ENCOUNTERING AND MANAGING THE POOR: RURAL SOCIETY AND THE ANGLICAN CLERGY IN NORFOLK 1815 – 1914

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by

Robert James Lee M. A.

Centre for English Local History
University of Leicester

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ABSTRACT

Robert Lee
‘Encountering and managing the poor: rural society and the Anglican clergy in Norfolk, 1815 – 1914’

This thesis is an exploration of the relationship between Anglican clergymen and the inhabitants of Norfolk’s rural parishes in the nineteenth century. It considers the potential impact clergymen could have upon a number of areas of secular life: on education as school managers, on law and order as magistrates, and on aspects of local economic, social and behavioural management as poor law guardians and charity trustees. Clergymen also negotiated a complex series of social relationships with agricultural labourers, with religious Nonconformists, with trade unionists, with tenant farmers, and with local landowners (who were often their patrons or kinsmen).

The thesis examines many facets of social, religious and political dissent in the countryside, and discusses the extent to which individual clergymen – by their attitudes and actions – might exacerbate or soothe tensions within their ‘spheres of influence’. The notion of clergymen as ‘colonial governors’ is posited. The term offers an explanation for their managerial role in local society, and elucidates the way in which the parish clergy operated as administrators rather than instigators of change.

Nineteenth-century rural society also witnessed the decline of a once-vibrant popular culture, based on an affinity with nature and lived to the rhythm of calendrical custom. It is argued that popular culture was actively suppressed by parish elites and that the Church played a pivotal role in the process of suppression. The pageantry of parish entertainments, the re-casting of the law so that it acted against custom, the rise of the clergyman as antiquarian historian and amateur archaeologist, the symbolism and architecture of the restored church and the newly-built Rectory are all cited as being of iconic significance in this respect.

By blending qualitative and quantitative methods, the thesis aims to build an holistic picture of the way in which two cultures encountered each other in the nineteenth-century countryside, and explains how one culture came to dominate, incorporate and manage the other.
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On a personal note I must acknowledge how much I owe to Anita and to Beverley for their tolerance, their interest and their practical help. Without them this work could not have been completed. Nor can I forget Tom, who has helped with the typing.

To all of these people must go a share of the credit for anything worthwhile that emerges from these pages. Its weaknesses, omissions and errors are, however, all my own work.

Robert Lee
November 2002
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

B.P.     Bury Post*
E.A.     East Anglian*
E.D.P.   Eastern Daily Press*
E.E.N.   Eastern Evening News*
N.C.     Norfolk Chronicle*
N.M.     Norwich Mercury*
N.N.     Norfolk News*
N.R.O.   Norfolk Records Office
N.S.L.   Norfolk Studies Library
P.L.U.   Poor Law Union
P.M.     Primitive Methodist Church
P.P.     Parliamentary Papers
P.R.O.   Public Record Office
R.C.     Royal Commission
S.C.     Select Committee
U.M.     United Methodist Church
U.R.     United Reformed Church
W.M.     Wesleyan Methodist Church
W.R.     Wesleyan Reform Church

* Reference dates from newspapers are given in the form 10.11.66 (10 November 1866). The year can always be assumed to be prefaced by 18 unless otherwise specified (e.g. 10.11.1966 or 10.11.1766).
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Introduction

On Christmas Eve, 1869, the Rev. William Allen of Shouldham hurried through the village to his parish church, anxious to ring the Christmas bells and to maintain a tradition that he had kept in every one of the preceding years of his ministry. When he reached the church, however, he found the door to the bell chamber securely locked against him. As Allen knew only too well, this was the work of the parish’s unofficial sexton, Mr. Malby. Determined and resourceful, however, the clergyman fetched ladders and climbed into the belfry through the trapdoor in its floor. Now the traditional Christmas peal could be rung, but not before Allen had descended the tower stairs and bolted the door from the inside, so that the rogue sexton was, in his turn, locked out.1

Whether, as he scrambled through the belfry trapdoor, William Allen paused to reflect on how things had come to such a pass we cannot, of course, know, but the kind of tensions on display here were becoming familiar enough in the second half of the nineteenth century. Mr. Malby, the ‘parish’ sexton and his rival Mr. Towler, the ‘vicar’s sexton’ – who competed vigorously with each other to lead the singing in church, to toll the bell and to dig graves – were the front men in a village power struggle that centred on access to vestry meetings for working people, control of the managing board of the National School, and public scrutiny of the accounts and administration records of local charities. Nor could it be said that Allen was being treated with a unique degree of disrespect. Within ten years we can read of the rector of South Lopham, returning home late one night and knocking his head against an effigy of himself hanging just inside the rectory gateway;2 or the Rev. James Homfray of Bintree who for several months ran the gauntlet – if he was out after dark – of groups of villagers who would join hands across his path and jostle him with shouts of ‘Rowdy!’ and ‘Bullseye!’;3 or of the Rev. Septimus Lee Warner passing a window in the High Street of Little Walsingham and seeing there ‘an

1 William Allen kept detailed notes and all his legal case papers and correspondence on the Shouldham churchwarden dispute bound together into a single volume, which he bequeathed to future incumbents. (N.R.O. PD356/148)
3 N.N. 12.10.67
apparatus revolving before a light and exhibited in a glass behind an upright coffin on the lid of which was a photograph of the Rev. Lee Warner himself. 4

All of these incidents, and a number of others like them, happened in rural Norfolk parishes in the 1860s and 1870s and sat squarely within a tradition of anti-clericalism that is exemplified by one quotation from a trade union source: ‘The labourers do not require, and do not receive, any attempt to persuade them that the clergy are their worst enemies. They have know it from their infancy’. 5 With these words, published in October 1873, the trade union paper the Labourers' Chronicle set out in the starkest possible terms the antipathy that existed between the Anglican clergyman in his rural parish and a labouring poor who were demonstrating an ever-increasing willingness to pursue political and religious independence.

Work done by historians over the last four decades - about rural Methodism and agricultural trade unionism, about the ‘social crime’ of poaching and about the ‘Swing’ risings of 1830 – must finally have laid to rest the myth of the passive, deferential nineteenth-century countryside. 6 But if we accept that protest was widespread – even endemic – it is its particular flavour that often seems doubly significant. A remarkable number of protest actions were being conducted in traditional, even ritualistic ways. In them we see much more than an interaction between rich and poor, possessors and the dispossessed. Two cultures were clashing in the countryside of nineteenth-century Norfolk: one that pre-dated living memory, was unwritten, popular, and took its cues

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4 N.C. 15.12.66
5 Labourers Chronicle 11.10.73, cited by the Rev. F. B. de Chair in Rev. M. W. Currie and Rev. F. B. de Chair, The Clergy and the Labourers’ Movement: Two Papers Read at the General Meeting of the Pastoral Work Association held at Norwich on Thursday November 6, 1873 (Norwich, 1873), p. 95.
6 A considerable list of books and articles could be appended here, but of the ones particularly influential to this thesis I would cite:
from the rough music and traditional dialogue of the moral economy, and one that was alien, legalistic, elite and authoritarian.

This thesis stems from a desire to explore the social, cultural and political tensions in these rural communities, and to understand the part played by the Anglican clergy in creating, exacerbating or soothing those tensions. It was in their secondary roles – as landowners, magistrates, poor law guardians, school governors and charity administrators - that clergymen had their most direct impact on the lives of the labouring poor, and if the notion of social control has any legitimacy it was here that it can most readily be seen in operation. For the clergyman worked within a shifting pattern of alliances in parish politics. In addition to the roles mentioned above he might be any – or all – of these things: a tithe-owner, a beneficiary of enclosure, a target of arson attacks, a kinsman of the local gentry, a campaigner against immoral housing and working conditions. As a consequence he was constantly negotiating and re-negotiating his relationships with landlords, tenant farmers, religious dissenters, trade unionists and agricultural labourers.

By combining qualitative and quantitative research methods it has been my aim to understand, in the most rounded way possible, the extent to which Anglican clergymen shaped the lives and prospects of their parishioners and influenced the economic and political destinies of their parishes deep into the twentieth century. Autobiographies, pamphlets, sermons, letters to the press, evidence to Parliamentary commissions, all give direct access to the thoughts and opinions of these men. More oblique – but equally significant – is the evidence of poll books, of Petty and Quarter Sessions records, of poor Law guardians’ minute books, of school governors’ meetings. There is evidence, too, that suggests itself only as a presence in the landscape. This thesis considers whether labourers’ cottages in ‘close’ parishes, or village schoolrooms, or newly-restored and Gothicised parish churches, were really the bricks-and-mortar symbols of benevolence and social generosity, or whether they were symptomatic of the ‘architecture of moral purpose’, by which means – to quote another trade union source – the poor might be
made to ‘fawn, cringe, lick, flatter, bow and scrape and sell their birthright for a mess of pottage’.

Understanding these issues might help to explain why the Rev. Septimus Lee Warner came face-to-face with his own photograph, stuck so provocatively onto a coffin lid in a shop window, or why his church was entered at the dead of night, a charge of gunpowder laid under the new organ, and an explosion set off which ‘shattered the instrument to pieces and inflicted serious damage upon the church itself’. More fundamentally, it offers a number of insights into the ways in which societies functioned – or malfunctioned – in the nineteenth-century countryside, and makes a contribution, too, to such important debates as the social significance of secularisation, the declining influence of the Church of England, the rise of rural Methodism and trade unionism, the rural exodus and its social implications, and the maintenance and control of public order.

This is, of course, a social, political and cultural approach to the subject, and one that largely leaves untouched many contemporary issues of religious belief, liturgical change and church reform. It has to be acknowledged, however, that, in an age when the established church was such a central feature of the body politic, every theological nuance seemed to be loaded with political significance. Ritualism, for instance, might offend the middle-class sensibilities of congregations who were accustomed to other ways of worship – and one old lady who could take no more jumped up in the middle of a service and shouted at the new vicar of Hunstanton: ‘Idols! You are an idolator!’ – but more materially it was seen ‘to destroy no small portion of the influence which the Church of England would otherwise wield over the hearts and minds of many who are either lukewarm . . . or entirely estranged’.

Among the ranks of the lukewarm and the estranged were the leaders and members of the agricultural trade unions, by now almost inextricably linked with the Primitive Methodist

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7 Letter to the English Labourer, 3.2.77 concerning the alleged maladministration of parochial charities in Wood Norton, held in N.R.O. PD407/46.
8 N.C. 10.11.66
9 This account and quotation from The Lynn Advertiser, 7 March 1891, held in N.R.O. PD294/31.
movement. Trade unionists reserved a special hatred for 'the detestable custom' of ritualism, and the *English Labourers' Chronicle* even produced a special supplement on the subject, entitled 'Christianity and Priestcraft', but the reasons for this particular antipathy seem, from a historical perspective, unclear and inconsistent. Criticisms of ritualists suggest that they had supplanted an earlier generation of clerics, once much more sympathetic to the labourers' cause. A poem in the *Labour League Examiner* from September 1874 appears to make this point:

'Ve had a minister once, sir
'Twas long before you came,
A man that was a minister,
Not only in the name.
Your decorations, copes and stoles
He didn't need much aid,
He cared too much for our poor souls
To think how his gown was made.'

In fact the poem does little more than highlight an intriguing opposition between the notions of Ritualism and Evangelicalism, Conservatism and Liberalism in the nineteenth-century church, a situation full of contradiction and paradox when it comes to understanding who stood where on the social questions of the day. Among the most implacable opponents of popular pastime and culture in the first half of the century, and among the church's most ascetic and unpopular clergy were members of its Evangelical wing. By comparison certain Ritualists could appear benignly tolerant of working-class life and culture.

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10 Scotland, *Methodism* details the links between rural trade unionism and Methodism, a subject also explored in Howkins, *Poor Labouring Men*.
11 'Christianity and Priestcraft' advertised in the *English Labourers' Chronicle*, 1 July 1882.
13 One might introduce here the Rev. William Henslowe (1802 – 1890), an Evangelical whose name will crop up at intervals in this thesis. Having antagonised the parishioners of Southery with his unyielding campaign against their popular pastimes, he went on to provoke an attempt to have him removed from his next living at Wormegay, generating *en route* a bitter controversy about the burial of a Dissenter's child. Southery: J. P. G. & A. V. G. A. Fysh, 'Six of one', *Norfolk Ancestor* 3.4 (March 1984), 52 – 57; Wormegay: Rev. W. H. Henslowe, *The Accepted Rejection* (Norwich, 1876); Burial: Rev. W. H. Henslowe, *Facts and Tracts in Evidence of the Apathy, Dereliction, and Degradation of the National Clergy* (London, 1844).
14 For instance, the Ritualist incumbent and diarist of East Dereham, Benjamin Armstrong, seemed less concerned by a trade union attempt to wrest control of the Rev. Henry Lombe's vestry at Swanton Morley than he was delighted at this embarrassment for an Evangelical neighbour 'who does not scruple to aggress
In dealing with its clergy, we have first to accept that we are dealing with a Victorian church that was being pulled in a number of different directions at once. Frances Knight has summarised the situation by describing the church as being, between 1800 and 1870, 'simultaneously in a state both of transition and of continuity with the past'. A church that was, at various times during the century, trying to reconcile a more modern, involved, professional approach to ministry with the revived appeal of the liturgy, religion and architecture of the medieval period – while at the same time juggling a renewed concern for devotion and ceremony alongside its many secular commitments – perhaps inevitably presented a schizophrenic face to the world. Benjamin Armstrong might well rail against the secular concerns of his neighbouring clergymen in 1850 – 'the farm, the Petty Sessions, or the Union Board are their occupations' – but it might equally be said that the revivification of the church's spiritual dimension was inextricably linked to the secularisation of society: as the century wore on, secular and religious functions were being ever more clearly and deliberately demarcated.

Questions and concepts such as this – notions that are often difficult, abstract and amorphous – are an almost constant feature of the study of nineteenth-century society in all its complexity. Perhaps it is worth commenting at this stage on the structure and methodology that I have tried to impose on this thesis in order to keep the study manageable.

Firstly, a word on the structure. Broadly-speaking the text is separated into two conceptual halves: a first part that deals with 'Encountering the Poor' and a second part that deals with 'Managing the Poor'. The division between these two parts is not intended to be rigid. Elements of 'encounter' and 'management' crop up in almost every issue

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15 F. Knight, The Nineteenth Century Church and English Society (Cambridge, 1995), p. 4


17 Armstrong, Norfolk Diary, p.13 (14 Sept., 1850)
examined and, for the sake of contextual clarity, each chapter has been allowed to develop an internal structure of its own, reflecting the same thematic division. The titles of the two parts are themselves indicative of a presumptive view that the clergyman stood in an authoritarian relationship to his parishioners and that his interaction with them took place across a gulf in social experience and cultural understanding. How far this presumption is justified is the constant, implicit question of the text.

Part One deals with all of those uncomfortable encounters that had the potentiality to become outright social challenge. How did the Oxbridge-educated clergyman come to grips with popular culture? How did he react as the observer or target of incendiarism and riot? How did he respond to religious and political dissent? Part Two considers the role of the clergy in seeing-off perceived challenges and in maintaining the social order. It covers the economic, moral and behavioural management that characterised poor law and charity administration; the provision of education and the nature and desirability of it when given to working-class children; and the dispensation of local justice from the magistrates’ bench.

As far as methodology is concerned, my work has centred predominantly on Norfolk’s rural parishes, the exact number of which has proved surprisingly difficult to pin down.\textsuperscript{18} Boundary changes, unifications, consolidations and rationalisations throughout the study period gave a quite fluid identity to some parishes, over and above the more natural processes of demographic change which had already sent a number of the parishes of the medieval landscape into terminal decline. Ultimately a value judgement had to be made about which parishes to omit from any systematic survey. Those without functioning churches had to go, along with parishes that had tiny and dwindling populations and those that had already been – for all administrative and ecclesiastical purposes – subsumed into a larger neighbour.\textsuperscript{19} To these omissions were added the several urban

\textsuperscript{18} For the purposes of this study cultural, social and political life in small towns such as Fakenham, Diss, Cromer, North Walsham etc. has been assumed to owe more to their respective rural hinterlands than to any nascent sense of ‘urbanisation’. Small towns have therefore been included in the rural survey, but the likelihood of subtle differences in such places should be acknowledged at the outset.

\textsuperscript{19} Examples of parishes eliminated from the study in this way, along with their status in 1851, include: Beeston St. Andrew, pop. 41, no church and administratively part of Sprowston; Leziate, pop. 199, no
parishes of Norwich, Kings Lynn and Great Yarmouth, meaning that the final number of rural parishes subjected to analysis was 664.\textsuperscript{20} A full list of these parishes, together with certain demographic and economic indicators, is given in Appendix D.

My aim has been to balance the relative strengths and weaknesses of both qualitative and quantitative approaches. This has entailed a thorough trawl through the archives of the Norfolk Records Office, the Public Records Office and a number of University and public libraries, the collection of the public and private writings of individual clergymen, and the collation of data for entry into an S.P.S.S dataset. Taken together these sources have facilitated an understanding and a theory of the clergyman’s changing position within the power, influence and authority nexus of the nineteenth-century rural community. Processing data through S.P.S.S, in particular, enables one to see patterns that would otherwise be obscured, especially in relation to structures of landownership and the dispensation of power through the ‘open-close’ parish system.\textsuperscript{21} To an extent, however, this analytical and forensic tool can also be something of a blunt instrument.

The failure to find relationships and correlations is as interesting and revealing as the discovery that they are there: local power systems which refuse to yield to analysis as statistical variables are often demonstrating the richness and infinite variety of human actions and interactions, and reflecting the individual personalities that lie behind them.

One further methodological complication should be mentioned. By taking a broad perspective across the secular work of the Anglican clergy, this thesis becomes much less a history of the clergy themselves than a history of the rural poor in their parishes. But this raises a conceptual difficulty: who, exactly, were the poor? Were they the ‘labouring poor’, the agricultural labourers stereotyped and lampooned by contemporaries as

\textsuperscript{20} Nevertheless, all of the omitted parishes had the potential to exert an influence on the overall picture, and information and evidence from them has been included in the text where appropriate.

‘Hodge’, who constituted ‘the largest occupational group in mid-nineteenth-century East Anglia’ and whose ‘dominance in some of the parishes was overwhelming’?\(^22\) Or were they, simply, the ‘not-rich’: the independent shopkeepers and artisans who identified and keenly defended differentiations between their status and that of the agricultural labourers, but who nevertheless found themselves bundled together into an elite-defined classification that more bluntly sought to identify those who were ‘managed’?\(^23\) I think the question must be allowed to remain open. For the most part the ‘poor’ referred to in these pages are the ‘labouring poor’, but the travails of a substratum of society to keep their distance from ‘Hodge’ – and the extent to which they persuaded parochial elites that there was a difference - is a sub-plot that should be continually borne in mind.

