When we place the evidence of what was being made by paupers alongside what was being given to them by way of clothing relief, it becomes clear that the majority of the clothing given to paupers was of a type that could be sourced, to a greater or lesser extent, by the poor themselves (Table 1).<sup>63</sup> It is also important to note that it corresponds closely with the findings of John Styles for clothing allocations by parishes in the north of England in the eighteenth century.<sup>64</sup> Of course, it may be that Ringwood was exceptional in requiring its outdoor as well as its indoor poor to produce clothing for their own use. Yet in most other aspects of parish policy, and in particular the kinds of pragmatic (especially make-work) schemes after 1818, Ringwood appears to have been entirely typical of parishes in the south of England.<sup>65</sup> Clearly, much more work needs to be done in this area: in 1776 there were over 1,800 workhouses in England and Wales covering approximately one in seven parishes, and we still have very little idea of the manufacturing capacity of these institutions, let alone the multitude of informal



Table 1  
*Number and percentage of clothing and textile items granted as relief  
 at Ringwood (excluding shoes), 1814–29*

Shirts	363	40.97
Bedding (all)	116	13.09
Shifts	72	8.13
Clothes/Clothing	60	6.77
Linen Cloth	60	6.77
Smock Frocks	40	4.51
Trousers	30	3.39
Petticoats	25	2.82
Jackets	22	2.48
Stockings	21	2.37
Bed Clothes	15	1.69
Flannel	15	1.69
Changes/Small Clothes	14	1.58
Breeches	5	0.56
Frocks	5	0.56
Gowns	5	0.56
Calico Cloth	4	0.45
Waistcoats	4	0.45
Aprons	2	0.23
Great Coats	2	0.23
Hats	2	0.23
Coats	1	0.11
Cotton	1	0.11
Gloves	1	0.11
Pinafores	1	0.11
<i>Total</i>	<i>886</i>	<i>100.00</i>

manufacturing schemes for the outdoor poor that are likely to have existed in the first decades of the nineteenth century.<sup>66</sup> It may well be that such enterprises had a significant impact not only on what was given, but on what was requested, by the parish poor in terms of clothing relief.

Overall, however, the picture presented by the parish of Ringwood suggests a number of things: first, that paupers, and particularly pauper children, were being placed in service or other forms of employment from at least the last decades of the eighteenth century, and that this practice became far more systematised as the relief ‘crisis’ deepened after the end of the French wars; second, that the main strategy used by the parish to facilitate this practice was by giving good clothing relief of a quantity and quality sufficient for service; and third, that it is possible that clothing relief was of particular importance in terms of overall relief policy, not only because it was viewed as a way of facilitating paupers back into work, but because, uniquely, it could be sourced, to a greater or lesser extent, from the labour of paupers themselves. What is also abundantly clear is that paupers were acutely aware of the special place of clothing in relief regimes, and that they were extremely adept at using this knowledge in negotiating for relief. ‘Gentlemen, the Bearer, my son (John Butler) waits on you with this to address as your parishioner in hope of



partaking your favour of cloathing', wrote John Bush to his home parish of Wantage as early as 1766:

[H]aving no other than he appears in which circumstance has in many instances precluded him from employment for means to avoid this necessity. My present situation being out of employ, together with the expenses attending my wifes late lying in has totally deprived me of all ability to assist him in this particular, and having lately had several enquiries for his service if this accommodation is afforded him I am induced to make this application, not doubting but for this good commendable purpose you will extend your assistance and trust it will prove the means of launching him into life & in future enable him to obtain a sufficient support & perhaps establish some other settlement or at least prevent any more trouble to you respecting him. A good place being secure to him on return under your favour, the consideration thereof will I hope render him worthy of your attention & that every good may attend it to all parties is the only wish of your most obedt. Servant.<sup>67</sup>