Any historical discussion of Norfolk clergymen is bound to fall at some time under the shadow of ‘Parson Woodforde’, the incumbent of Weston Longville between 1776 and 1803 whose diaries have provided generations of readers with an apparent short-cut to understanding social relations in eighteenth-century rural society.\(^24\) In this version the country parson lives well, with a rich and varied diet supplemented with smuggled brandies, and takes a genial and avuncular interest in the well-being of the parish poor. They, in their turn, are willing enough to tug their forelocks in appreciation and anticipation of the good things that come their way: the Christmas suppers, the charity doles, the one-off special-needs payments. The image is not without an element of truth, but to a reforming nineteenth-century clergy Woodforde’s era was viewed as ‘the midst of the Church’s deadness and imbecility’.\(^25\)

By the time William Marcon published his *Reminiscences of a Norfolk Parson* in 1927 a transformation was felt to be complete, as Canon F. J. Meyrick made explicit in his

\(^{22}\) D. Jones, *Crime, Protest, Community and Police in Nineteenth-century Britain* (London, 1982), p. 34. Jones records 77,517 agricultural labourers in Norfolk and Suffolk in 1841 and notes, too, the ‘monolithic and static nature of the labouring class’. From marriage records Jones states that ‘89 per cent of labourers were the sons of labourers and 78.6 per cent of labourers married the daughters of labourers’. See also M. Freeman, ‘The agricultural labourer and the “Hodge” stereotype c1850 – 1914’, *Agricultural History Review*, vol. 49 pt. iii (2001), 172 – 186 and Snell, *Annals*, pp. 5 – 9 for a discussion on the ‘Hodge’ stereotype.

\(^{23}\) See also E. P. Thompson, *Customs in Common* (London, 1993), p.17 on this point.


\(^{25}\) Armstrong, *Norfolk Diary*, p. 20 (5 May, 1854)
foreword to the volume: 'Passing from Parson Woodforde of the eighteenth century to Parson Marcon of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries . . . we are not merely in another century, or another Norfolk village. We move in a different world'.26 Meyrick's principal interest lay in the movement away from Woodforde's Epicurean self-indulgence towards a renewed awareness of 'the spiritual and physical needs of the people', but the metaphor of 'different worlds' - and, indeed, the collisions between those worlds - is one that has a broad application across the study period. On Good Friday, 1785, as part of his European Grand Tour, the Rev. William Gunn of Barton Turf attended evening service in the Vatican's Sistine Chapel. There he heard a piece of music so sublime he was obliged to 'retire unseen to give vent to Tears it is impossible to suppress . . . During the course of the Vespers the Tapers are all gradually extinguished but one, which just gives light enough to distinguish objects about you. A dead silence of a few moments takes place, everyone prostrate, and the voices from a Gallery begin . . . But Good God! Such voices! Such strains of melting Harmony enough to pierce the very Soul - every one was petrified, and it was the General consent that they thought nothing less than Angelic Powers could produce such Effects.'27

The grinding of cultural gears can only be imagined as Gunn subsequently tried to bring himself down from this experience, to concentrate again on the petty squabbles, bastardy orders and poor relief claims that came before him on the magistrates' bench. William Marcon, too, in spite of the distance that he liked to put between himself and eighteenth-century predecessors like Gunn, confessed to experiencing just such feelings as these when he commenced his lengthy ministry in the 1870s: 'I found life among bucolics very slow and lonely . . . To me the stolid taciturnity begat a moral wilderness . . . Perhaps the

27 M. Riviere, 'The Rev. William Gunn, B. D.: A Norfolk parson on the Grand Tour', Norfolk Archaeology 33 (1965), 357. Gunn had undoubtedly heard the Miserere of Allegri, one of the Vatican's most jealously-guarded musical secrets. Fifteen years before Gunn's visit the piece had been heard and transcribed by Mozart, by which means it eventually reached the public domain. It must have taken much longer to reach Barton Turf, however, and in 1785 Gunn was probably justified in saying 'these compositions have never been out of the Vatican'.

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greatest trial was the absence of higher grade music... to go year in year out without hearing again the harmony of a four-part song... was a sort of slow starvation'.

The full extent of this 'culture-clash' and its social and political ramifications is a recurring theme of the following chapters – not least chapter one, which deals specifically with clergy encounters with popular culture and the process of 'cultural incorporation'. It is worth noting some of the ambiguities that are inherent here. The church of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries – as will be argued, the church of the pre-Parliamentary enclosure era – was, in Bob Bushaway's words, 'locked into the customary calendar'. Nobody exemplified this more clearly than Parson Woodforde who, from the moment of his arrival in Weston Longville, not only accepted but actively sponsored the local culture that he found there, one that was often very different from the culture of his previous parish in Somerset. The various examples of largesse and customary doles, as well as the annual parish perambulation, were all readily embraced by Woodforde: the diarist recorded a world that was cyclical and, in developmental terms, largely static.

Gray's *Elegy Wrote in a Country Churchyard* of 1751 effectively celebrated the stasis of rural community:

> Beneath those rugged elms, that yew-tree's shade,  
> Where heaves the turf in many a mound'ring heap  
> Each in his narrow cell for ever laid,  
> The rude Forefathers of the hamlet sleep...

> Let not Ambition mock their useful toil,  
> Their homely joys, and destiny obscure;  
> Nor grandeur hear with a disdainful smile,  
> The short and simple annals of the poor'.

The imagery of Gray's poem could still be eulogised in the *Church of England Review* of 1837, which stated that the work 'speaks from every marble slab, from every little tomb

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28 *Marcon, Reminiscences*, pp. 16 - 17  
with its osier bands, from every straw-built cottage, and from every village church’. 31 Yet, by these early decades of the nineteenth-century, the tensions of ‘culture clash’ were becoming increasingly apparent, and the ground stood prepared and ready for a prolonged conflict over customs and cultures, old ways and new ways, education and economics, political freedoms and religious affiliations. ‘A learned Fellow of a College is sent to preach to a set of untaught rustics,’ wrote one observer, ‘and can neither see the necessity, nor give himself the trouble to write a sermon such people can understand . . . His church therefore continues empty and the meeting-houses full’. 32

Unsurprisingly, perhaps, relationships between parishioners and clergymen were shaped by attitude and prejudice on both sides. In a startling piece of polemic, one vicar’s wife described the agricultural labourer as lazy and indolent, only stirring himself to work when his wife or the local beer-shop keeper demanded some of his money. ‘Our labourer hates his employer,’ she wrote, ‘he hates his squire, but, above all, he hates his parson. They are all richer than he is, and he has been told by social agitators that they have taken the money and lands that should be his; . . . he has been defrauded of his rights, and the people who have defrauded him are ever with him. He hates them, but he conceals his hatred as well as he can, so that he may still benefit from their kindness.’ 33

Consciously or otherwise, Mrs. Batson had touched upon a number of the open wounds that suppurated in the nineteenth-century rural community: the identification of parson with squire and farmer, the self-same triumvirate that had robbed the poor of lands and rights at enclosure and who now held them in thrall as landowners, employers and the renters-out of tied cottages; the baleful influence of ‘social agitators’ who, in this context, were no doubt trade union activists but who had been ever-present as a cast of shadowy ‘strangers’ and ‘foreigners’ throughout the century; and a telling reference, too, to the

32 Wife of a Country Gentleman, A Woman’s Thoughts on Public Affairs, Including the Church, Pauperism and the Game Laws (Norwich, 1832).
33 H. M. Batson, ‘Hodge at home’ The Nineteenth Century, 31 (1892), 178
particular bitterness that only deference enforced by charity could engender.\textsuperscript{24} It took a rejoinder in the March edition of the same year’s \textit{Nineteenth Century} magazine, written by the Rev. Arnold Taylor, to point out to Mrs. Batson the nature of the half-truths upon which she had alighted.\textsuperscript{35} Taylor highlighted the way in which the parson, squire and farmers frequently formed a cartel that dominated the vestry and excluded labourers from any democratic participation in the political life of their communities. The parson, too, would interfere with religious freedoms, and would often be a supporter of the Conservative Party, ‘the party which has always stood in the way of Hodge’s ambitions’. His or his wife’s involvement with the Primrose League was also utterly transparent: ‘Hodge knows that it exists to keep him in his state of bondage . . . The truth is that all the parson does is tainted in Hodge’s nostrils. Hodge sees in all that is done for him only sops to keep him quiet . . . where, and as, he is’.

Fin de siècle, and the Batson/Taylor exchange demonstrated clearly that the Rev. Augustus Jessopp’s contemporary vision of the ‘ideal village’ - ‘a happy valley where a simple people are living sweetly under the paternal care of a gracious landowner’ and where ‘parson and squire work together in perfect harmony’ for the good of all – was as impossibly remote as ever.\textsuperscript{36}

Sometimes reinforcing, sometimes helping to break down entrenched positions, the character, personality and sheer capacity for work of individual clergymen stand in the equation as random and unquantifiable factors. One might seize upon the work of the Rev. Peter Skrimshire Wood of Middleton, for instance, who wrote the words ‘whore and mantrap!’ against the name of every unmarried mother in his baptism register, who launched endless tithe litigation against local farmers, and who was egocentric enough, in 1815, to christen his own daughter Congress Vienna Amelia in honour of events elsewhere in Europe, and conclude that here one had found a man unlikely to blend into

\textsuperscript{24} For more on the last of these points, see K. D. M. Snell, ‘Deferential bitterness: the social outlook of the rural proletariat in eighteenth and nineteenth-century England and Wales’ in M. Bush (ed.), \textit{Social Orders and Social Classes in Europe since 1500} (London, 1992), 158 - 184
\textsuperscript{35} Rev. A. D. Taylor, ‘Hodge and his Parson’ \textit{The Nineteenth Century}, 31 (1892), 359 - 362
the life of any rural community. But, emerging from the pages of this thesis, is the evidence that for every Skrimshire Wood there was a Benjamin Barker, working tirelessly to prove to sceptical and complacent colleagues that there was a link between contaminated water and cholera; a William Marcon, dedicating an entire life’s work to one community and growing with it towards a mutual respect and understanding; and an Ambrose Goode, prepared to go to jail – almost – for giving voice to the injustices visited upon the poor.

It cannot be concluded from this, of course, that the hardest-working clergyman was necessarily the poor man’s friend. Some worked diligently to dismantle popular sports and pastimes, some devoted enormous time and energy to projects and hobbies of their own, and even those whose work seems the most enlightened and the most obviously designed for the greater good sometimes had methods and motives that do not stand up well to detailed examination. Poor relief and charitable assistance, for example, were often made contingent upon enforced deference, the benefits only bestowed upon those who could demonstrate appropriate levels of social, political and religious conformity. In a related context, too, while the torch of enlightenment seems ostensibly to have been carried by those clergymen advocating free, compulsory education and an extension of the school leaving age, it is necessary to ask what purpose school education was actually intended to serve. Did it, in fact, represent the triumph of conservative values? Was this the way in which the establishment gained control of radicalism and legitimised dissent,

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37 Wood’s comments and the baptism entry for his own daughter are to be found in the Middleton Baptism Register 1811 – 1822, N.R.O. MF594/10. Among other examples of tension between Wood and local farmers, a libel case brought against him by Farmer Howes for remarks made in relation to tithe payment is detailed in N.M. 31.7.30.

38 Barker, Marcon and Goode respectively held the livings of Shipdham, Edgefield and Terrington St. Clement. A number of sources could be cited to indicate the work that they were doing in their parishes, but examples are: (Barker) P.R.O. MH 12/8478 Correspondence with the Mitford and Launditch Poor Law Union, Apr. – Sept. 1849; (Marcon) Marcon, Reminiscences, passim. ; (Goode) P.R.O. MH 32/60 ‘Substance of a speech prepared for the first meeting of His Majesty’s Commissioners under the New Poor Law Amendment Bill’ Terrington, 19 November 1835.

39 Visiting Cawston in 1854, Benjamin Armstrong noted that ‘the parish was shamefully neglected, the Rector (Mr. Bulwer) employing his time in the elevating task of mending pots and kettles.’ Armstrong, Norfolk Diary, p. 15 (5 July, 1852).
ultimately shepherding them forward and together into a more coherent, insular and conservative appreciation of ‘Englishness’ and ‘Empire’?

In the course of her polemical attack against the lazy and disrespectful agricultural labourer, Mrs. Batson set up one last intriguing opposition. ‘In trouble,’ she wrote, ‘[the labourer] runs to the parson for help, in prosperity he preserves a dignified distance; but neither in prosperity nor in adversity has he ever a good word to say for the man who spends his life in ministering to him’. The implication is that, despised though he may have been in some quarters, the parson was seldom ignored: he was simply too powerful, too influential – the man who knew which strings to pull and which ears to bend – for even his most hostile adversaries in the parish to remain completely detached from him. Where concerted attempts were made to ostracise or isolate an incumbent – at Burston, for instance in the years after 1913, or at Wormegay in the 1870s – the root cause was the perceived misuse of his authority rather than his irrelevance to the life of the community.

Of course, some antipathy had its origins in liturgical and religious practice, and as a Ritualist incumbent the diarist Benjamin Armstrong was never short of material detailing the criticism his innovations in music, furnishings and the conduct of services had attracted. Whether parishioners objected to the clergyman on spiritual or secular grounds, however, the stumbling-block that they always faced was the parson’s freehold, the legal device that ensured no incumbent could be removed from his living without a civil suit. In a final attempt to rid themselves of the Rev. William Henslowe, whose career trajectory had left in its wake a host of bitter and unresolved conflicts, the parishioners of Tottenhill and Wormegay wrote to the Bishop of Norwich:

'The inhabitants . . . wish to know if there is no way to remove their curate? If not, close their churches, as it is a mockery to pay a curate to preach to empty benches. He is so mentally deraigned as to address his Parishioners as Fiends and Heathens. If he is not in a fit state to execute his duties, he ought to have

41 Batson, ‘Hodge at home’, 178 - 9
42 N.R.O. MC 31/3 – 31/70 Burston Strike School documents.
See footnote 44 for source material concerning Wormegay.
someone to do it for him, and not for his Parishioners to stay at home, having no other place of worship to attend.\textsuperscript{44}

For men like Henslowe such democratic participation in the hiring and firing of clergymen was too absurd a notion to warrant much comment. ‘Ministers and People,’ he wrote, ‘like Rulers and Subjects, Parents and Children, Husbands and Wives, may not change each other but by divine permission and decree’.\textsuperscript{45}

If impatience with the divinely appointed and irremovable clergy was one source of anti-clericalism – and a major recruiter into the much more democratically inclined Methodist denominations – another must have been resentment of clergy wealth and the impressionistic sense of a corrupt power network that underpinned it. Still decipherable on an old weaver’s loom in 1929, alongside the faded portrait of a hangman, was a satirical poem that gave vent to some of these feelings:

\begin{verbatim}
'Money's my creed and I'll not pray without it,  
My heaven is closed 'gainst all those who doubt it,  
For this is the essence of parson's religion,  
Come regular to church and be plucked like a pigeon.

Fools sometimes ask what I do with the money,  
They might as well ask what a bee does with honey,  
I answer them all with a wink and a nod,  
I keep three thirds myself and give praises to God.

In the cool silent earth I may soon be laid low  
To sleep with the blest that went long ago,  
I shall slumber in peace till the great resurrection,  
Then be first on my legs to make a collection.'\textsuperscript{46}
\end{verbatim}

The satire is hard-hitting enough, but politically unsophisticated. The greed, materialism and spiritual superficiality of individual clergymen were soft targets, and any assault on

\textsuperscript{44} Letter dated 11 March 1876 reproduced in W. H. Henslowe, The Accepted Rejection (1876). Henslowe was the perpetual curate of Tottenhill and Wormegay, a position which granted him a lifelong tenure. His departure under a cloud from Southery is detailed in Chapter One. At Wormegay he was quickly embroiled in a particularly acrimonious dispute concerning the burial of a Dissenter’s child, his self-justification being published in W. H. Henslowe, Facts and Tracts (1844).
\textsuperscript{45} Henslowe, Accepted Rejection.
\textsuperscript{46} N. M. 25.5.1929. The poem was found on a loom in the parish of North Lopham and probably dates from the 1880s. Serpell, Lophams, passim has much on the antagonisms between the weaving community and a succession of Lopham parsons.
them left untouched the much more abstract and complex notions of who wielded power in the countryside, where that power came from, and how it was dispensed.

Certainly, pure wealth could be an issue. Anne Howes, the wife of a vicar of Morningthorpe, in a diary that is elsewhere heavily laden with the problems caused by ‘the smallness of our income’, writes without conscious irony of her husband’s refurbishment of the Rectory: ‘My dearest Howes began his plan of improvements in the two Parlours that is enlarging the Dining Room and throwing out a French window in the Drawing Room . . . The expenses attending the above named alterations amounted to upwards of 300£.’ Extravagances like this became an issue again later in the century when Rectories were refurbished and rebuilt – usually on a very grand scale – in an effort to secure clergy residency.

Whilst it would be wrong to project our own, twenty-first century notions of tact, fairness and equity onto a nineteenth-century social problem, it would be equally wrong, surely, to assume that labourers who were constantly exposed, day-by-day, to the chequerboard contrasts of mortal poverty and self-indulgent luxury would not occasionally have raised their gaze beyond their own struggles and looked for some of the root causes of the iniquities they saw around them. The charitable donations that came their way: soup doles, bread doles, coal doles, shillings and pence grudgingly given in return for a year’s worth of closely-monitored deference and enforced church attendance were often contrasted with the resources of the clergy themselves, widely held to have been the disproportionate and undeserving beneficiaries of enclosure.

Enclosure had an impact, too, that transcended its ostensible role as a system of land exchange and consolidation. Arguably it set in train decades of disputes and ill-feeling that occurred at the very interface between written, legalistic definitions of landownership, and customary, traditional understandings of land-use. In a very similar way the New Poor Law cut a swathe through those age-old ways of relieving the poor which had achieved quasi-customary status under the Old Poor Law, and effectively

replaced a holistic system of assistance with one that saw as its principal objective the aggressive reduction of poor rates. At risk from these and other innovations was a way of life, an established, localised ‘moral economy’ which had at its core a popular notion of identity and belonging. And there, at the centre of this cosmic disruption, stood the parish clergyman: if not quite the evil genius behind it all, at the very least the enabler, the facilitator, the enforcer who did the bidding of his gentry patrons and kinsmen and raked-off a handsome pecuniary reward.

Just such an impressionistic understanding of the situation must have informed much nineteenth-century anti-clericalism. The notion was self-perpetuating, too: even when they were not directly involved or were actually campaigning on behalf of the poor, clergymen were so heavily implicated in the iniquities of poor law and charity administration, the dispensation of justice and the collection of tithes that they were condemned by association. The abstraction was understood by the trade union chroniclers of the Burston school strike. Use the obvious and the immediate as your reference points by all means, was their advice, but only as a means of seeing the systems, the machinations, the wheels-within-wheels that are really shaping the lives of the poor. Their chosen quotation – a paraphrase of Aristotle – might well stand as an allegory for the study of local history itself: ‘To understand the things that are at our door is the best preparation for understanding those that lie beyond’. 48

PART ONE

ENCOUNTERING THE POOR
Chapter One

Church Restoration and Cultural Revolution: Encounters with Popular Culture

Introduction

Why is it that Victorian church restorations are so easy to spot? (Plate 2). Does their failure to blend seamlessly into the medieval Gothic that they seek to emulate stem merely from relative newness, or is there evidence that a different spirit was at work in the process of construction? This chapter considers the cultural meaning that underpinned the wave of church restorations in the second half of the nineteenth century, and in so doing explores how Norfolk’s clergy came to deal with the vestiges of an older popular culture that lingered on in their rural parishes.

The dire consequences, should a clergyman get it wrong and find himself in a parish where he simply could not settle, were not underestimated by some contemporary observers. ‘No clergyman should be allowed to accept a living the climate of which he knows would be uncongenial’, wrote one. ‘The neglect of so many of the clergy . . . is one cause of the . . . demoralisation of the lower classes and . . . the rapid progress of the Dissenters’.

The problem was that, for many new incumbents, the dislocation from Oxbridge cloister to village green came as a considerable culture shock. The Rev. William Marcon described his feelings on entering his first living, at Edgefield, in the 1870s:

‘Coming as a young man from . . . the camaraderie of College life . . . I found life amongst bucolics very slow and lonely . . . I missed the give and take of ordinary converse. To me the stolid taciturnity begat a moral wilderness. No one intitiated an idea; everyone waited for me to speak and then replied in monosyllables . . . I thought them ignorant [and] it sent me into myself.’

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1 ‘Wife of a Country Gentleman’, A Woman’s Thoughts on Public Affairs, Including the Church, Pauperism and the Game Laws (Norwich, 1832), p. 9
Clergymen faced a problem that transcended issues of religious belief and pastoral care. Among the forces at work in the countryside was the impetus of agricultural improvement, which carried with it an inherent threat to the belief-systems and customs of the labouring poor. Increasingly, rational and scientific approaches to farming had begun to undermine belief in what Howkins has described as ‘a quasi-magical intervention in the process of growth and fertility’. It can be argued, too, that an understanding of the ‘popular mind’ has always been an important resource for those who would seek to control or reform society, and that, as a result, nineteenth-century popular culture had a clear political dimension. E. P. Thompson has described it as a ‘plebeian culture’, an important weapon in the arsenal of the poor: ‘it is a defence against the intrusions of gentry or clergy [and] it consolidates those customs which serve [the poor’s] own interests’. And there was yet another facet to this, for not only was popular culture a threat to the values of elites, ‘it was increasingly viewed by socialists as dulling the senses of the proletariat and as a cataract preventing the perception of the reality of exploitation’.

Intertwined with popular culture was popular custom, an ancient dialogue of rights and responsibilities which performed a dual role for the labouring poor: establishing a social cohesion which enabled the poor to defend their rights as well as providing ‘models for socially disruptive behaviour’.

Strikingly, however, after a half-century campaign to secure its demise, the decline of popular culture suddenly became a cause for anxiety and regret. The antiquarian movement, with clergymen prominent, began to prize old superstitions, customs and dialects, seeing in them the vanishing core of a type of knowledge that was ‘other’ and valuable. As Marcon wrote, in the seventy-sixth year of his association with Edgefield,

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‘ignorant [the people] are not, but very full of knowledge of such things as they [are]
familiar with and I [am] not’.\(^7\) Without that knowledge, and denied those cultural and
customary touchstones that linked the poor to their past and to their environment, rural
life was deeply impoverished. The antiquarian and essayist Augustus Jessopp appreciated
this, and wrote:

‘The plain, ugly fact is patent to all who do not resolutely keep their eyes shut, that the agricultural
labourer’s life has had all the joy taken out of it, and has become as dull and sodden a life as a man’s can
well be made.’\(^8\)

This chapter considers the type of belief-systems that the nineteenth-century rural
incumbent could expect to encounter, and considers, too, the varying ways in which
vestiges of popular culture, as well as the perennial problem of parish custom, were
confronted and managed – or embraced – as the century progressed. The route into an
understanding of how these worlds collided often has to be oblique. Consequently the
nebulous remains of cultural encounters are sought in issues as diverse as the re-creation
by parish elites of idealised forms of popular pageantry, the re-alignment of pews in
church, and the replacement of ‘singing-galleries’ with organs and choirstalls.
Contextualised in this way, the newly-restored Victorian Gothic church – with its crisply
dressed stonework, its regular rows of low pews, its organ and its chancel-bound,
surpliced choir – can be re-evaluated as an icon of control and imposed order: a symbol
of Cultural Revolution.

**Encountering Popular Culture: Witches, Wise-Men and ‘Closed Communities’**.

‘The nineteenth century has not produced universal knowledge’, wrote the Rev.
Benjamin Armstrong of East Dereham in 1864, ‘I have been with two parishioners this
week who are really and truly persuaded that they are bewitched, a notion that is very far

\(^7\) Marcon, Reminiscences, p. 6.
\(^8\) Rev. A. Jessopp, Arcady: For Better For Worse (London, 1890), pp. 20 – 1.
from being extirpated in these country parts'. A number of Armstrong's clerical contemporaries recorded their own first-hand experiences of witchcraft and folk-magic survivals, often finding themselves on the receiving end of what the Rev. John Gunn of Irstead described as 'applications . . . for advice [made] by persons feeling themselves aggrieved by the imputation of sorcery'. To the frustration of many clergymen, Christian teaching had become conflated with vestiges of folk-magic to produce a hybridised belief system that hovered somewhere between picturesque ignorance and outright blasphemy. At the same time saints' days retained their importance as integral elements of the annual farming cycle. Consequently, when Robert Staff, landlord of the Maid's Head at Stalham, peered from an upper window opposite the churchyard to watch the annual St. Mark's Eve procession of the spirits of those parishioners who would die and those who would marry during the forthcoming year, he was manifesting a tacit understanding of the immutable wheel that bound past, present, future, nature, supernature, agriculture and religion, and kept them turning together in the popular imagination.

Arguably, the all-pervading nature of popular belief-systems began to pose a threat to nineteenth-century elites when they manifested themselves as an alternative means of social and political expression. Demonstrations of effigy-burning and 'rough music' were reported in tones of shock and outrage when instances occurred in the second half of the century, especially when the targets appeared to be the emerging engines of social authority. Middle class deponents who brought cases against their servants, policemen, a disciplinarian farm steward and an authoritarian Wesleyan minister were all the targets of

11 Bible fortune-telling at Bridgham and a prayer charm from Mattishall are both to be found in early twentieth-century folklore manuscripts (N.R.O. MS4322, 57 x 1). A lover's Bible charm using the Book of Ruth is described in C. Fendall, A Norfolk Anthology, (Ipswich, 1972), p. 130.
12 E. P. Thompson has argued that the calendar of popular festivities was manipulated by the church during the medieval and early-modern periods to coincide with the light labour months in agriculture that fell between Christmas and Easter (Thompson, Customs in Common, p. 51). Religion, popular culture and agriculture arrived together, inextricably linked, at the threshold of the nineteenth century.
13 Gunn, 'Proverbs', p. 295. St. Mark's Eve fell on the night of 24/25 April. Like St. Christopher, St. Mark was believed to protect against sudden death.
rough music or effigy-burning in Norfolk between 1848 and 1868. Occasionally customary forms of popular demonstration merged with very contemporary expressions of political unrest and manifested themselves in direct action against the clergyman. For instance, at Great Ellingham the Rev. Samuel Colby was threatened with being 'swum' in the village pond during the 'Swing' riots of 1830, and effigies of unpopular incumbents were exhibited in Little Walsingham, Bintree and South Lopham.

Even when its expression was not remotely political, popular culture and its associated knowledge-system posed a threat because it evoked a time when the lot of the agricultural labourer had supposedly been rather better. In the tiny Broadland parish of Irstead the Rev. John Gunn encountered weatherlore that was based on sunspot observation, the cycles of the moon, the abundance of autumnal hips and haws, the migrational behaviour of birds, and changing patterns of the stars in the night sky. The Oxbridge-educated clergyman in his rural living often found it difficult to come to terms with such a close, all-pervading affinity with nature, and experienced a cultural alienation from his parishioners that was further enhanced by the popular suspicion that certain aspects of the world of super-nature had not survived enclosure, a process with which, of course, the clergyman was closely associated. To some observers these belief- and knowledge-systems represented a kind of comfort blanket for the labouring classes which had gradually to be eased away from them if they were to embrace the new, increasingly scientific world of agriculture. One correspondent wrote to Dr. Taylor, an avid collector

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14 Most of these cases are discussed in detail elsewhere in this thesis. The locations of the incidents and the sources for them are as follows:
Middle-class deponents: Terrington, N.M. 11.5.50, Burnham N.C. 2.4.53, Clippesby N.N. 29.2.68; Police: Swaffham, N.N. 20.5.48; Farm steward: East Barsham, N.N. 22.8.68; Wesleyan Minister: Great Witchingham/Lenwade, N.C. 28.12.50.
15 P.R.O. HO 52/9. Colby to Melbourne, 6 December 1830.
18 An example of this is the case of the 'Jack o’Lanterns' at Neatishead which were said to have disappeared after the Enclosure of 1810. As Jack o’Lanterns were probably flares of marsh-gas on undrained land, the coincidence of these events undoubtedly had a scientific cause but to some, at least, the new land-management regime had driven away part of an old, magical world. Gunn, 'Proverbs', p. 299.
of Norfolk folklore: "One is left gasping at the credulity of the race . . . [But] to some extent one's whole life is a struggle to rid one's mind of its swaddling clothes".19

To men like the Rev. George Crabbe of Merton, the task of liberating the uneducated mind from the 'swaddling clothes' of popular culture fell to the clergyman and was straightforwardly an issue of parochial leadership. He cited pastoral neglect as one of the main reasons for the heavy concentration of witchcraft-belief in the Breckland region:

'It may astonish people 50 years hence to know that in the year of grace 1860 witchcraft & astrology was still believed in to such an extent in this neighbourhood as to support a Witch Doctor and also a "planet-reader" at Shipdham . . . In the memory of people still living 12 clergymen resided at Swaffham and served all the parishes round, some taking as many as 5 or 6 duties on the Sunday. No church had more than one service a week, many only once . . . a month. Within 30 years there was no resident clergyman at Merton, Thompson, Tuttington, Stuston, Croxtone, Breckles, Tofts, Langford or Threxton'.20

Crabbe's attack on the performance of his predecessors in the Breckland parishes failed to acknowledge one additional problem that must have faced them: the geographical isolation of their livings and the tendency for kinship links and attitudes to deepen and strengthen in remote and socially 'closed' communities. Clergymen in such parishes could expect to encounter a resistance to their ideas that was nurtured generationally and reinforced by a kinship network which was dense both vertically and horizontally.

Southery, a parish on the fen-edge of west Norfolk, was just such a community, and one that earned a degree of notoriety during the nineteenth century for the truculence of its inhabitants and the unwholesomeness of its social structure. Writing in 1876, the Rev. Benjamin Armstrong described it as a place 'where there are but three names in the parish. This betokens a bad state of affairs; isolation, intermarriage, scrofula, and many serious evils indeed'.21 Catherine Hall, wife of the rector of Southery in the 1890s, was initially amused by the same phenomenon: "The people here are all named Porter, Osler or Bell & have such funny nicknames - Mucky, Tit, Eels, Boiler, Lovy &c. - it is most funny, each member of the family is called by the same nickname'.22

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19 N.R.O. MS4412, P140A. Dorothy Coleman to Dr. Taylor, December 1925.
21 Armstrong, Norfolk Diary, p. 201. (16 October, 1876).
22 N.R.O. MC641/1, 785 x 2. Diary of Catherine Hall, Southery, 6 December, 1895.
Fifty years earlier, however, the Rev. William Henslowe had discovered just how difficult life could be for the proactive, involved and ambitious clergyman if he made himself unpopular in such a community. Appointed to the curacy by the absentee rector of Southery in 1838, Henslowe brought with him an evangelical zeal and impeccable social credentials: educated at Repton, King’s School Canterbury and Jesus College, Cambridge, the son of a Captain of Hussars and the nephew of John Henslowe, Chair of Botany at Cambridge and teacher of Charles Darwin. Little in this background prepared Henslowe for what he found when he arrived in Southery:

‘The moral and spiritual condition of the people [was] then most reprobate and abandoned. The population . . . destitute even of a Sunday school and of any parochial charitable endowment whatsoever, but having 10 beerhouses to resort to, besides poaching, gambling, Sunday cricketing and other lawless and godless pastimes for their occupation. There was only one . . . sermon preached per week.’

Henslowe’s remedy was to open a lending library and to commence a series of public lectures, but neither initiative attracted much support – either from parishioners or from neighbouring clergymen – and Henslowe soon found himself the target of direct action:

‘[November 28, 1838] At Midnight, the Parsonage Inmates were roused by the tramp of a loose horse by the windows and an alarm of Thieves, when it was discovered that The Garden had been robbed, the Poultry all stolen, The Stable forced, and the horse was loose. This was afterwards known to be the act of Parishioners and said to be in Revenge of information laid against the Beer shops.’

Much of the rest of Henslowe’s brief curacy was spent in a vain battle against the excesses of his parishioners - there can be little doubt that in Southery the ‘irresistible force’ of clerical energy met the ‘immovable object’ of rural culture - but it is worth asking whether any demographic evidence exists to support Benjamin Armstrong and Catherine Hall’s independently drawn conclusions that this was a community of a

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23 The following account of Henslowe at Southery is synthesised from two sources:
particularly ‘closed’ kind. Table 1.1 suggests that, in terms of parochial endogamy, Southery was remarkable even by Norfolk’s unusually high standards.24

Table 1.1: Southery. Parochial endogamy rates 1815 – 1894

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Endogamous marriages</th>
<th>Exogamous marriages</th>
<th>Total Marriages</th>
<th>Percentage Endogamous</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1815 – 24</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>84.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1825 – 34</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>91.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1835 – 44</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>88.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1845 – 54</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>96.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1855 – 64</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1865 – 74</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>74.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1875 – 84</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>82.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1885 – 94</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>76.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>545</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>639</td>
<td>85.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: N.R.O. Southery Baptism Registers, 1815 – 1894

Between 1845 and 1854, for example, only three marriages were contracted with partners from outside the parish, and endogamy rates throughout most of the first half of the nineteenth century were running at or close to 90%. Whilst Southery was a relatively populous place (pop. 1,155 in 1851), it seems inevitable that such a high rate of parochial endogamy would eventually lead to a dense kinship network and the kind of surname concentration that Benjamin Armstrong was later to identify as a potential hazard to physical and moral health. Table 1.2, an analysis of surnames in Southery’s baptism registers, demonstrates that Armstrong’s information that the parish contained ‘but three names’ was empirically unsustainable, but suggests that the impression may have grown from the extraordinarily high number of Porters, Oslers and Bells being baptised and

24 Parochial endogamy is defined as the proportion of marriages contracted between two partners who both come from the parish in which the marriage takes place. ‘Exogamous’ marriages have only one partner from the “home” parish. In his study of parochial endogamy in eight counties, Snell found that Norfolk had consistently higher rates of endogamous marriage than the other seven: K. D. M. Snell, ‘English rural societies and geographical marital endogamy 1700 – 1837’, Economic History Review (forthcoming).
from the fact that the parish's five main surname/kinship groups accounted for roughly one third of the population throughout most of the nineteenth century.25

Table 1.2: Southery. Baptisms and most frequently occurring surnames 1813 – 1897

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1813 - 30</th>
<th>1831 - 57</th>
<th>1858 - 78</th>
<th>1879 - 97</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total no. Baptisms</td>
<td>385</td>
<td>1203</td>
<td>865</td>
<td>636</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total no. Surnames</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>202</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Five most frequently occurring surnames</td>
<td>Porter, 60</td>
<td>Porter, 192</td>
<td>Porter, 161</td>
<td>Porter, 87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bell, 17</td>
<td>Osler, 52</td>
<td>Osler, 67</td>
<td>Osler, 26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Galloway, 13</td>
<td>Bell, 47</td>
<td>Bell, 37</td>
<td>Bell, 26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Crick, 11</td>
<td>Rogers, 34</td>
<td>Blowers, 29</td>
<td>Legge, 23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Osler, 11</td>
<td>Feltwell, 27</td>
<td>Feltwell, 21</td>
<td>Galloway, 18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Baptisms (top five surnames)</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>352</td>
<td>335</td>
<td>180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Top five surnames as % of all baptisms</td>
<td>29.1</td>
<td>29.3</td>
<td>38.7</td>
<td>28.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: N.R.O. Southery Baptism Registers, 1813 – 1897

The perception that nineteenth-century parish-clergy relations were damaged by being conducted through the medium of mutually exclusive, alienating, 'closed' communities was not, of course, one-sided, and the clerical profession itself could often appear to be a 'closed community'. Some parishes took on the appearance of 'dynastic incumbencies', their livings forever tied to one family, their ministers in post for a (sometimes very long) lifetime. An attempt has been made to quantify dynastic incumbencies, and to explore what for many parishioners must have been an impressionistic source of resentment: the sense that clergy-gentry kinship networks, in conjunction with some apparently interminable incumbencies, had effectively sewn up all potential routes to parochial patronage and power. The results are tabulated in Appendix F. Fifty parishes were sampled at random from seven Hundreds evenly spread across the county. The results indicate that incumbencies lasted a long time by modern standards, the average length

25 By way of comparison the parish of Litcham, with 120 baptismal surnames between 1858 and 1878, was unable to muster any surname group more dominant than Eastoe and Laws, with nineteen baptisms apiece. (N.R.O. MF699/19 Litcham Baptism Registers 1858 – 78). The parish did have a smaller population than Southery: 855 in 1851.
never falling below 10 years (Anmer) and reaching a high of 39 years (Winterton).26 Few correlations are to be found between incumbency length and other aspects of parochial society, however, reflecting the fact that for many nineteenth-century incumbents, irrespective of the ‘type’ of parish that they worked in, a ‘living’ really could be for life. Without hard evidence, therefore, one can only speculate on whether aspects of religious and political dissent owed something, at least, to disillusionment with these long-lasting, apparently inert Anglican incumbencies.27

The measurement of ‘surname concentration’ has been arrived at by calculating the number of surname changes among key players in the parish as incumbencies changed during the course of the century. The higher the ‘surname concentration’ figure the closer the kinship links may be assumed to be between clergyman, patron and local land-owner, and the more likely a parish is to be a ‘dynastic incumbency’ in which the living is handed down from father to son. Again, correlations with other social features are not strong, and no link could be established with ‘open’ and ‘close’ parish types.