### **Conclusion**

Historians have calculated that as much as twenty per cent of the population of England was more or less reliant on poor relief by the end of the French wars, and recent research suggests that this figure was likely to have been much higher in the agricultural south of England.<sup>68</sup> Pauperism, whether permanent or temporary, was a fact of life for huge numbers of English labouring families at the beginning of the nineteenth century. But it is clear that paupers were not without a degree of influence over the systems of relief on which they depended, and that the giving and getting of relief was definitely a two-way process. Pauper letters give us a unique insight into the way in which the hopeful recipients of parish relief were able to combine rhetorically sophisticated conventions, reaching far beyond the narrow confines of parish relations, with known and observably familiar conditions in order to achieve specific results in the locality. On the one hand, it is clear that paupers were fully aware of the need to 'play by the rules' of the pragmatic parish, just as they were of what was expected and even required of them in the act of making applications for relief. Time and again, in the pauper letters, they demonstrate a sophisticated understanding of the constraints under which vestries operated, tailoring their requests towards specific types of relief (clothing) for specific circumstances (service or employment) that they knew were likely to be more favourably received. But it is just as clear that paupers themselves were instrumental in making and adapting those rules, not least by implicitly referring to contested cultural discourses from far beyond the vestry room itself. By consistently rehearsing images (such as nakedness and the barefoot child) which were firmly embedded both in popular culture and polite discourse to emphasise their absolute need, paupers used their rhetorical voices to draw parish officials into wider debates about the rights and wrongs of being raggedly clothed in a land of relative plenty. In addition, this meant defining and utilising different notions of 'decency' to take account of the many different needs expressed in relief applications, some of which could be used to subtly shift the onus of responsibility and moral obligation from paupers themselves to those behind the vestry table. We do not know if Maria Langford was successful in extracting relief from Wallingford parish, but having detailed her husband's disabling illness and its effect on her and her child, she made it doubly difficult for the gentlemen

of the vestry to refuse by signing off her letter: 'P.S. Sr. I am very willing to work to get my bread, provided I had but necessaries and Raiment fit to appear in'.<sup>69</sup> When it came to negotiations for relief, and in particular for parish clothing, there is no doubt that paupers had at their disposal a considerable practical and rhetorical armoury that they were highly adept at deploying on the old poor laws' front line.

### Notes

1. An earlier draft of this paper was presented the conference: 'Narratives of Poverty: English Pauper Letters, 1780–1840, in Comparative Perspective' at Hagen, Germany, in October 2007. My thanks are due to Thomas Sokoll and Steven King for organising that conference; to Vivienne Richmond for her useful comments on an earlier version of this paper; and especially to John Styles for his invaluable observations, comments and suggestions, without which this paper would be much the poorer. Any errors or inconsistencies are, of course, entirely my own.
2. See especially John Styles, *The Dress of the People: Everyday Fashion in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven, 2008). See also John Styles, 'Clothing the North: The Supply of Non-Elite Clothing in the Eighteenth-Century North of England', *Textile History*, 25:2 (1994); John Styles, 'Involuntary Consumers? Servants and Their Clothes in Eighteenth-Century England', *Textile History*, 33 (2002); John Styles, 'Custom or Consumption? Plebeian Fashion in Eighteenth-Century England' in Maxine Berg and Elizabeth Eger, eds., *Luxury in the Eighteenth-Century: Debates, Desires and Delectable Goods* (Basingstoke, 2002); Steven King and Christiana Payne, eds., 'The Dress of the Poor, 1700–1900', *Textile History* (special edition), 33 (2002); Steven King, 'The Clothing of the Poor: A Matter of Pride or Shame?' in Andreas Gestrich, Steven King and Raphael Lutz, eds., *Being Poor in Modern Europe: Historical Perspectives 1800–1940* (Oxford 2006); Peter Jones, 'Clothing the Poor in Early-Nineteenth Century England', *Textile History*, 37:1 (2006); Miles Lambert, 'Cast-off Wearing Apparell': The Consumption and Distribution of Second-Hand Clothing in Northern England during the Long Eighteenth Century', *Textile History*, 35:1 (2004); Beverly Lemire, 'Peddling Fashion: Salesmen, Pawnbrokers, Tailors, Thieves and the Second-hand Clothes Trade in England, 1700–1800', *Textile History*, 22:1 (1991); Beverly Lemire, 'A Good Stock of Cloaths': The Changing Market for Cotton Clothing, 1750–1800', *Textile History*, 22:2 (1991).
3. See especially Tim Hitchcock, Peter King and Pamela Sharpe, *Chronicling Poverty: The Voices and Strategies of the English Poor, 1640–1840* (Basingstoke, 1997); Steven King and Alannah Tomkins, *The Poor in England 1700–1850: An Economy of Makeshifts* (Manchester, 2003).
4. See, for example, Hitchcock, King and Sharpe, *Chronicling Poverty*, chapters 7, 8, 9; Thomas Sokoll, *Essex Pauper Letters 1731–1837* (Oxford, 2001); Thomas Sokoll, 'Negotiating a Living: Essex Pauper Letters from London, 1800–1834' *International Review of Social History* 45 (2000); Thomas Sokoll, 'Writing for Relief: Rhetoric in English Pauper Letters' in Andreas Gestrich, Steven King and Lutz Raphael, eds., *Being Poor in Modern Europe: Historical Perspectives 1800–1940* (Geneva, 2004); Steven King, "'Stop This Overwhelming Torment of Destiny": Negotiating Financial Aid at Times of Sickness under the English Old Poor Law, 1800–1840', in *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, 79:2 (2005); Steven King, "'It is impossible for our Vestry to judge his case into perfection from here": Managing the Distance Dimensions of Poor Relief, 1800–1840', *Rural History*, 16:2 (2005).
5. J. L. and Barbara Hammond, *The Village Labourer 1760–1832* (London, 1911), p. 242.
6. The question of 'authenticity', or who actually wrote the letters and to what purpose, is complex, although Thomas Sokoll and Steven King have done a good job of assuaging historians' concerns in their work so far (see especially Sokoll, 'Writing for Relief', and King 'Stop this Overwhelming Torrent of Destiny', 238–240). My own view is that the issue of