Nevertheless, in some parishes at least, parish and clergy were prone to withdraw from each other and into their own ‘cultural communities’. These were mutually exclusive and incomprehensible, displaying a cultural apartheid which combined with the various political and administrative functions of the nineteenth-century parish to make life doubly difficult for those incomers who were striving to achieve both social legitimacy and cultural belonging. The parish, as one clergyman wrote, ‘seemed to be a complete kingdom – itself surrounded by its own ring fence’, and acceptance was not easily achieved.28 An illustration of this is provided by the Banningham witchcraft correspondence, consisting of two letters penned in apparent desperation by a woman named Sara Macklin, addressed to a ‘Mr. Covel’:

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26 Average incumbency length is measured by calculating the number of years between the start of the incumbency in place in 1815 and the end of the incumbency in place in 1914, and dividing by the number of incumbencies.

27 S.P.S.S tests, running incumbency length as a variable against open-close parish type, population size and levels of unrest and Nonconformity produced a series of very random results, indicating the absence of any correlative link. It should not be overlooked, of course, that as a measure, ‘average incumbency length’ is at the mercy of one utterly random factor: the lifespan of individual clergymen.

28 Marcon, Reminiscences, p. 6
'My Dear Frend Mr Covel, I Agane take the Freedham of Righting these fue Lines to you to inform you That This Old Susana Bartheram and Sara Canham say They kill my sister . . . as sune as my sister Go out of Dawes and This old Susan Bartheram sey Hir she Taken so she cant Hardley Spek and His Full of Pain and Hir Chest Fear if It Stop up Pleas Mr Covil to Put a Stop to Them and How whe Due Wish old Susan Bartheram was Dead . . .'

The correspondence goes on to cover a number of issues that a ‘wise man’ might be called upon to deal with: animosity between neighbours; rent arrears; antagonism about agricultural machinery; a thwarted love affair; some missing valuables. The true nature of the Macklins’ difficulties only becomes apparent, however, when the cast of characters that are mentioned is compared with the 1871 Banningham census. Most of the people named can be identified; all were natives or married to natives of Banningham, and all were surrounded in tight kinship proximity by other family groups with the same surnames. The exceptions were Sara Macklin and her brother Charles. He was a machine-maker from Huntingdon, she an unmarried woman from Shipdham. In their respective journals both the Rev. Benjamin Armstrong and the Rev. George Crabbe refer to the famous ‘Wise Man of Shipdham’, Benjamin Cobel, and it is he, clearly, who was the intended recipient of the Macklin letters. Ostracised in Banningham, the brother and sister turned for help and support not to a neighbour, still less to the local clergyman, Henry Kenny – who was himself an ‘outsider’ from Ireland – but to the ‘wise man’ from Sara Macklin’s home village of Shipdham: a man whose standing was high in the surrounding parishes, and whose reputation Sara Macklin now clung to in her new, distant home.

The evidence from Banningham suggests that popular culture did much more than establish a form of ‘class consciousness’. In association with the kinship network it could act as a badge of ‘exclusion’ as readily as a badge of ‘belonging’ and it made the parish ‘kingdom’ even more difficult for lay and clerical outsiders to penetrate. The idea of a fiercely local identity – one reinforced by parish perambulations and finding voice in highly-localised dialect usage – is one that should be held on to in any discussion of a

29 N.R.O. MC167/1 – 3, 629 x 1. Macklin to ‘Mr. Covel’ 16 February 1871.
30 Armstrong, Norfolk Diary, p. 72 (18 May 1860); N.R.O. PD532/32 Crabbe, ‘Annals’.
31 For a further discussion on the links between Banningham and Shipdham, see chapter four.
broader-based popular culture. Together, local cultures and ‘closed’ communities retained the potential to unseat some of those clergymen that had failed to find acceptance. On 21 November 1860, Benjamin Armstrong ‘called at West Bradenham to say “good-bye” to poor Stone. He goes to Ireland to a parish of 5000 of whom not above twenty are members of the Irish church. He will, perhaps, get on better among his own people than he got on here’.32

In what ways, then, can parish elites be said to have ‘tamed’ a disparate and socially divisive popular culture? Many aspects of that culture appeared to have a constituency that actually extended well beyond the labouring classes: Harvest ‘frolics’ with their pagan imagery and their secular pursuit of ‘largess’, and Whitsun, with its thirteen days of drinking, dancing, and vestigial fertility rites, were tolerated and indulged, if not actually participated in, by rural elites. The record of these festivities, along with those of St. Valentine’s Day, Midsummer and many others, kept by clergymen like George Crabbe at Merton, might justifiably be understood as the record of a ‘rural’ rather than a purely popular culture.33

Crabbe, however, was writing retrospectively in the 1870s, about an era that was forty years in the past. During that forty years, aspects of popular rural culture had come under direct attack. Written in 1841, a pamphlet described the debauchery of the ‘Harvest Home’:

‘The evening and night is spent amid clouds of tobacco smoke and tankards of ale, and glasses of rum, and desecrated with the song of the drunkard and the oaths of the profane; drunkenness, quarrelling and fighting frequently take place... Youths of both sexes associate through the night [and] indulge freely in those beverages which, taken to excess, banish all moral restraint from the mind.’34

Alun Howkins has discerned a socio-economic motive behind the change. He describes the attack on Whitsun traditions as 'the need to impose the time and work disciplines of developing capitalist society on an essentially pre-industrial labouring population'.

Alongside this full-frontal assault, a much more subtle process was at work, one that Howkins has characterised as 'cultural incorporation'. In time cultural incorporation enabled a reassertion of paternalistic values to grow in tandem with an apparently contradictory intellectual and social sense of 'distance'. Among the manifestations of 'distance' was the concept of 'clerical dignity'. It seems unimaginable, for example, that a later nineteenth-century rector would have allowed himself to be put through the indignities endured by one clergyman in the 1840s:

'The pulpit door [was] so narrow that the stout rector of Ringstead after vainly attempting to enter it either straightways or crab fashion was obliged to elevate himself by its doorposts and pass his legs through the aperture which would not admit his body.'

Part of the reason for the success of 'cultural incorporation' may have resided in the fact that some aspects of popular culture appeared to have very shallow and ill-defined conceptual foundations. As Armstrong wrote in 1862, 'the pancake bell was rung out from the steeple, as it has been from time immemorial . . . I do not suppose that ten people in the parish know that it means anything in particular'. This did not mean that incorporation was achieved without a fight, however. When a traditionally-exercised custom like that of gleaning became subject to complex, written sets of rules and

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36 Howkins, 'Taming of Whitsun', p. 205. Howkins describes a series of steps on the route to cultural incorporation, including the undermining of 'old magic' belief systems by scientific and rational farming techniques; the withdrawal of gentry support for traditional pursuits; gentry sponsorship of more rational leisure activities; and a sense of self-help instigated by the Evangelical and Methodist movements. Whitweek itself was later adopted by working class benefit clubs and friendly societies as the occasion for their annual festivals. (see Bushaway, By Rite, p. 260 – I).
37 N.R.O. PD601/31 Sedgeford church restoration, description by Charles Fawcett Neville Rolfe, 2 July 1841. The 'stout rector of Ringstead' was clearly a visiting preacher on this occasion.
38 Armstrong, Norfolk Diary, p. 91 (4 March, 1862). The ringing of the 'pancake bell' (and that of the 'gleaning bell') was, by the middle of the nineteenth century, a vestigial remnant of a series of popular events once legitimated by the church. Known before the Reformation as the 'shreving bell' – a summons to pre-Lent confession – by Armstrong's time the 'pancake bell' signalled the making of pancakes for the 'Lent crockers' (Bushaway, By Rite, p. 51). Armstrong the Ritualist was here, probably, regretting the loss of the pre-Reformation custom.
regulations – as was the case at Carlton Colville, with rector and churchwardens at the forefront of the new regime – the gleaners could simply refuse to be bound by the new constraints. And at East Barsham a farm steward attempted to clear unauthorised gleaners by tying a rope between two horses and sweeping the field, ‘catching two of the women . . . toppling them over and over, deranging their dresses in an indecent manner and bruising them a good deal’. The steward’s reward was to be repeatedly ‘mobbed’ in the parish, ‘and greeted with the cry of “Rope! Rope!”’

Even so, it is important to acknowledge that it was not only from an elite direction that popular culture was coming under attack: working-class movements like Methodism and agricultural trade unionism also played a significant role in the transformation of popular attitudes. Methodism urged temperance and teetotalism as a route to working-class independence and self-respect, as did the friendly societies and benefit clubs that were increasingly beginning to appear, often under gentry or clergy patronage. As George Rix wrote to his brother trade unionists in 1880, labourers should ‘unite for mutual intercourse, instruction and information. Knowledge is power. Leave off smoking and tippling and get to reading, thinking and acting’.

Managing Popular Culture: Parish Entertainments.

For Ritualists like Benjamin Armstrong, the conjunction of state, church, judiciary and military in procession could be an uplifting sight, filled with the potent symbolism of society-as-it-should-be. In 1884, describing the events of Assize Week, Armstrong wrote:

'A wonderful instance of State Ritual at the Cathedral! The Bishop was at the west door waiting for the judges. The procession reached from the west door to the organ loft. In it were the Bishop, Canons, Mayor and Corporation (with regalia), City Sheriff, High Sheriff and Chaplain, Town Councillors and others. The presence of a cavalry regiment added to what was really a grand scene.'

40 N.N. 22.8.68. Gleaning as a customary right that was increasingly being extinguished by the law is considered further in chapter 5.
41 Cited in Howkins, ‘Taming of Whitsun’, p. 188.
42 Armstrong, Norfolk Diary, p. 263 (10 February 1884).
It was just this sense of order and sobriety that characterised the ‘parish entertainments’ of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Newspaper reports of the various Coronation, Jubilee and Empire Day celebrations reveal a striking unanimity in the conduct of these celebrations throughout the county, the essential elements being: a church service of thanksgiving; a parish dinner, usually of the ‘Roast Beef of Old England’, held in a farmer’s barn; participatory sports and games pre-determined by a ‘sports committee’ comprising the rector and leading parishioners, and held in the grounds of the local landowner’s park; a parish tea; and a ceremonial conclusion, with fireworks and a rendition of the National Anthem.

At Shouldham, the surviving records of May Day and Whitsuntide festivities indicate just how neutered and contrived these occasions could become by the late nineteenth century. Shouldham still had its May King and May Queen, but the substance of the celebration lay in songs, recitations, and the performance of playlets that celebrated various aspects of ‘Englishness’. The May Day procession itself, led by Miss Pickersgill, village schoolmistress and church organist, commenced with a dutiful visit to Shouldham Hall and concluded with the presentation of gifts and prizes by the vicar’s wife. By 1884, Whitsuntide at Shouldham, which fifty years earlier might have been celebrated as a thirteen-day festival of ‘maypoles, carnival queens, drinking, dancing, fighting, and the relaxation of normal sexual standards’, had been transformed into a long morning in church, followed by a parish dinner and a game of cricket on the rectory lawn.

At Sedgeford the annual carnival instigated by squire Holcombe Ingleby in 1905 demonstrated that there was a multi-layered socio-political dimension to these events. Sedgeford Hall had been let to tenants before 1905, and the returning squire clearly intended to prove that only the true-born, resident English gentry could properly care for the people. Ingleby himself wrote:

43 N.R.O. PD356/129 Shouldham May Day play (1884).
44 N.R.O. PD356/125 Shouldham May Day procession (1884).
45 Howkins, ‘Taming of Whitsun’, p. 188
'On Empire Day 1905 . . . an entertainment by Sedgeford for Sedgeford [was organised] with Mr. and Mrs. Ingleby as hosts to all comers. The village was gaily decorated with flags and flowers, and the fancy dress procession . . . formed up on Cole Green, preparatory to a triumphant march to the Hall. In the procession were many well-represented characters out of English history and allegorical groups representing our world-wide Empire. Tea, sports and fireworks were to follow, and there were many who returned home that night feeling that the squire and his lady had, indeed, returned home, and all hoped that they meant to stay.'

Ingleby had rescued Sedgeford from Edwardian rentier culture and had replaced it with an expression of high-paternalism, an elite-driven reconstruction of a mythic 'Merrie England', sanitised and organised in such a way as to make it a celebration of the restoration of squirearchical power and the power and glory of the British Empire. This was a pre-Raphaelite vision of England, in which squire, parson and people were locked together in an embrace of authority, deference and mutual dependency.

At one level, the process of cultural incorporation as mediated through the church had an immediate and visible impact on the celebration of certain calendrical festivities. One could cite, for example, the way in which 'harvest homes', 'frolics' and 'horkeys' gave way to the much more sober witness of 'harvest festival'. Conversely, there was in certain places an injection of medieval pageantry and colour directly into the church service:

"The Guild of St. Nicholas had its special service at 8 p.m. The members walked in procession with the choir, headed by a magnificent banner surmounted by a gold cross and bearing an effigy of the saint in full Eucharistic vestments. Who would have thought this possible in Dereham?"

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47 The notion of a rentier culture stems from those frequent occasions in the first decades of the twentieth century when 'old money' gentry and aristocracy – often facing a financial crisis because of agricultural recession – surrendered all or part of their estates to the 'new money' of bankers and industrialists. In landscape terms this can best be seen in Norfolk in the great baroque mansion of Sennowe Park near Guist, developed for the travel agent Thomas Cook in 1905 (see D. Dymond, The Norfolk Landscape (London, 1985), p. 190). As an allegory of a changing world, however, the notion is best understood in a literary context. E. M. Forster, Howard's End (London, 1910) and L. P. Hartley, The Go-Between (London, 1953) both deal with the social and cultural complexities of this phenomenon.
48 One of the principal hymns used at Harvest Festival since the introduction of Hymns Ancient & Modern has made specific allusion to a new, sanctified version of Harvest Home, in which the Harvest Home itself has become God's own: 'Come then, Lord of mercy come / Bid us sing Thy Harvest-home'.
49 Armstrong, Norfolk Diary, p. 170 (19 December, 1872).
At a quite different level, however, cultural incorporation was instrumental in a major social transformation during the course of the nineteenth century. As one contemporary observer wrote:

'What a revolution of taste... has taken place in the English people... the times and the spirit of the times are changed - we are become a sober people. England is no longer Merry England but busy England; England full of wealth and poverty, extravagance and care.'

Few things provide a more useful allegory of the ways in which popular pastimes were tamed, controlled and 'incorporated' by parish elites than the rehabilitation of the game of cricket. The Rev. Lee Warner campaigned against it in Little Walsingham, and the Rev. William Henslowe strove for his Reading Room in Southery in the hope of 'improving those Sabbath hours which are now so awfully lost in the Beershop and on the cricket field'. But a later generation of clergymen found that it was much more productive to work with the grain of this particular aspect of popular culture, and again and again by the end of the century parish cricket clubs were naming the local clergyman as their president or as a committee member. Rule No. 6 of the Cranworth Cricket Club in 1876 made the level of clerical involvement quite explicit: 'All disputes that cannot be otherwise arranged are to be referred to the clergy for settlement, and their decision shall be final'.

Cricket's symbolic journey seems complete by 23 June 1911. In the words of its own programme, Buxton's Coronation Day procession was:

'. . . intended to be representative of the Empire in its composition and its life. [The four cardinal virtues come first], because on them the true greatness of Empire depends . . . Next follow the five great colonies and Dependencies . . . The Buxton Lodge of the M. U. Oddfellows follow [representing forethought and brotherly kindness], the typical and essential qualities that make true Englishmen, men who are independent and free . . . The second part of the procession is representative of work [as] no country can become civilised or make progress without work . . . And since we must play as well as work, sports are represented by our national game - a cricket eleven.'

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50 William Howitt (1840), cited in Bushaway, By Rite, p. 239.
51 N.R.O. DN/VIS 64/6 Visitation returns, Walsingham Rural Deanery, 1838.
53 N.R.O. PD359/70 Cranworth Cricket Club rules (1876).
54 N.R.O. PD160/74 Buxton Coronation Day papers (1911).
Cricket had completed its elevation from ‘Godless pursuit’ of the lower classes to the iconic representation of the sporting ethos of Englishness in an Imperial pageant. In so doing it registered one of the high-watermarks of paternalism: the complete subsumption and ‘incorporation’ of an element of popular culture into elite respectability.

**Clergymen: Lifestyles and Backgrounds.**

The fact that dynastic incumbencies and surname concentrations do not appear to have had a markedly detrimental effect on social relations has already been discussed, and it could be argued that lengthy incumbencies had the potential to improve relations. It would be surprising if, in the course of a 76 year connection like that of Marcon with Edgefield, or a 77 year ministry like that of Bartle Edwards at Ashill, some kind of deep mutual identification did not grow between incumbent and parish, whatever their differences in terms of social background. Where relations *did* break down it seems unlikely that the intellectual and educational gulf alone could have been responsible: almost without exception Norfolk livings were held by Oxbridge graduates or, later in the nineteenth century, by graduates from the new theological colleges, and a cultural chasm would have existed in every parish, whether social relations were good or bad. Individual temperaments must have had a part to play here: while some clergymen, like Henslowe at Southery, seemed set on a course of confrontation and mutual antagonism with their parishioners, others, like the Rev. Smith Churchill at Boughton, were astute enough to realise that their backgrounds could generate suspicion as readily as respect, and took steps to minimise the social barriers that the visible trappings of education and elite culture could throw up. Churchill’s son wrote, ‘My father only wore a surplice, reaching to his buskins, having neither cassock or stole & only on very special occasions wore his B.A. hood’. 55 Most clergy recognized that intellectual fulfillment had to be sought outside the parish, and for some the clerical social circuit was relied upon as an oasis of

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fellow-feeling. As Churchill recalled, 'the clergy in those days were very sociable & the lunches at the clerical meetings, held at the different Parsonages, were much looked forward to’.

One potential source of tension between a clergyman and his parishioners might be traced to their respective material lifestyles. To pursue this notion further the households of seventy Norfolk rectories were investigated using the census returns of 1851 and 1901, and the results are summarised in Table 1.3.\(^{56}\) The evidence indicates that the incumbent of 1901 was likely to be older and much more likely to be married, with the same number of children and servants but fewer family links with Norfolk than his predecessor in 1851.

**Table 1.3: Norfolk clergy families and lifestyles in 1851 and 1901.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1851</th>
<th>1901</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average age</td>
<td>45.1</td>
<td>56.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of all clergymen who are married</td>
<td>58.8</td>
<td>90.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of all clergymen who are widowed</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of all clergymen who are unmarried</td>
<td>31.4</td>
<td>7.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average number of children per married household</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of rectory children baptised in current parish</td>
<td>53.2</td>
<td>48.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average number of servants per rectory household</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of rectory servants baptised in parish</td>
<td>27.3</td>
<td>12.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of clergymen baptised in Norfolk</td>
<td>52.9</td>
<td>36.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of clergy wives baptised in Norfolk</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>19.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SAMPLE: 70 Norfolk parishes. SOURCE: Census returns 1851 and 1901 for the parishes of the Aylsham and Freebridge Lynn Poor Law Unions.

The rectory of 1901 was certainly a more cosmopolitan place than that of 1851.\(^{57}\) The incumbents themselves were more usually outsiders to Norfolk and only one in five of

\(^{56}\) The seventy parishes analysed were those of the Aylsham Poor Law Union in the east of the county and those of the Freebridge Lynn Poor Law Union in the west of the county.

\(^{57}\) The household of the Rev. Joseph Brereton at Little Massingham might be cited as an example here. Given that Little Massingham was an otherwise static ‘dynastic incumbency’ – Joseph Brereton was the grandson of the pamphleteer Charles, and the third successive Brereton to hold the living – the rectory on census day in 1901 contained people from an enormous range of social and geographic backgrounds:
them had married Norfolk women. Clergy wives came from places as exotic as Canada, the U.S.A and Turkey, and the birthplaces of their children represented a miniature summary of the clergyman's career path to date.58 This was the case, too, with servants, many of whom had clearly followed the rectory household from living to living, to the extent that by 1901 it was becoming exceptional to find a rectory servant who was working in the parish of his or her baptism. It was the employment of servants that probably gave the rectory its place – in the eyes of some contemporary social observers – on the hierarchal ladder of parish households. The average number of rectory servants barely changed over the fifty years of the survey, and the modest number involved placed the rectory well below the landowner's Hall and below the households even of some of the larger local farmers. Rectory servants were almost invariably female – there were no butlers or footmen to be found – and most, too, were of the junior status of housemaids and kitchenmaids.59 This census-based survey, of course, takes account only of those servants actually living in the rectory, and does not include any staff that might have been employed to 'come in' to work on a daily basis. Nevertheless, while all rectories in the survey had at least one servant, and while some rectories were large and wealthy households, the overall impression is that – on the issue of servants, at least – rectories were very much in the second rank of elite parochial properties.60

Rectory households in both 1851 and 1901 were usually family environments with children, but by 1901 they were also ageing places, where the 'children' at home were

Joseph (78) was a widower, baptised in Lt. Massingham. With him were six single children: Henrietta (42, baptised in West Buckland, Devon); Margaret (38, Devon); Jane (33, Lt. Massingham); Eleanor (32, Lt. Massingham); Cicely (27, Cambridge); Philip (23, a clergyman, Lt. Massingham); a daughter-in-law, Ethel (38, Bath), a grandson, William (6, Cawnpore, India), a niece, Mary (22, Ramsey, Isle of Man), a cousin, John Newman (17, West Buckland, Devon), a visitor, Margaret Owen (16, Nottinghamshire), four servants: Martha Baker (41, cook, Fakenham); Mary Dennis (20, housemaid, Longham); Annie Dickerson (16, parlourmaid, Harpley); Ethel MacKnight (14, housemaid, Plymouth); and one visitor, Claud Lucas, 30, a student and British subject from Mauritius.

58 These included a handful of children that had been baptised in India although, as in 1851, roughly half of all clergy children had been baptised in their father’s current Norfolk parish.
59 The youngest and most junior of these servants were the most likely to be employed from the home parish.
60 See P. C. Hammond, The Parson and the Victorian Parish (London, 1977), pp. 61-3 for a discussion on rectory servants. Hammond gives a sense of a rather wealthier servant-employing regime than that presented here. He also raises the valid point that employment of local servants represented direct engagement with the local poor, and he concludes that there were few clergymen 'withdrawn from the world who lived alone.'
often unmarried daughters in their thirties and forties. Two incumbents – Charles Earle Marsh at Salle and George Ellen at West Winch – were in post throughout the fifty years.61

Figures 1.1, 1.2 and 1.3 represent in summary an analysis of social, educational and geographical data collected from Norfolk ordination records.62 Figure 1.1 demonstrates the rarity of the non-graduate clergyman (only eight were ordained in the eleven years examined), the pre-eminence throughout most of the nineteenth-century of the Oxbridge-educated clergyman, and the gradual emergence of ordinands from the newer, non-Oxbridge, theological colleges.63

![Fig. 1.1: Educational background of clerical ordinands, Norfolk 1810 - 1910](image)

SOURCE: N.R.O. DN/ORD 18-44 Norwich Diocese Ordination Papers 1810 - 1920

61 By 1901 Marsh had taken a wife forty-one years his junior. One feature of the 1901 survey was the very great age-gap in some clergy marriages. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to do more than speculate whether this was a coincidence, or a sign that elderly men felt the need for unpaid housekeepers, or a reflection of a belated decision by some clergymen to cast off their celibate existence and move closer to the life-experiences of their parishioners.


63 Ordinands had gained their education in thirteen places other than Oxford and Cambridge between 1850 and 1901. These were (with numbers of ordinands recorded): King’s College, London (8); Durham (6); St. Aidan’s Theological College, Birkenhead (4); University of London (4); St. Bee’s, Cumbria (3); London College of Divinity (3); Trinity College, Dublin (3); Lincoln Theological College (2); Wells Theological College (2); Glasgow, Lampeter, Chichester, and Isle of Man Theological Colleges (1 each).
Figure 1.2 indicates that a peak in ordinations was reached in 1840 and 1850 and that this was substantially due to an intake of clergymen who were themselves the sons of clergymen or of fathers who occupied social group 1.64

This peak was roughly coincident with that depicted in Figure 1.3: a substantially higher proportion of Norfolk-born clergymen was ordained in 1840 and 1850 than was usual during the rest of the century. Although these clergymen remained in a minority, they represented a large enough bloc to have made their presence felt. These were men who knew Norfolk, who often stayed in their livings for decades, and who were steeped in an elite-driven tradition of paternalism. Such a strand of 'pastoral identification' can only have eased the way for the process of cultural incorporation: apparently timeless links between clergy, gentry and particular localities would have made the process a much more seamless transition than some of the abrasive confrontations that characterised change at other times and other places during the century.

64 The 'social groups' used here and elsewhere in the thesis are explained in Appendix G.
Certainly William Marcon regarded his life-long association with Edgefield as a cause for nothing but celebration and pride: ‘About 76 years before I began writing these memories I was born at Edgefield on December 20th 1850 in the same room in which I now sleep and in which I expect to die. A record, surely!’

Architectural, Social and Spiritual Restorations (I):
The aesthetics of Gothic restorations.

If ‘paternalism’, ‘distance’ and ‘dignity’ can be argued to have been, at least in part, the motivational forces behind much nineteenth-century church restoration and social re-ordering, to what extent can changes in the church fabric be said to reflect a changing social dynamic between the church and the wider community? Three lines of enquiry suggest themselves here: (i) the aesthetics of Gothic restorations, (ii) the politics of pews, and (iii) church music and social engineering: the replacement of west gallery bands and singers with organists and choirs. What is certain is that by 1914 the attitude to interior fittings that had caused so many problems for the ‘stout rector of Ringstead’ had long

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65 Marcon, Reminiscences, p. 5.
gone, to be replaced in some cases by an almost fanatical attention to detail. In that year, for example, the architect responsible for the church restoration at Mundesley wrote passionately to the rector on the subject of the choice of reading desk:

'We are very sorry to hear that the Reading Desk will be purchased . . . without any regard as to what is suitable for the church . . . I have] frequently seen churches utterly spoiled by selecting furniture from firms . . . whose only object is to sell . . . Please also remember it affects us professionally in a very serious manner. People will see the church and will ultimately saddle us with the bad credit of an unsuitable design . . . I do feel very strongly about this matter & am very much grieved.'

Fig. 1.4: Summary of Norfolk Faculty Awards 1810 - 1919, expressed as percentage of total awards for the decade

SOURCE: DN/FCB/5, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13 Norwich Diocesan Faculty Books 1811 - 1939.

Figure 1.4 depicts trends in the various applications for faculties during the study period, and indicates that the three main categories of work showing a steady increase were organ installations, general restorations, and the erection of commemorative monuments. The increase in the last of these categories was clearly exaggerated by the losses of the First World War, but it remains relevant to the wider themes of this chapter by demonstrating the extent to which personal commemorative space and an acknowledgement of individual identity were becoming democratised within the church.

building. The peak decades for full-scale restorations came from the 1860s onward, and followed a twenty-year period when re-pewing had been the major on-going interior work.

Objections to the aesthetics of church restoration were often purely ideological, and objections came from the same ‘low church’ quarters which viewed any manifestation of ritualism with suspicion. But there was a class dimension, too: the architect of the Mundesley restoration wrote disdainfully that buying an off-the-shelf reading desk would be ‘very much like being clothed at a ready-made clothes shop’, 67 and the Rev. Augustus Pyne of Horning could barely conceal his anthropological amusement when he described how the newly-donated figures of the four evangelists on the church tower had startled and annoyed a parishioner: ‘They gave me a right tarn, they did . . . I reckon [the] lady had far better given us a good [weather-vane]; that would ha’ told us something.’ 68

Owen Chadwick’s introduction to the second volume of Armstrong’s diaries makes the point that popular conservatism in the face of radical restoration was not merely based on sentiment or ignorance: ‘They had learnt to worship God in this way, and every change was at first an intrusion’. 69 In this the lower classes were not alone. Liturgical and architectural change challenged popular and middle class religious custom. As the Lynn Advertiser put it in 1891, ‘there are few things which more vex and distress attendants upon public worship than material changes in the services to which they have become accustomed’. 70 The specific complaint alluded to here was the introduction of ritualistic practice, but in the broader context of architectural change it is striking how much opposition to restoration work came from parish elites. Problems arose because the aesthetics of the ‘new Gothic’, the desire for the installation of large new organs, and the thirst for internal re-ordering were often mutually antagonistic, a situation exacerbated by the fact that local landowners frequently held the purse-strings of restoration funds and demanded a full input into all plans and decisions. Organs presented a particular

67 N.R.O. PD 433/36 Mundesley church restoration correspondence, Lacey to Harvey 15 April 1914.
69 Armstrong, Armstrong’s Norfolk Diary, p. 9 (Introduction by Owen Chadwick).
70 N.R.O. PD 294/31. Lynn Advertiser, 7 March 1891.
difficulty: over-ambition often led to the acquisition of instruments which could not be fitted into the church without wrecking the integrity of the restorer’s Gothic vision. At Hedenham (Plates 4 and 6) lengthy correspondence between Lord Bedingfield’s agent and the rector demonstrated the heat that could be generated when aesthetics, ambition and finance clashed. On 6 May 1884 the agent wrote:

'I think with all submission that you are wrong about your proposed building of the organ chamber & that you will spoil your chancel if you carry out your present idea. The Chancel is now very handsome & has really . . . a Westminster Abbey look about it . . . a great gap or archway cut into the chancel would ruin it. Pray ponder over this before you destroy your own handiwork.'

Beyond any aesthetic consideration, the landlord considered the new organ to be a white elephant which could only be accommodated by moving a number of family memorials:

'As Patron of the Living [Lord Bedingfield] does not admit that there is any necessity for an organ in a village like Hedenham but thinks that it will be regarded by future incumbents as a drawback rather than an advantage . . . [He] is so strongly opposed to the movements that I am unable to offer you any assistance because as Trustee of the Ditchingham Hall Estate I am of course bound to consult and support his wishes in every way.'

At Geldeston the squire threatened to withdraw his subscription if the restoration was not carried out in accordance with his wishes, and at Herringfleet Lt. Col. Leathes, in a letter to his agent, threatened even wider sanctions if the cost of restoration bore too heavily upon him:

'I quite understand the church belongs to me, and a thorough white elephant it is, for unlike other livings there is simply no emolument whatever . . . Why should I pay forty times your subscription? . . . I am certainly not encouraged to carry on schools and other charities at my own exclusive cost at this rate.'

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73 N.R.O. PD 542/28, Geldeston vestry minutes, 25 April 1864.
Even the most enthusiastic restorers had sometimes to acknowledge that subscriptions to restoration funds represented power. When the rector of New Buckenham fell out with the squire over the nature of the new chancel seating, his friend Benjamin Armstrong ‘... saw that the game was not worth the candle and advised Rivett to concede the point, especially as the squire had given all the oak for the restoration’.75

Architectural, Social and Spiritual restorations (II): The politics of pews.

A key element in many church restorations, and one that was laden with social and political significance, was the issue of re-pewing. This usually entailed the replacement of eighteenth-century box pews and galleries with open, east-facing bench seats, (Plate 3) and represented much more than a campaign to ‘tidy-up’ the appearance of church interiors: Re-pewing brought into sharp focus the deeply political issue of who sat where, and why.

The position in common law was that ‘every parishioner was entitled to a seat in the church, provided there was room, but was not enabled to sit wherever s/he chose’.76 Accommodation was, broadly speaking, divided between the ‘free’ sittings of the poor and servant classes, and the ‘appropriated’ sittings of landowners, farmers and tradespeople. Appropriated pews were assets to be bought and sold; not infrequently items of freehold property that were held in association with the ownership of a particular house or piece of land.

With the passage of time changes in property ownership, combined with pew exchanges and the random erection of new pews, had left many churches with a jumble of irregularly placed and constructed box pews, inappropriate for the needs of the liturgy and fossilising an eighteenth-century social structure that bore little resemblance to the make-up of the community in the mid-nineteenth century. Faculty applications attempted

75 Armstrong, Norfolk Diary, p. 156 (12 October 1870).
to address this problem, as the submission made by the parish of Redenhall with Harleston in 1857 made clear:

'The parish church of Redenhall . . . is badly and insufficiently pewed, the pews being high and for the most part double-seated so that kneeling is almost impossible and many are compelled to sit with their backs to the minister . . . [and] from constant changes of inhabitants and from increased attendance in the said church confusion and uncertainty prevail to a great and prejudicial extent.'77

While Figure 1.4 incorporates those faculty awards that were made for re-pewing alone, it is important to note that the majority of churches were re-pewed as part of a general restoration. A completely new regime of seating meant that the provision of 'free' and 'appropriated' accommodation could be updated to match contemporary needs and aspirations. The design had to negotiate a course between three powerful and often contradictory considerations: (i) the fact that pew rents were an important source of income; (ii) the fact that many influential parishioners expected their social status to be reflected in the new arrangement; and (iii) the fact that pressure was applied by the law and by grant-giving organizations to ensure that a certain level of 'free' seating was maintained.78 However, any pre-supposition that accommodation in Anglican churches was heavily weighted towards the appropriated seating of the middle- and upper-classes is not, in fact, borne out by the evidence. Work done by Snell has demonstrated that, nationally, the provision of 'free' sittings in the Church of England was higher – sometimes substantially so – than in almost every denomination except Primitive Methodism.79

The social symbolism of 'free' and 'appropriated' sittings in church must, therefore, have been more complex than that of a straightforward function of class. Snell has discussed the finding that more seats were appropriated in larger 'open' parishes than in those

77 N.R.O. DN/FCB/7 Norwich Diocesan Faculty Book, 1840 – 68.
78 Grants from the 'Incorporated Society for Promoting the Enlargement, Building and Repairing of Churches and Chapels' were frequently made conditional upon a certain proportion of seats being 'set apart & declared to be free for the use of the parish for ever'. Church restoration correspondence from Brooke (N.R.O. PD 599/45), Catton (N.R.O. PD 418/40) and Colkirk (N.R.O. PD665/40, 41) provides examples of this.
79 Snell & Ell, Rival Jerusalems, pp. 343 – 351.
where landownership tended to be in the hands of one family. This may reflect a greater perceived need on the part of an aspirant group of tradespeople to assert their social differentiation and status. Evidence for this is not easy to come by, but the process may be discerned in action at Shipdham in 1830 (Table 1.4).  

Table 1.4: Shipdham pew allocations (1830)  
(Those pews reconstructed where employment of occupier can be identified)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pew No.</th>
<th>Name of Occupier(s)</th>
<th>Employment of pew occupier(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Fuller Coker</td>
<td>Builder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>James Clemmence</td>
<td>Broke</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Thomas Bagge</td>
<td>Butcher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>George Payne</td>
<td>'Independent'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>James Ingleton</td>
<td>Whitsmith</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Thomas Mendham</td>
<td>Tailor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>John Wright</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>James Gaff</td>
<td>Farmer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Robert Hayhow</td>
<td>Gardener</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>James Germany</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>William George</td>
<td>'Independent'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>William Andrews</td>
<td>Butcher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>John Buckler</td>
<td>Shoemaker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Thomas Rumball</td>
<td>Shoemaker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>George Fairweather</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Thomas Nicholas</td>
<td>Farmer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Thomas Clark</td>
<td>Farmer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Jabez Vassour</td>
<td>Farmer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Thomas Vassour</td>
<td>Farmer’s son</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Michael Ringer</td>
<td>Farmer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>the Misses Bullock</td>
<td>'Independent'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Robert Tuck</td>
<td>Butcher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>William Peck</td>
<td>Farmer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>John Bagge</td>
<td>Bricklayer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>William Butcher</td>
<td>Builder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Hugh Bagge</td>
<td>Cordwainer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stephen Bagge</td>
<td>Agricultural Labourer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>James Bagge</td>
<td>Carpenter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>A. Margetson</td>
<td>Farmer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>W. George</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>D. Skipper</td>
<td>Shoemaker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Widow Stagg</td>
<td>Farmer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>J. Bales</td>
<td>Farmer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>R. Littleproud</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37</td>
<td>B. Levaiti</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>John Barker</td>
<td>Baker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>William Rivett</td>
<td>Carpenter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41</td>
<td>Henry Hopson</td>
<td>Surgeon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Henry Hopson</td>
<td>Grocer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: N.R.O. PD 337/101; 1841 census

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80 Snell & Ell, Rival Jerusalems, p. 352
81 The social ‘reconstruction’ of Shipdham’s pews has been attempted using N.R.O. PD 337/101 (Shipdham pew allocation, 1830) and H.O. 107/780/12 (the 1841 census return).
Only 18 of Shipdham’s 43 allocated pews can be ‘reconstituted’ according to the employment of their occupants, but the evidence of those 18 pews does suggest a series of informal groupings between employment types, as well as offering hints towards the congeniality and acceptability of other trades as prospective co-occupiers or as pew-neighbours.

As well as helping to reflect possible business alliances and social networks, pew location was also important in defining the concept of ‘best space’ in church. Locations in the chancel, in the transepts, or clustered towards the sanctuary or pulpit were the most prestigious, while gallery accommodation was usually reserved as free seating for the poor. Of course, there was nothing new in the concept of ‘best space’. Personal chantries, parclose screens, and private pews had all been indicative of a desire among medieval elites to withdraw from communal worship, and by the nineteenth century it is arguable that the quest for differentiation had filtered down the social scale and hardened into an active distaste for enforced communality. In 1827, complaining bitterly about being shown into a ‘free’ seat in Loddon, Capt. Fayerman wrote to the churchwarden:

‘I desire to inform you that I intend to . . . explain to the Bishop the shameful disposal of pews in the church at Loddon . . . As I hold a Captain’s commission under His majesty I cannot see why I am not equally entitled to one as much as you, sir . . . You ought to show some respect to the commission I have and I am sorry to observe that an officer in this neighbourhood is looked upon as the filth of the earth.’82

Early nineteenth-century concepts of social differentiation and ‘best space’ can be discerned in the pew lay-out of the Harleston chapel-of-ease in 1820 where a more complete reconstitution may be attempted based on a contemporary plan and list of named subscribers to the restoration fund (Figure 1.5).83 Here the most prestigious seats (red) were clustered towards the east end of the nave, with tradespeople (yellow) occupying most of the rest of the ground floor and the poor and servant classes (green), segregated by gender, accommodated at the west end and in galleries.