‘authenticity’ in terms of the rhetorical output of the poor is something that requires a much more rigorous treatment than it has received so far, something I hope to address in the near future. For the purposes of this article (and in a nutshell) I have taken a stance that is similar to that of an anonymous correspondent to the *National Review* in 1861 in relation to popular ballads: ‘[They] are almost always written by persons of the class to which they are addressed; and the very sameness of them, the family likeness which runs through each separate branch of them, shows that they are adapted to meet the wants and views of that class’ (quoted in Roy Palmer, *The Sound of History* (Oxford, 1988), p. 13).

7. Sokoll, *Essex Pauper Letters*. Pauper letters collected specifically for this study come from the parishes of Sonning, Pangbourne, Tilehurst, Wallingford and Wantage in Berkshire, and Bishopstoke, Brokenhurst and Fawley in Hampshire. See below for archival references.
8. Sokoll, ‘Writing for Relief’, p. 103.
9. For narratives of sickness in the letters, see King, ‘Stop This Overwhelming Torment of Destiny’, and King, ‘The Dignity of the Sick Poor’.
10. E. P. Thompson, ‘The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century’, in *Customs in Common* (London, 1991), p. 187.
11. For recent work on how the old poor law was administered in the locality, see (for the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries), Steve Hindle, *On the Parish? The Micro-Politics of Poor Relief in Rural England c.1550–1750* (Oxford, 2004); for the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, see especially Keith Snell, *Annals of the Labouring Poor: Social Change and Agrarian England 1660–1900* (Cambridge 1985), pp. 104–137, and Samantha Williams, ‘Poor Relief, Labourers’ Households and Living Standards in Rural England c.1770–1834: A Bedfordshire Case Study’, *Economic History Review*, 58:3 (2005), 485–519.
12. Hampshire Record Office (HRO) 25M60/PV1, 5th January 1820; Berkshire County Record Office (BCRO) DP 28/8/1, 29th November 1822; HRO 137M71/PV1, 20th December 1821.
13. HRO 25M60/PV1, 21st November 1821; HRO 22M84/PV1, 16th May 1829.
14. Styles, *Dress of the People*, 247–255. Styles notes that ‘clothes were the third most common form of provision for the poor provided by endowed charities in the early nineteenth century, after money and foodstuffs’ (p. 250).
15. BCRO DP/132/18/12, no date, possibly 1835.
16. Sokoll, *Essex Pauper Letters*, pp. 315, 322, 333, 533.
17. *Ibid.*, pp. 356–7.
18. HRO 25M60/PO35/896 26th May 1830, and HRO 25M60/PO35/894 9<sup>th</sup> October 1830.
19. BCRO DP/91/18/10, 27th October 1828.
20. Thompson, *Customs in Common*, p. 11.
21. David Davies, *The Case of the Labourers in Husbandry Stated and Considered* (London, 1795); Frederick Morton Eden, *The State of the Poor: or an History of the Labouring Classes in England* (London, 1797). John Styles has recently questioned the accuracy of their collection methods, suggesting that ‘their findings should be treated with considerable caution’. However, in the final analysis he concludes that ‘Despite these shortcomings, the information on clothing in the family budgets ... remains informative, as long its limitations are recognised’. Styles, *Dress of the People*, p. 255, 266.
22. Davies, *The Case of the Labourers in Husbandry*, Appendix 1, p. 205; Eden, *The State of the Poor*, Appendix XII, cccxliv.
23. Davies, *The Case of the Labourers in Husbandry*, p. 7.
24. *Select Committee on the Operation of the Poor Law Amendment Act, 1837: Minutes of Evidence*, p. 19.
25. *Report from the Select Committee on Labourers’ Wages, 1824*, pp. 21–22.
26. For the ‘assisted acquisition’ of clothing for the poor, see Styles, *Dress of the People*, Chapter 15, and Vivienne Richmond, ‘“No Finery”: The Dress of the Poor in Nineteenth-Century England’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of London, Goldsmiths College, 2004), chapter 5.