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82 N.R.O. PD 595/123 Loddon pew allocation correspondence, Capt. Fayerman to Mr. J. Parkerson (churchwarden), 22 January 1827.
83 N.R.O. PD 295/55, Redenhall with Harleston pew appropriation (1820).
Accommodation for servants was a complex and sensitive issue for church restorers. As the century wore on, the ‘ghettoisation’ of servants in pews of their own became increasingly frowned-upon as a recipe for misbehaviour and inattention during divine service. New seating arrangements often reflected the desirability of having the household group attend church together as a unit, and some clergymen noted with
satisfaction the improved standards of behaviour that accompanied this change.
Responding to a visitation question in 1838, the Rev. John Vickers of Wood Dalling
alluded to this very point: 'Much more decorum in consequence of new Tenants in the
Farm Houses who attend church constantly with their Servants'.

Attempts at social manipulation and control can be detected behind many re-pewing
faculties, even when the declared motive was simply to increase accommodation for an
expanding parish population. In 1864, the Rev. Daniel Gillett made an appeal for
contributions towards the restoration expenses of Geldeston church:

"The Church was originally built for a very limited congregation and now needs enlargement to give barely
sufficient accommodation to the people. Only one resident family, besides the Rector's, can be expected to
give any material assistance of this good work; and it is therefore necessary to make this public appeal for
help." 85

In fact, as Table 1.5 makes clear, the restoration was carried out at a time when
Geldeston's population was declining. Considerable demographic changes were afoot in
the parish, however, and Table 1.5 suggests a new concentration of wealth in elite hands,
complemented by a substantial growth in the number of servants. Socially, Geldeston was
becoming a much more polarized place. Twenty years later, correspondence from
members of the Rev. Gillett's family about the pre-restoration church make the point that
the pews were 'mainly shoulder high, vide the pigeon house in the Rectory coach house .
. . [and] on the north side of the chancel there was only one long narrow pew, which was
always occupied by our servants'. 86 It seems likely that the real accommodation problem
faced by Gillett, in common with many of his contemporaries, was the accommodation of
servants, a problem that was exacerbated by his desire to reclaim the chancel for
devotional use.

84 N.R.O. DN/VIS 65/9 Visitation Returns, Sparham Rural Deanery, 1838.
85 N.R.O. Geldeston church restoration correspondence, subscription requests, 1864.
86 N.R.O. PD 542/37 Geldeston church restoration correspondence, Rev. H. Gillett to E. Dowson
(architect), unspecified date in 1886.
Table 1.5: Demographic change in Geldeston, 1841 - 1881

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Group (Heads of Household)</th>
<th>1841</th>
<th>1861</th>
<th>1881</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parish pop.</td>
<td>386</td>
<td>345</td>
<td>292</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SOURCE: Census returns

A number of tensions might therefore be said to have been at work when clergymen laid plans to re-pew their churches: the prosaic need to provide more seating; the subtler need to reflect a changing social dynamic within the community; and the need to respond to changing liturgical fashion. All of these had to be juggled against the backdrop of the wishes of a financially powerful landowning class who frequently financed church restorations and expected the restored building to reflect their own tastes, attitudes and ideas. In many ways, when seen in conjunction with the increase in faculties for private monuments and commemorative stained glass, restored churches were revisiting the medieval concept of the church as elite memorial chapel. Richard Henry Vade Walpole’s faculty application for Freethorpe in 1851 (Plate 5) illustrates the point:

‘He has lately at his own expense rebuilt the parish church and chancel... and has also erected on the north side of the chancel... a certain building [8'6 x 8'] with an oak partition between the same and the chancel the height of three feet [connected to the chancel by a doorway. Walpole] is very desirous of having the said building appropriated as a seat or pew for himself and his heirs... and their tenants and families and friends to sit stand and kneel therein during the time of divine service exclusive of all other persons whomsoever.’\(^{87}\)

Architectural, Social and Spiritual Restorations (III): Church Music and Social Engineering.

Church restorations were often contemporaneous with – and often designed to accommodate architecturally – an on-going revolution in church music, indicated by the

\(^{87}\) N.R.O. DN/CON/137 Consistory Court proceedings, 1848 – 51.
number of faculty awards for the removal of ‘singing galleries’, the installation of organs, and the erection of choirstalls. While in some cases this revolution had its genesis in the erudite tastes of individual clergymen, a social agenda may be perceived in the aims of organisations like the Society for Promoting Church Music, which presented a manifesto tantamount to ‘cultural cleansing’: ‘the banishment of secular melodies from church . . . the provision of truly sacred music in their place, and the recruitment of reliable church choirs to lead the singing and to maintain a spirit of reverence.’ Consequently, the musical revolution had a momentum even in parishes where the changes were made in defiance of all practical considerations. At Catton, Shouldham and Herringfleet, for example, large new organs donated by wealthy benefactors were installed even though expensive structural alterations were required to accommodate them and even though, when the instruments were in place, the parish had no-one capable of playing them properly.

If the removal of galleries and the installation of organs created logistical problems for middle-class vestries, for the labouring classes the changes represented an assault on the popular culture of parish singers and bands. The Rev. Thomas Helmore of Ashwellthorpe, who was a figure of national importance in the move to introduce plainsong and Gregorian chant into divine service, argued that high quality, well performed music was the perfect complement to the liturgical and architectural changes that had been inspired by the Camden Society, and that church music should be regarded as ‘the handmaid of Religion.’ For some who used Helmore’s service books, church music was at the forefront of a campaign of cultural re-education, a process which Vic Gammon has contextualised within the broader societal change from paternalism to capitalism, in which an elite cultural superiority had to be demonstrated to – and accepted

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89 Catton: N.R.O. PD 418/45 organ installation correspondence, 1880 – 1; Shouldham: N.R.O. PD 356/129 organ subscription list, 1884. Earlier attempts to install an organ had founndered as ‘no one in the village could manage the pedals’; Herringfleet: N.R.O. PD 126/41 parish correspondence, Mary Leathes to Mr. Claridge, May 1901 (‘The gardener’s daughter undertakes the organ during our absence. She will only be able to give you two Hymns during the morning service & the responses she cannot undertake.’)
90 Rev. T. Helmore, Accompanying Harmonies to Brief Directory of the Plain Song (London, 1853), p. v. Even Parson Woodforde acknowledged that ill-perfomed music could be an impediment to religious solemnity: ‘There was a large congregation at Church. Poor old Js. Smith my Clerk made a shocking hand of it in singing this Afternoon at Church, much laughed at’. (Woodforde, Diary, p. 403, 14 August 1791).
by the poor. As the Rev. William Allen said to his congregation at the Shouldham Whitsuntide service in 1865:

'Granting that some of you may not be able to enter into all that you have seen and heard, may it not be because we are using a language which as yet you do not understand? But... remember that all we have done has been with a view to your edification.'

The cultural alienation represented by new forms of church music was exacerbated by the fact that 'the employment of a single (usually middle class) organist in the place of a band or choir destroys the potential for association through activity'. Furthermore, the hymn book which replaced individually compiled manuscript collections was 'at once an authority and a more alienated form. In the widespread acceptance of *Hymns Ancient and Modern* after 1861 we see the national and standard triumphing over the local and various'.

Supporters of these changes did not underestimate the hostility that the reforming clergyman could face. Writing in 1831 the Herefordshire curate J. A. le Trobe prepared his readers for opposition and antagonism: '[The clergyman] is about to withstand principles which for obstinate depravity have no rival in the human heart – the principles of ignorant selfishness and petty pride'. This, he forecast, would start to manifest itself with insolence and sullenness, might progress through desertion of the church, and could even culminate in physical violence. Le Trobe’s publication captured the mood of the Anglican church in the 1830s and was highly influential in the development of what Gammon has characterised as ‘aggressive Anglicanism’.

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92 N.R.O. PD 356/125 Shouldham parish celebrations, 1865.
93 V. Gammon, ‘Babylonian Performances’, p. 82.
95 Gammon, ‘Babylonian Performances’, pp. 76 – 7. Between 1846 and 1851 a publication called *The Parish Choir* campaigned on the same ground as le Trobe, and catalogued the opposition of musicians in a regular feature entitled ‘Refractory Village Choirs’.

53
The trouble anticipated by writers like le Trobe duly began to show itself in rural East Anglia, and in some parishes disputation over the direction of church music seemed to penetrate to the very heart of issues of control and authority in the community. Ronald Fletcher describes one such episode in Suffolk, in which a conflict between rector and parishioners over the use of organ or singing gallery was taken to the Ipswich Quarter Sessions in January 1873. And, with immense symbolic significance on 5 November 1866, an even more dramatic expression of antagonism shook the air in Little Walsingham:

‘In 1861-2, at an expense of over £2000, the noble [church] was beautifully restored, externally and internally ... through the liberal donations of the rector (the Rev. S. H. Lee Warner), H. Lee Warner Esq., and other friends ... The organ was placed in the south transept, and led to the introduction of a more efficient ... musical service. This change, however, evoked a feeling of strong disapproval on the part of some'. [The clerk, Mr. Ringstead, had tolled the curfew bell at 8 p.m. and had then left and locked the church.] ‘About ten minutes afterwards a terrific explosion was heard in every part of the town ... The church had been forcibly entered at the chancel door and at the bottom of the organ - underneath the bellows - had been placed a deposit of gunpowder which was ignited by a trail of cotton and, with the exception of the swell organ, had shattered the instrument to pieces, and inflicted serious damage upon the church itself.’

In the vast majority of cases, of course, ill-feeling and conflict became apparent in a far less dramatic way, but by its very nature, the appointment of a solitary, middle-class organist by a predominantly middle-class vestry represented the wresting away of musical control from the wider community. The power shift was often consolidated by the fact that the appointee might be the rector’s wife or daughter. ‘Choirstall culture’ effectively brought the parish singers down from their galleries, where the potential for misbehaviour had been a constant concern, surpliced them in the uniform of an essentially elite religious fashion, and placed them in full view of the parish whom they could now lead by example. A system of payments – which for the children of Burnham Overy choir in 1906 amounted to ½d. per appearance - choir ‘treats’ and fines for non-attendance or misbehaviour, helped to secure the complicity of working class families, for whom any financial incentive was a welcome addition to the household income.

97 N.C. 10.11.66.
With these contexts in mind, how much involvement with their newly-restored church or its new musical regime might ‘ordinary’ parishioners feel? Table 1.6 illustrates graphically the social origin of donations to restoration and organ funds.99

Table 1.6: Contributions to organ installations and church restoration* in selected Norfolk parishes, analysed by social group of subscriber

*note that all data given is for organ installations except for Little Walsingham

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parish</th>
<th>Caston</th>
<th>Cranworth</th>
<th>Dersingham</th>
<th>Gt. Cressingham</th>
<th>Happisburgh</th>
<th>Herringfleet</th>
<th>Shouldham</th>
<th>Lt. Walsingham</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>1885</td>
<td>1877</td>
<td>1884</td>
<td>1894</td>
<td>1900</td>
<td>1884</td>
<td>1899</td>
<td>1862</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pop.</td>
<td>821</td>
<td>239</td>
<td>1014</td>
<td>479</td>
<td>503</td>
<td>224</td>
<td>524</td>
<td>1207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parish subscribers</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% subscription raised in parish</td>
<td>27.7</td>
<td>52.7</td>
<td>32.8</td>
<td>32.5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>61.8</td>
<td>85.5</td>
<td>83</td>
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<td>No. of subscribers from Social group 1</td>
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<td>3</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<td>24</td>
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<tr>
<td>No. of subscribers from Social group 2</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of subscribers from Social group 3</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>41</td>
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<tr>
<td>No. of subscribers from Social group 4</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>32</td>
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<td>No. of subscribers from outside parish</td>
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<td>16</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SOURCES: See footnote 121

99 References from the subscription lists which provided the source material for Table 1.6 are as follows: Caston N.R.O. PD 158/26; Cranworth N.R.O. PD 359/25; Gt. Cressingham N.R.O. PD 131/29; Dersingham N.R.O. PD 603/48/3; Happisburgh N.R.O. PD 516/19; Herringfleet N.R.O. PD 126/34; Shouldham N.R.O. PD 356/129/10; Lt. Walsingham N.R.O. PD 582/52. These sources were checked in each case against the most recent previous census return in order to ascertain the social group of each subscriber. Social groups are defined and explained in Appendix G.
In all cases it is striking how few substantial contributions were made by local people. Only at Herringfleet and Shouldham was anything like a social spread of subscribers achieved, and even here the best result was a contribution from just 26 out of 224 parishioners in Herringfleet, 11.6% of the population. The low level participation of the poorest parishioners (designated as social group 4) also becomes apparent. At places like Cranworth and Great Cressingham the organ installation was clearly an elite project, with a tiny handful of the parish population – 7 at Cranworth, 4 at Great Cressingham – combining to raise a substantial portion of the total cost. Elsewhere, as was notably the case at Happisburgh, the majority of contributions came from outside the parish, increasing the likelihood that the instrument would be regarded as an intrusion, and one which attracted little loyalty or affection from local people. These threads combined at Little Walsingham, where the church restoration and organ installation attracted such an explosive response from its opponents. Although their lack of disposable income should not be overlooked as a factor, it is notable that Walsingham’s poorer parishioners (again designated as social group 4) contributed just 0.4% of the total amount raised. The majority of funding came from parish elites (66.2%) and from extra-parochial contributions (17.1%), and the whole enterprise probably came to be seen as the pet project of the Rev. Lee Warner’s family and their social circle. As Anne Lee-Warner wrote to her brother (the Rev. James) in Oxford, ‘we have been over 4 times this week to Walsingham. Just now I am organ mad’. 100

The role of aesthetics, re-pewring and music in the context of nineteenth-century church restoration might be summarised as helping to mediate the transition from an elite culture of ‘display’ to one of ‘withdrawal’ and ‘control’. In the process, ‘the Anglican church ridded itself of the embarrassment of being patron to lower-class forms of musical expression which it neither understood nor appreciated. It succeeded in an act of self-purification. But in doing so it largely drove out the active popular element in worship in rural areas’ 101 The role of folk-music and song in developing a sense of communal – and, ultimately, political – identity is explored by Howkins in a context that goes well beyond

100 N.R.O. LW 26/1, 441 x 7 Lee Warner estate papers, Anne Lee Warner to Rev. James Lee Warner, unspecified date in 1864.
the bounds of church music. Its significance here lies in the fact that, until the advent of choirs and organs, the parish church offered a legitimising outlet for popular musical forms and offered, too, a platform for involvement in the conduct of worship that was the parishioners' own. The 'musical restoration' of the later nineteenth century displaced and marginalised the parish singers and all they represented. Like Thomas Hardy's Mellstock Quire when the new organ was played for the first time, popular musicians were left—physically and metaphorically—feeling 'awkward, out of place, abashed and inconvenienced by their hands'. In this context a single, sweeping sentence of the Rev. George Crabbe's Merton Annals amounts to a dispassionate eye-witness account of a tidal-wave of cultural change:

'[7 August 1870] Congregational singing was established in [Merton] church, with Hymns Ancient & Modern. Lady Walsingham played the Harmonium in her pew the first two Sundays, and afterwards Miss Woods played in the Chancel'.

Antiquarian Awareness

Crabbe's Merton Annals of the 1870s were significant in that they registered a sea-change in clerical attitudes to popular culture as the nineteenth century wore on. Rural life was increasingly seen as something to be respected and recorded—even treasured—as the pressures of a more materialistic age began to erode it. Consequently Crabbe took pains to reproduce the nuances of Norfolk dialect in print, and his lengthy description of 'rough music' and wedding customs demonstrated a broad engagement with the richness of popular culture that had its origins in an attempt to understand it from an eclectic range of sources without being judgemental or disparaging. This was a culture to be recorded, not repressed.

103 This quotation from Thomas Hardy's Under the Greenwood Tree is cited in Howkins, 'Voice of the People', p. 60.
104 N.R.O. PD 532/32, Crabbe, Annals. Crabbe's brief account embraces the imposition of national (as opposed to local) hymns, the involvement of the aristocracy, the introduction of a harmonium, the presence of a private pew, and the reclamation of the chancel.
Table 1.7: Analysis of clerical contributions to the Norfolk & Norwich Archaeological Society, 1847 – 1917.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>No. of clerical committee members</th>
<th>% of committee members who are clergymen</th>
<th>No. of clerical contributors to the Journal</th>
<th>% of contributors to Journal who are clergymen</th>
<th>% of society members who are clergymen</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1847</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>44.4</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>27.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1849</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1852</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>38.9</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>42.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1855</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>36.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1859</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>55.6</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>53.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1864</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>66.7</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>47.4</td>
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<tr>
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<td>47.1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>31.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1877</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>52.9</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>57.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1884</td>
<td>8</td>
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<td>15</td>
<td>60.0</td>
<td>38.9</td>
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<tr>
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<td>9</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>69.2</td>
<td></td>
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<td>1892</td>
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<td>55.6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>46.7</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
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<td>5</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1898</td>
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<td>33.3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>43.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1901</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>22.2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>28.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1904</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>16.7</td>
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<td>1910</td>
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<td>38.9</td>
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<td>57.1</td>
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</tr>
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<td>1914</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>22.2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>23.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1917</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>17.7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Of course, there was nothing new in the phenomenon of the clergymen-historian, and when, for example, workmen in Colney in 1799 uncovered an urn-burial it seemed only natural for them to take the remains to the rector as the only local source of educated authority. ¹⁰⁵ But the later nineteenth-century spirit of antiquarianism seemed to reflect a widespread mood that some indefinable quality of life was being lost. This may have been partly due to an increase in the number of incumbents with Norfolk roots. The increase in Norfolk-baptised clergy being appointed to Norfolk livings in the 1850s has already been noted, and a link can be detected between this trend and an enhanced clerical engagement with Norfolk culture in the second half of the nineteenth century. An

¹⁰⁵ N.R.O. PD 475/72, Rev. William Gibson’s account of an urn-burial discovered at Colney, 1799.
analysis of clergy involvement with the Norfolk & Norwich Archaeological Society (Table 1.7) indicates a definite increase during the 1860s, 1870s and 1880s, with up to 66% of committee members and up to 69% of contributors to the society journal being clergymen.

When these trends are analysed as a three-point moving average, depicted graphically and plotted against the numbers of Norfolk-baptised ordinands (Figure 1.6), the data suggests three cyclical peaks of involvement: appointments of Norfolk-baptised clergymen peaked c.1850; clerical membership of the Archaeological Society peaked in the 1870s; and clerical contributions to the house journal *Norfolk Archaeology* peaked in the late 1880s. A life-cycle involvement of the same men is heavily implied here. Born in Norfolk, often into a clerical or gentry family, a wave of young clergymen dominated the committee of the Archaeological Society for much of the thirty years following their appointments. As they grew older their involvement became more ‘passive’—article writing and literary contributions—and eventually declined markedly in the first decades of the twentieth century as the Norfolk-born clergymen died and were succeeded by appointees from outside the county.

*Fig. 1.6: Norfolk-baptised clergy and antiquarian involvement, calculated as a three-point moving average, 1847 - 1917*

SOURCE: DN/ORD 18 – 44, Norwich Diocese Ordination papers 1810 – 1920
A changing mood can be detected in the space of just twenty years at Geldeston. Letters exchanged between members of the Rev. Gillett's family at the time of the 1886 restoration demonstrate a profound regret that no record had been kept of the church's appearance prior to the restoration of 1864. As one correspondent noted, 'in so many cases there has been as much ignorant destruction of interesting things as of improvement'. This was felt to be much more than a purely architectural loss. Another member of the Gillett family detected the dead hand of standardised education behind the decline in cultural variety: 'It is a matter for regret that the games and songs of children in remote rural districts have not been more closely studied ere this, for they are fast dying out before the wooden routine of the School Board'.

The Gillett correspondence offers one expression of an increasingly romanticised view of the past. But there was a psychological dimension, too, and one that detected in the saws and legends of popular culture an almost anthropological expression of what it was that made individuals and societies function. The Rev. John Gunn may only have been collecting the memories of an illiterate old washerwoman from Irstead, but, he wrote:

'Can the recording of the sayings of Mrs. Lubbock be considered useless? Be it remembered that, frivolous and superstitious as they may appear, they in reality exhibit phases of the human mind which are as much within the province of philosophical enquiry as the deductions of exact science.'

When the Rev. George Crabbe 'superintended the opening of two barrows or Tumuli on Sparrow Hills' he joined a long list of Norfolk clergymen who doubled as amateur archaeologists. One of the most famous of these was the Rev. Augustus Jessopp of Scarning. Jessopp was a prolific writer whose fascination with folklore and popular culture gave a particular impetus to his archaeological work. As he explained in his essay,
‘Hill Digging and Magic’, many of his excavations were conducted in an attempt to seek out the truth behind local legends:

‘Have all the railway tunnels and other audacious devices of our time let too much light and too much air into the bowels of the earth, so that the very demons have been expelled, or retired deeper and deeper down towards the centre of our planet... whence sometimes they burst forth?’

It may be that Jessopp also came to feel that ‘too much light and too much air’ had been let into the church service. In other essays he described in detail his regret at the demise of parish bands and singers, seeing the change as symptomatic of the way in which much that was good in the social fabric of rural England was being swept away. Jessopp’s brand of historical enquiry - eager to embrace the supernatural in order to subject it to scientific investigation - was typical of an elite antiquarian culture that was far from hostile to the idea of ghosts and spirits but ran parallel to these aspects of popular culture in a more rarefied atmosphere. Jessopp, after all, was a man whose own supernatural experience had attained a degree of notoriety. In January 1880 the *Athenaeum* published Jessopp’s own account of his encounter with a ghost in the library at Mannington Hall. As it develops, Jessopp’s ghost story becomes increasingly reminiscent of those written by M. R. James in the late nineteenth century, so often ‘culturally closed’ around the idea of an ecclesiastic/antiquarian who, rummaging through some old books or papers, makes a discovery that puts him in touch with the spectral manifestation of another, long dead, cleric.

Even while there was a growing engagement with Norfolk culture on the part of Norfolk-born clergymen, this was one way that ‘distance’ was maintained between clergy and society. Arguably, antiquarian interest only developed when popular culture had

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12 M. R. James, Collected Ghost Stories (Ware, 1995). A host of stories from this collection follow the same pattern. *Canon Alberic’s Scrapbook* (1894) seems actually to be based on Jessopp’s story.
effectively been neutered as an alternative belief system, and soon the antiquarians themselves were vanishing into the depths of their own arcane world, immersed in mysteries that were understood and participated in only by their own kind: mysteries which represented the cultural appropriation of the once despised popular belief in witches, ghosts and demons.

Conclusion

In his introduction to William Marcon’s Reminiscences, Canon Meyrick of Norwich observed that ‘passing from Parson Woodforde of the eighteenth century to Parson Marcon of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries . . . we are not merely in another century or another Norfolk village. We move in a different world’. If Parson Woodforde’s world was one in which popular culture was understood, tolerated and even sponsored by elites, and Marcon’s world one in which only respectable, elite-driven culture would do, much of the intervening century must be seen as an era of transition, during which – for a time – ‘different worlds’ existed side-by-side in rural communities. This chapter has attempted to interpret the effect of two utterly different cultures colliding within the claustrophobic confines of the parish, for it was here, strikingly, in these rural backwaters, that men who represented a large segment of England’s most-educated and most-erudite class chose to live out their lives.

Ultimately the ‘community’ of parish elites achieved an ascendancy over the ‘community’ of popular culture, and by the end of the nineteenth century the process of cultural incorporation was well advanced. This was an era when the church’s legitimation of popular culture – vestigially present in gleaning bells and pancake bells, parish perambulations and the State Services of the Book of Common Prayer – was transformed into something paler, emptier, and stripped of its meaning. But there was movement,

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114 R. Bushaway, By Rite has much on all these themes. See p. 51 for gleaning and pancake bells, for instance, p. 85 for parish perambulations, and p. 64 for the State Services of the church. These were services appointed to be conducted in the Church of England on 5 November, 30 January, 29 May and 29
too, in the opposite direction, and William Marcon’s journey from irritation and frustration with popular culture to an understanding – 50 years later – that it represented a well-spring of ‘alternative knowledge’, can be said to symbolise the journey undergone by many Anglican clergymen during the nineteenth century.

To attempt a political reading of these changes is to run into an almost impenetrable series of conceptual difficulties as to the nature of ‘conservatism’ and ‘radicalism’. A cultural reading, however, seems to suggest that the ideas of ‘spirit’ and ‘creativity’ were essential to the Gothic Revival and to the complementary Victorian movement of pre-Raphaelite art. Both movements identified a simplicity and honesty in medieval art and architecture that had been lost, obliterated by the Classical Revival of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (Plate 6). Associated religious movements, like the Tractarians and the Camden Society, considered that the liturgy of the thirteenth century, with its concentration on awe and wonder and mystery, had brought man as close as he could get to a true sense of religiosity, and that thirteenth-century church architecture had provided the perfect vehicle for this ‘quest’. For thinkers like John Ruskin, a Gothic Revival could help to recover some of that lost magic, and in the process could begin to alleviate some of the dullness and monotony of working life in an industrialised society. But Ruskin was aware, too, of the argument’s fatal flaw, within which lies the key to why Victorian Gothic church restorations remain so easy to spot. Ruskin described how the nineteenth-century stone carver of Bourges Cathedral had devalued his art by attempting to ‘re-create hawthorn’ instead of being content to offer a carved impression of it: Ruskin’s theme was that once innocence has been lost it cannot be artificially re-created, and in its quest to retrieve the irretrievable much of the art and architecture of the second half of the nineteenth century had come to appear self-conscious and false.\footnote{J. Ruskin, ‘The Nature of Gothic’ in W. Buckler (ed.), Prose of the Victorian Period (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1958), pp. 367 – 82.}

Just the same kind of self-consciousness and artificiality seemed to inform late nineteenth-century attempts to re-create a mythologised version of popular culture. Elite-
driven festivities, usually celebrated on days of significance for the political establishment and designed, essentially, to replace popular festivals with a church service and tea on the rectory lawn, spoke more of an agenda of control than of innocent medieval harmony. This is one reason why, in the context of the nineteenth-century church, the term ‘restoration’ should be understood in its broadest possible sense. The re-ordering of crumbling masonry, plain broken glass, collapsing floors, rotten and disorderly pews, was much more than an architectural refurbishment: it was deeply symbolic of an ongoing drive for ‘spiritual restoration’. A church that many felt had become tolerant, lazy, effete, even corrupt in the preceding hundred years was now re-asserting itself as a force in the community. A superficial ‘democratisation’ of the old, jealously-guarded and hierarchical box pews was more than offset by the socio-political statement that the church now made in the conduct of worship. Parish bands gave way to solitary organists, diverse in their range of technical accomplishment, certainly, but almost invariably close to the incumbent. Singing galleries gave way to choirstalls: the parish choir were surpliced, salaried and removed into the chancel where their training, performance and conduct could be strictly regulated. The church – building, calendar and incumbent – that had once been an integral part of (or at the very least not overtly hostile to) popular culture, now stood foursquare in the parish as an expression of cultural imperialism. To a large extent the church, as a national and local institution, had succeeded in re-casting popular culture as a *tabula rasa* upon which a very different set of priorities and values might be etched.

Coming to grips with the clash between popular and elite culture in the nineteenth-century parishes of South Lindsey, Obelkevich cites the observations of Henry Winn. Winn had noted the increasing ‘practicality’ of the views of people later in the century compared to those of the villagers of his youth who, he recalled, had had ‘a nearer apprehension of the spiritual world’ and a world view that was ‘far more poetical’.\(^\text{116}\) Perhaps it was a similar realisation, finally, that alarmed Norfolk’s clergymen into a belated antiquarian appreciation of popular culture: order and discipline had been brought into the church,

certainly, and witch-belief and folk medicine had almost been eradicated, but it seemed that, in the process, the community had lost something of its poetic soul.
Plate 2: 'Why is it that Victorian church restorations are so easy to spot?'
St. Andrews, Framingham Pigot.

Plate 3: Regular rows of eastward-facing pews
Bintree, c. 1868
Plate 4: Organ installed against the wishes of the local landowner, Hedenham, 1884

Plate 5: Richard Henry Vade Walpole
Private pew in extension to Chancel, Freethorpe, 1851

Plate 6: Victorian revival of medieval imagery
Hedenham, 1884
Chapter Two

Tithes and Unrest: The ‘Mutual Injury Principle’

Introduction

‘About seven I went and saw a mob at the kitchen door; it was dark; the little square yard was brim full; I asked what they wanted; they replied . . . I must reduce my tithe’

Giving evidence at the Norwich Summer Assizes in July 1831, the Rev. Richard Adams of Edingthorpe described an experience that he had shared in common with at least thirty other clergymen at the turn of that troubled year: a confrontation with a mob of angry agricultural labourers who were demanding a reduction in the tithe burden on tenant farmers so that they, the labourers’ employers, could afford to pay higher wages. Across the county in the late autumn of 1830, at the height of the ‘Captain Swing’ risings, tithe-owning clergymen found themselves besieged in their rectories and vestries, waylaid and surrounded as they moved around their parishes and confronted and jostled at tithe audit meetings. Peace was, in most cases, only restored when a promise of some kind of tithe abatement had been extracted. In many other parishes incumbents, responding either to the genuinely perceived hardship of their flock or to the whiff of revolution in the air, made hurried, voluntary reductions to their tithe-claims and in so doing contributed to the general air of appeasement that greatly antagonised national government.

Was, then, tithe unrest simply a manifestation of economic hardship? Writing in 1821, ‘A Norfolk Parson’ expressed his bafflement as to why tithes, and not rents, were the principal bone of contention in his neighbourhood:

‘Can TEN per cent on tithes, believe you / Assist you much? No – don’t deceive you: / ‘Tis RENTS, high RENTS, that now aggrieve you / And RENTS reduc’d must now relieve you’.2

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1 N.M. 30.7.31
2 ‘A Norfolk Parson’, Fair Play, Addressed to his Worthy and Respectable Tithe Payers (East Dereham, 1821).
The most coherent economic argument against the tithe system was that it acted as a deterrent to agricultural improvement. As Kain writes, 'those farmers who invested in expensive agricultural improvements to produce more crops and livestock had to pay more tithe than their less enterprising neighbours. The church was a sleeping partner in these capital improvements, took none of the risks but nonetheless received its tenth of the profits'. A petition drawn up by occupiers in the North Walsham area made much the same economic point and argued, too, that the issue of tithe was poisoning social relations in the parish. Agricultural improvement and the use of fertilizers now meant that the church was taking:

'three tenths or more of the natural produce of the soil . . . which is felt by all classes of the People as a burden no longer to be borne . . . the Clergyman then being looked upon not as the kind Shepherd anxious for the Welfare and prosperity of his Flock, but as the cruel and rapacious Wolf determined upon its destruction'.

But objections to tithing transcended fluctuations in the economic cycle and brought local communities to loggerheads long before and long after the brief, dramatic weeks of 'Swing'. There was a political dimension. Radicals and Nonconformists could not tolerate the way in which payments were exacted on a compulsory basis to finance a state church. On the other hand, to the system's apologists, tithes stood four-square in the realm of private property, as inalienable as the estates of the landed gentry. In the words of the Rev. George Burges of Halvergate, 'the first hand that is lifted up against the payment of tithes must, in fact . . . be lifted up against the payment of rent'.

Beyond this, tithes straddled the very boundary between matters secular and sacred. In a modernising world there were still some, like Burges, who insisted on the concept of divine right: 'Tithes were undoubtedly of divine origin, paid under the law as a maintenance for the Jewish priesthood; . . . the first fruit of Man's gratitude to his maker and preserver'. Consequently, 'the law of tithes being no law of man' stood beyond man's powers to amend and change it. At the same time the tithe question was present in many facets of the relationship between church and society in the nineteenth century, including economics, politics, the quality

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4 N.R.O. GTN/33/1 Suffield papers: W. Postle to Suffield, January 1831, describing a petition that was due to be presented to the House of Lords.
of pastoral care, the wealth of the clergy, the attitudes of individual incumbents, and the preservation of local custom. Only 53 of Norfolk’s 732 ‘tithe districts’ were tithe-free in 1836, and high-profile cases of riot and disputation covered in the local press were, in all probability, only the tip of an iceberg of parishes where relations between clergy and people were under severe strain.

Unrest and riot

Newspaper reports of cases which came to trial illustrate graphically how violent the tithe question had become in the autumn of 1830. In Attleborough the elderly Rev. Fairfax Francklin, attending a vestry meeting to discuss the tithe, found himself besieged in the building for several hours by a mob demanding a fifty per cent reduction:

‘After I had consented to reduce 10 per cent they became more violent, continuously crying out “damn him! damn him!” and they closed in upon me. . . twice I had mortar thrown at me. . . afterwards they . . . hurt me very much with sticks against my legs, my friends at last prevailed in getting me out, but as I was getting out I was struck very hard over the shoulders’.

At neighbouring Great Ellingham, the Rev. Colby’s rectory was surrounded for six hours until a detachment of soldiers arrived, while at Haddiscoe the Rev. Ellison’s tithe audit at the Crown Inn was taken over by a mob who ‘broke the windows and furniture . . . and kept the Rev. Gentleman in bodily fear till half past ten o’clock at night’. The Rev. Boycatt at Burgh St. Peter was made to attend a showdown at a pre-arranged meeting place in the parish:

‘The cry was general that I should refund [my tithe for that year]. I said I am determined not to yield to this demand, what is the use of my remaining’ [Boycatt signalled to his servant who was standing nearby with his horse.] ‘Joseph Godbold said “you are not going, sir, you shall not stir. . . you shall never leave this spot till you have done what we met to compel you to do”.’

Dramatic though these incidents were, and despite the heavy implication of newspaper reports that they were unprecedented intrusions into the parish idyll, further investigation suggests that these communities, in common with many others, were grumbling hives of discontent over the

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7 In rural areas ‘tithe districts’ can be assumed to relate exactly to the parish.
8 N.C. 11.12.30; P.R.O. HO 52/9 Home Office papers, Francklin to Lord Melbourne, 7 December 1830.
11 N.C. 15.1.31.
payment of tithe. In 1834 Ellison at Haddiscoe was still refusing to sign the glebe terrier because of a modus that he objected to, while at Burgh St. Peter, Boycatt’s evidence to the Commutation Commissioner in 1838 points to a tradition of dispute in the parish:

'The father of the present Rector had taken his tithes in kind for near 28 years – the present tithe-owner took them in kind for the first two years [1829 and 1830] of his incumbency . . . [Tithe-taking for these 30 years] was conducted on the mutual injury principle. The farmer opposing and resorting to every shift to annoy the Clergyman and the latter leaving the Tithes in kind to rot in his yard in defiance . . . The late Rector carried on for years various suits in the Exchequer to break [the moduses] down but with no success'.

Some visitation returns also suggest that all was far from well in the collection of tithe for many decades before the eruption of the 1830s. At Wiggenhall in 1801 the Rev. William Money stood on the very brink of litigation over his parishioners’ refusal to accept his tithe demands, while disputes over the Rev. Fairfax Francklin’s entitlement at Attleborough can, without difficulty, be traced back to 1784. And when the case at Edingthorpe came to court, the carefully crafted image of Adams as a harmless old clergyman, confronted by an armed mob at his kitchen door and there intimidated into making hasty concessions, quickly broke down when Adams was cross-questioned by Mr. Andrews, the defence barrister. Andrews’ probing revealed that the ‘mob’ had only gathered to seek fulfilment of promises previously made to them by Adams. He also raised the issue of Adams having been litigious and difficult in the past: of having been replaced as a poor law administrator at the Smallburgh House of Industry (‘I was a governor, but I am not now because they voted me out; this is not the first time I have been concerned in action’); and of being on bad terms with one of the defendants, Ezra Barcham, because he was a dissenter. The Edingtborpe dispute was demonstrated by Andrews to have been one between the clergyman and the farmers, with the labourers caught in the crossfire. Adams had promised them an increased wage if the parish as a whole agreed to pay the revised rate; the labourers had gone to the farmers with this proposal; the farmers had responded by sending the labourers back to the rector, demanding a reduction in tithes before higher wages could be paid.