27. *The Southampton Town and County Herald, Isle of Wight Gazette, and General Advertiser*, 2<sup>nd</sup> January 1830. The same pattern is visible in almost any provincial newspaper in the south of England for the same period, and is also clearly visible in the national press, for example in *The Times*. John Styles notes that charitable donations of clothing were common during periods of hardship throughout the eighteenth century, but the records suggest that they became far more regular and formalised after the crisis years of 1799–1800. Styles, *Dress of the People*, p. 249.
28. ‘Mechanics’ Lamentation’, in the Bodleian Library Collection, University of Oxford, Harding B 11(2392).
29. ‘Ye Tyrants of Old England’, in Manchester Central Reference Library, BR Q398.8 S9.
30. Styles, *Dress of the People*, pp. 20–24.
31. William Cobbett, *Twopenny Trash*, No. 1, July 1830 p. 12.
32. *The Times*, 26th November 1803.
33. For a fuller discussion of the trope of the opulently dressed ‘new-fashioned farmer’, see Jones, ‘Clothing the Poor’, 32–3; Jones, ‘Captain Swing and Rural Popular Consciousness: Nineteenth Century Southern English Social History in Context’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Southampton 2003), pp. 96–104; Ian Dyck, *William Cobbett and Rural Popular Culture* (Cambridge, 1992), chapter 3; and, more recently, Styles, *Dress of the People*, pp. 184–8.
34. ‘The Farmers Never Done’, cited in Roy Palmer, *The Painful Plough* (Cambridge, 1972), original in Norfolk and Norwich Millenium Library.
35. William Cobbett, *Political Register*, 11th March 1823, p. 757.
36. For discussion of the ‘crisis’ of poor relief at the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth centuries, see especially Mark Blaug, ‘The Myth of the Old Poor Law and the Making of the New’, *Journal of Economic History*, 23:2 (1963); D. A. Baugh, ‘The Cost of Poor Relief in South-East England, 1790–1834’, *Economic History Review*, 28, 1 (1975); K. D. M. Snell, *Parish and Belonging: Community, Identity and Welfare in England and Wales 1700–1950* (Cambridge, 2006), pp. 213–14.
37. Peter Jones, ‘Swing, Speenhamland and Rural Social Relations: The ‘Moral Economy’ of the English Crowd in the Nineteenth Century’ in *Social History*, 32:3 (August 2007), 271–90.
38. HRO 46M69/PV1, 22nd October 1822.
39. East Sussex County Record Office (ESCRO) PAR.253, n.d., 1791.
40. BCRO DP51/8/1, 14th November 1829; HRO 25M60/PV1, 14th February 1821; HRO 90M71/PV1, 2nd May 1828.
41. Jones, ‘Clothing the Poor’, 27–9
42. BCRO DP/139/18/4/6, 16th January 1768.
43. HRO 43M67/PV1, Ampport Vestry Minutes.
44. HRO 25M60/PV1, Fawley Vestry Minutes.
45. BRO DP/71/8/3, 4th March 1822; HRO 40M75A/PV2, 6th September 1825.
46. BCRO DP/51/8/1 (Enborne), 3rd April 1804.
47. BCRO DP/91/18, 23rd March 1827.
48. BCRO DP/139/18/3, 29th April 1755.
49. BCRO DP/132/18/12/29, 29th January 1829; Arthur Tabrum to Chelmsford, 23rd December 1828, cited in Sokoll, *Essex Pauper Letters*, p. 275.
50. Styles, *Dress of the People*, p. 209; Wesleyan Methodist Church Conference, *Minutes of several conversations, between the Rev. John Wesley, A.M. and the preachers in connection with him. Containing the form of discipline Established among Preachers and People in the Methodist Societies* (London, 1779), p. 11.
51. E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London 1963), p. 8.
52. Jones, ‘Clothing the Poor’, 19–22.
53. Jones, ‘Clothing the Poor’, 20.

54. HRO 95M95/PV1, 4th October 1791.
55. HRO 22M84/PO119, Ringwood Rough Workhouse Ledger, 1826–30.
56. HRO 22M84/PO119, 20th October 1828–15th August 1829.
57. HRO 22M84/PV3, 11th May 1818, 18th April 1819, 28th June 1828.
58. The literature on domestic and agricultural service in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is diverse and extensive, but see especially Snell, *Annals of the Labouring Poor*, pp. 67–103; and L. D. Schwarz, 'English Servants and Their Employers During the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries' *Economic History Review*, 52: 2, (May 1999), 236–56.
59. *Report of the Select Committee on Criminal Commitments and Convictions* (1828) pp. 36, 32.
60. HRO 22M84/PO107, Ringwood 'Shoe Accounts Book', 1817–1823. It is important to note that those outdoor poor employed in the making and repair of shoes were *additional* to those employed elsewhere by the parish on the roads etc., and those working for local employers under the parish's vigorous and well-enforced 'roundsman' system.
61. HRO 22M84/PO111, Account of the Number of Residents in Ringwood Workhouse and How Employed, 1814–23. In addition, we also know that between April 1816 and March 1819 Anthony Pritchett, an elderly workhouse resident, was paid a mere twelve shillings and four pence for weaving thirty-four separate pieces of dowlas and sheeting. See HRO 22M85/PO106, Ringwood Workhouse Accounts, 'Incidental Payments', 1816–19.
62. Styles, *Dress of the People*, chapter 16.
63. The material in Table 1 is very similar to the information presented in Jones, 'Clothing the Poor', 22. However, at that time only the information from 1823 to 1829 was available for analysis.
64. Styles, *Dress of the Poor*, p. 265.
65. Jones, 'Swing, Speenhamland and Rural Social Relations', 279–81.
66. Parliamentary Papers: *Report from the Committee appointed to inspect and consider the Returns made to the Overseers of the Poor, in Pursuance of Act of last Session*, 15th May 1777.
67. BCRO DP/143/18/5/8, 2nd June 1766.
68. For the best recent discussion of the numbers reliant on poor relief, see Steven King, *Poverty and Welfare in England 1700–1850: A Comparative Perspective* (Manchester 2000), pp. 111–140. Samantha Williams estimates that in the Bedfordshire parishes of Campton and Shefford, up to one third of the population benefited directly from poor relief between 1790 and 1834, although this figure could be much higher in crisis years: Samantha Williams, 'Poor Relief, Labourers' Households and Living Standards in Rural England c.1770–1834: A Bedfordshire Case Study', *Economic History Review*, 58: 3 (2005), 516.
69. BCRO DP/139/18/4/2, 10<sup>th</sup> May 1755.