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12 N.R.O. PD 208/182 Haddiscoe glebe terrier, 1834.
13 P.R.O. IR 18/5821 Burgh St. Peter tithe file, 1838.
14 N.R.O. DN/VIS 37/7 Lynn Marshland Rural Deanery Visitation Returns, 1801. William Money’s parishioners at Wiggenhall St. Mary Virgin had also locked the parish chest and repeatedly denied him access to the glebe terrier.
15 N.R.O. DN/VIS 30/5 Rockland Rural Deanery Visitation Returns, 1784. Francklin was facing a growing community of dissenters in his parish who were refusing to pay tithe as a matter of religious principle.
16 N.M. 30.7.31
The revelations eked out by Andrews brought the Edingthorpe case into line with contemporary suspicions that much of the ‘Swing’ unrest was fomented by farmers as a means of engineering a reduction in their own outgoings. The Rev. James Brown, Norwich’s prison chaplain, was in no doubt: ‘I have had much confidential conversation with the rioters,’ he wrote, ‘and I have no hesitation in declaring that the farmers, generally speaking, are at the root of all the mischief’. The Rev. Boycatt noted that ‘nearly all the farmers in the parish were present’ when his tithe confrontation took place in Burgh St. Peter, and it is significant that all the defendants in the Edingthorpe case were either tenant farmers (Ezra Barcham and John Bush) or owner-occupiers (Charles and John Turner). But it was not only the tenant farmers who were taking the opportunity to address long-standing tithe grievances under the cover of ‘Swing’. At Earsham the Rev. George Day considered that Sir William Dalling, the parish’s leading landowner, was heavily implicated in Earsham’s own mini-Swing/tithe revolt. Writing to Dalling in March 1831, Day said:

‘A deputation of Farmers waited upon me last November by the desire as they stated of Sir W. Dalling to know if I would make a certain reduction in my Tithes... Sir W. Dalling will at least allow his Tenants to act as they please on the subject of Tithe’.

The tithe riots of November 1830 were taking place against the backdrop of much wider social unrest. The overwhelming impression left by acts of incendiarism and riot is one of a periodic, loosely focused spasm of anger against a system that had succeeded in alienating the larger part of its population and had effectively closed all avenues of political, religious and legal expression. Consequently the tithe riot at Attleborough was associated with an outbreak of machine-breaking and a march on the workhouse, where the people ‘shouted, blew the horn and knocked at the windows’. Similar incidents took place at Forncett where the mob, frustrated in their attempts to challenge the Rev. Jack at his tithe audit, ‘proceeded to the Poor House and pulled a part of it down’. Implied here is an awareness on the part of the labouring poor that tithing was one of the many building blocks in a carefully constructed system of social

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17 N.R.O. GTN/32/1, Suffield papers: Brown to Suffield 14 December 1830.
18 N.C. 15.1.31
19 N.M. 30.7.31; N.S. 941.081 Edingthorpe Tithe Return, 1839.
20 N.R.O. MEA 3/603, Day to Dalling, March 1831.
21 N.C. 15.1.31
22 N.C. 4.12.30
oppression, an awareness which, incidentally, many conservative defenders of tithe shared. A consideration of the timing of episodes of unrest on the Heydon estate (Table 2.1) gives an indication that a symbolic linkage between tithe payments and chronic poverty was being made in the minds of the rural poor.

Table 2.1: Coincidence between tithe payment and unrest on the Heydon estate, 1830 - 1839

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Parish</th>
<th>Tithe Payment</th>
<th>Amount</th>
<th>Target of Unrest</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nov. 1830</td>
<td>Irimingland</td>
<td>(by) Mr. Priest</td>
<td>£73.10.0</td>
<td>Mr. Priest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan. 1831</td>
<td>Heydon</td>
<td>(to) Rev. Dr. Bulwer</td>
<td>£69.18.2</td>
<td>Rev. Dr. Bulwer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mar. 1832</td>
<td>Corpusty</td>
<td>(to) Rev. Nepean</td>
<td>£48.6.2</td>
<td>Thomas Hase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov. 1832</td>
<td>Corpusty</td>
<td>(to) Rev. Nepean</td>
<td>£294.0.0</td>
<td>Henry Johnson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov. 1833</td>
<td>Corpusty</td>
<td>(to) Rev. Nepean</td>
<td>£294.0.0</td>
<td>Thomas Hase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dec. 1838</td>
<td>Saxthorpe</td>
<td>(by) Saxthorpe tenant farmers</td>
<td></td>
<td>3 tenant farmers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dec 1839</td>
<td>Corpusty</td>
<td>(by) A. W. Ireland</td>
<td>£13.10.0</td>
<td>A. W. Ireland</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SOURCE: N.R.O. BUL 11/135, 616 x 1; N.R.O. BUL 11/134, 616 x 1; local newspaper reports; J. Archer (PhD).

Seven times in nine years, major outbreaks of incendiaryism on the Heydon estate coincided closely with the payment of tithes. On only one of these occasions was the receiving clergyman the target of the unrest: in all other cases it was the farmers handing over the tithe who bore the brunt of the ill-feeling, a fact that hints at a rapid breakdown in any farmer-labourer alliance in the years immediately after ‘Swing’. Certainly no direct causal link can be proved here, but the pattern is suggestive of a growing awareness that, if only in an abstract way, the tithe system was believed to be a principal reason for hardship among agricultural labourers. At Field Dalling, for example, it was the fact that ‘the clergyman had given notice that he would receive his tithe that day’ which directly sparked a riot, and the farmers had to advise him ‘that it would by no
means be safe for him to remain there'.

So predictable had trouble at tithe audits become that a party of dragoons was sent to Long Stratton in advance, while at Fornsett the Rev. Jack ‘left his house early in the morning and ordered his servants to distribute the meat which had been provided for the tithe feast among the poor of the parish’.25

Tithe riots, in common with other manifestations of unrest, left the authorities in general, and clergymen in particular, with the dilemma of how to respond. Whilst a military crackdown was advocated in some quarters, and deployed at Hickling and Southrepps, others saw such a measure as counter-productive. One Holt magistrate incurred the wrath of Home Secretary Melbourne by suggesting that if the people had been told ‘that their Wages should be increased, Rents and Tythes reduced and Thrashing Machines laid aside, they would have quietly dispersed and committed no further violence’.27

For many individual clergymen a strategic, voluntary abatement of tithe seems to have recommended itself, and there were a handful of instances where such an abatement took place in the neighbourhood of other parishes which were experiencing unrest.28 As early as 1816, tithe and rent abatements as a means of alleviating hardship had been lobbied for in Earsham, but while the landowner Sir Windham Dalling consistently offered abatements over the following 14 years, no complementary move seems to have been forthcoming from the tithe-owner, the Rev. George Day.29 The inherent inconsistency of voluntary tithe abatement could cause its own problems, however, particularly in parishes where more than one clergyman owned tithes, or where clergymen had holdings in more than one parish. This may have been a factor in the case of the Rev. Humfrey, who abated his tithes by 20% at Great Dunham but was the subject of an arson attack in his ‘home’ parish of Wroxham, or in the case of the Rev. George Jarvis at Buxton, three times

23 N.M. 4.12.30
24 P.R.O. HO 52/9 Dean George Pellew to Lord Melbourne, 14 December 1830.
25 N.C. 4.12.30
26 E.A. 30.11.30
27 P.R.O. HO 52/9 W. Withers (Holt) to Lord Melbourne, 2 December 1830.
28 Examples include West Walton (next-door to the troubled parish of Walpole St. Andrew); Kelling (Holt); Great Massingham (Gayton Thorpe); Lyng (Great Witchingham); Rockland (Attleborough); Rockland St. Peter (Great Ellingham); Rackheath (Wroxham).
29 N.R.O. MEA 7/9, 660 x 8, Earsham Tithe Dispute, Day to ?, 7 December 1830.
30 N.C. 11.12.30
targeted by incendiaries while the Rev. Anson of Lyng was offering abatements on the tithes that he owned in Jarvis’s parish.\textsuperscript{31} As one correspondent to Lord Melbourne observed, ‘demands if granted in one place are denied in another – the disaffection remains’.\textsuperscript{32}

The extent to which tithe riots were successful in reducing tithes is a moot point. At Forncett the evidence suggests that, despite the unrest, the heaviest tithing year of the seven leading up to commutation was immediately after ‘Swing’.\textsuperscript{33} On the other hand the Great Ellingham vestry worked out a detailed programme of increased wages for labourers ‘in consideration of the liberal abatement of Twenty Per Cent on our Tithes made to us by the Revd. Colby’.\textsuperscript{34} In general the tendency seems to have been for abatements and arbitrations to have been agreed to: many are reported in the newspapers of late 1830 and early 1831, and by 1833 the Norfolk land agent Robert Wright was able to report to the Parliamentary Select Committee on agriculture that ‘generally, the clergy take twenty to twenty-five per cent less than their strict entitlement’.\textsuperscript{35} If nothing else, tithe riots had succeeded in bringing the tithe question close to the top of the local political agenda.

For the most part, however, this triumph was short-lived. The ‘tithe-files’ which were compiled as each parish moved through the process of commutation after 1836 indicate that even the most contentious parishes could be settled amicably on a commuted tithe rent-charge. In the case of Edingthorpe, Commutation Commissioner Henry Gunning commented specifically on the cordiality of proceedings:

“They were very jocular with each other when I left the room and were on the point of eating and drinking, which I suppose quite restored them’. Despite a small increase on the rent charge, ‘the farmers themselves admitted that they had not been by any means injured in their amount of composition, and that they did not consider them too high’.\textsuperscript{36}

\textsuperscript{31}N.C. 11.12.30
\textsuperscript{32}P.R.O HO 52/9 Anonymous correspondent from Aylsham to Lord Melbourne, 25 November 1830.
\textsuperscript{33}N.R.O. PD 421/30: Forncett tithe compositions over the period 1829 – 1835 were as follows: £453.3.6 in 1829; £515.10.6 in 1830; £672.16.6 in 1831; £626.16.3 in 1832; £615.7.1 in 1833; £626.1.10 in 1834; and £650.16.0 in 1835.
\textsuperscript{34}N.R.O. MF 958/10, Great Ellingham Vestry Minutes, 14 December 1830.
\textsuperscript{35}S.C. on Agriculture V, 1833, p. 106.
\textsuperscript{36}P.R.O. IR 18/5900 Edingthorpe Tithe File, 1839.
Given that among those present at the Edingthorpe commutation meeting were the Rev. Richard Adams, John Bush, John Turner and Charles Turner, who just a few years earlier had confronted each other in a court of law, such a rapprochement is highly suggestive of two things, both of which place the tithe question in its wider political context. Either the farmers’ involvement in the ‘Swing’ riots of 1830 had been a calculated attempt to deflect the anger of the labourers away from themselves and onto the clergy, or some political expedient had been taken in the intervening years which had brought the interests and attitudes of the farming middle-class and the elite governing class more closely into line than hitherto. Among the candidates must be the Reform Act of 1832, a political change that was frequently conflated with the tithe question in contemporary discussion, and the Poor Law Amendment Act, the political and social ramifications of which are discussed in much more detail elsewhere in his thesis.

Enclosure, Commutation and Enrichment

When, in May 1816, the composer of an anonymous letter itemising all the injustices visited upon the people of Ashill since the parish’s Enclosure Award of 1786 chose to post his thoughts at the Rectory gate, his action symbolised two important legacies of the enclosure movement.\(^{37}\) Firstly, even after thirty years, the enclosure was still causing hardship and disaffection, and, secondly, clergymen were identified as being among enclosure’s principal beneficiaries.\(^ {38}\) Voluntary commutation of tithe was a central feature of many enclosure awards, and as the tithe-owner effectively had the power to prevent the enclosure by refusing commutation, many tithing agreements erred on the side of generosity towards the clergyman. At Hillington the Rev. James Hodgson made a frank acknowledgment of this fact when he said that ‘his predecessors had not received more than £200 annually from tithes, though their proper value was nearer £350. After


\(^{38}\) The role of enclosure as a challenge to popular custom is discussed elsewhere in this thesis, especially in Chapter Six.
enclosure the value settled at around £500 “with the advantage besides of receiving my income without any trouble and vexation by which it was before obtained”.

Commutation associated with enclosure often took the form of land allotments. By this means the clergyman became a substantial landowner in the parish, with blocks of glebe land often consolidated in the area of church and rectory. The troubled parish of Edingthorpe is again a case in point. Fig. 2.1 indicates the way in which enclosure consolidated the glebe land of the Rev. Richard Adams in the fields closest to the church.

**Fig. 2.1: Land Consolidation at enclosure, Edingthorpe 1828, showing the lands of the main protagonists at the Tithe Riot trial (1831)**

Furthermore, as tithe was designed to present the owner with a tenth of the parish yield, the grant of land required to ensure this income was often consolidated from the parish’s most productive soils or from considerably more than ten per cent of the available parish land. This process of aggrandisement continued long after enclosure, with clergymen entering into a kaleidoscopic array of land exchanges with other landowners in a way that

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40 The church is, admittedly, difficult to spot on this map, but it is situated just to the right of the narrow strip in the centre of Adams’ holding (red), immediately to the south of (white) field 34.
constantly fine-tuned the results and benefits of the original enclosure award. Significantly, landownership also enhanced the social stature of the clergyman, who became an ‘altogether better established figure than a man faced with yearly wrangles over a disputed property only grudgingly and partially conceded… Country parsons [became] gentleman farmers. The hunting fields would be open to them, and the traditional functions of social leadership, notably those of magistrate, were thrust upon them’.  

The whole process of enclosure was heavily weighted in the interests of the tithe owner in a way that would not have been lost on the wider community. Tithe owners had the right to appoint one enclosure commissioner for their parish, and clergymen not infrequently chose another clergyman. They also usually received the land of their choice and were, furthermore, exempted from all administrative costs. All of this was underpinned by a church organisation that was demonstrating hitherto unsuspected reserves of business acumen and legal determination. ‘Perhaps for the last time… the church was in a position to dictate to the farming community and it used its advantage to full effect… Some shrewd financial brains stalked the quiet precincts of cathedral closes.’

Commutation to rent-charge, when it was made compulsory by the 1836 Act, was certainly less heavily weighted towards the benefit of the tithe owner. The Rev. George Burges at Halvergate was an implacable opponent of it, arguing that it would remove income from the clergy and place it in the hands of ‘the opulent landowner, already… gorged… with ecclesiastical plunder’. Responsibility for Poor and Highway Rates became inextricably bound up with the commuted tithe and, in its turn, became the source of considerable ill-feeling. The Heydon estate agent John Richardson’s meticulously detailed commutation calculations for the parish of Cawston (Table 2.2) demonstrate how

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41 Edingthorpe parish took sixteen years to move from Award (1812) to Act (1828). Much of this time was spent in negotiating an extraordinarily complex series of land exchanges between the landed proprietors of Edingthorpe and the neighbouring parishes of Witton and Bacton. Among the major players were the Revs. Adams, Atkinson and Fauquier (N.R.O. PD 62/43 Edingthorpe land exchanges, 1828).
42 Evans, Contentious Tithe, p. 106.
43 Evans, Contentious Tithe, p. 101.
44 Burgess, Remarks, p. 18.
the inclusion of these rates made the commuted tithe appear to exceed the seven-year average that preceded it. The average tithe composition for those seven years had actually been £715.8.9. With poor and highway rates included the amount was inflated to £1023.16.5, almost exactly the amount for which tithes were commuted in 1841. The situation was exacerbated by the fact that the calculation was based on pre-1834 poor rates. The Cawston figures indicate that an immediate and considerable reduction had been effected in 1835, something which – if sustained – would not have been reflected in the commutation figure. So convinced did some farmers become that they were the victims of sleight of hand that some tenancies were surrendered on principle. At Gayton Thorpe in 1849, after a dispute over the commuted tithe, farmer Aldham Sooby wrote to his landlord: ‘[your agent] Mr. Edwards charged me last night with not acting to you with common honesty . . . I could not brook the charge, nor could I enter into the business of re-taking the farm again’.45

Table 2.2: Tithe Commutation calculations for the parish of Cawston, 1836, showing the inclusion of poor and highway rates within the final commutation figure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tithe Composition</th>
<th>Poor Rates</th>
<th>Highway Rates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1829</td>
<td>843.11.6</td>
<td>261.5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1830</td>
<td>848.11.6</td>
<td>288.15.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1831</td>
<td>852.1.6</td>
<td>330.0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1832</td>
<td>616.8.3</td>
<td>316.5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1833</td>
<td>617.0.9</td>
<td>333.14.11½</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1834</td>
<td>616.15.3</td>
<td>336.8.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1835</td>
<td>613.11.3</td>
<td>195.10.6½</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>5008.0.0</td>
<td>2061.12.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>715.8.9</td>
<td>294.10.3¼</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* John Richardson based these calculations on the combined highway rates for 1833 and 1834 only.

SOURCE: N.R.O. BUL 11/347, 617 x 8 Bulwer papers, Cawston Tithe Commutation calculations, 1836

45 N.R.O. HMN 3/59/1-4 Hamond papers, Sooby to Hamond, 10 January 1849.
However it was the decision to base rent-charge on the average value of tithes taken in the preceding seven years that ensured the tithe question would still be causing trouble at the end of the nineteenth century. This method of calculation had already been found wanting when early voluntary commutations had been based on the seven-year average price of corn. Such calculations made no provision for the collapse of the price of corn at the end of the Napoleonic wars. Consequently a tithe commutation calculated in 1819 would have reflected a wheat price which, nationally, averaged around 80s. per quarter. This spelt trouble in the ensuing seven years when the average wheat price fell to 57s. 5d. per quarter.46 To the tithe payers of 1895 and 1896 this foreseeable folly had merely been repeated by the 1836 Commutation Act. With farm incomes falling in the 1890s, the tithe was again beginning to bite, particularly as Norfolk had one of the highest rent-charge rates per acre in England, set at a time when the average rent-charge had been ‘as high as the tithes were at the best of times’.47 Even so, nothing more than a flexible revision of the system was being sought, and the suggestion of abolition, made at Henry Rew’s public meetings in 1895, was quickly dismissed: ‘Sixty years ago the question of tithe was settled by the Tithe Commutation Act, and to raise it again in the form proposed would be a revolutionary measure’.48

**Absenteeism and Alienation**

By the end of the eighteenth century there had opened up, between the richest and the poorest clergy, a gulf in income that was regarded as one of the great scandals of the contemporary church. The privileged clergy were close to sources of political power and patronage and usually had their own private sources of income. At the other end of the scale perpetual and stipendiary curates found themselves obliged to hold posts

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47 R.C. on Agriculture, 1895, p. 59, citing R. N. Bacon’s Report on Agriculture in the County of Norfolk (1844).
48 R. C. on Agriculture, 1895, p. 60, report of Henry Rew, citing the views of Canon Brereton.
in plurality in order to sustain a viable income. Many saw this as a contributory factor in declining moral standards, and incipient tension between absentee rector and their over-stretched curates can sometimes be detected in visitation returns. A legacy of plurality and non-residency continued in certain livings throughout the nineteenth century, frequently exacerbating problems when it came to the settlement of tithe.

One community that clearly had profound difficulties in its relationship with an absentee rector was the parish of Surlingham. In the Norwich Mercury of 8 December 1830, the Rev. William Collett, incumbent of St. Mary's Thetford and of the ruined church of St. Saviour's in Surlingham, published an address in response to the unrest that had disrupted his attempts to gather the St. Saviour's tithes:

'I was sorry, for the sake of the poor, that some of you met at the Ferry House in an unlawful manner. . . but I have no doubt that you were misled and made tools of by others . . . I have received from some of the farmers . . . a notice to gather my tithes in kind, or else to take in future just what they please to offer. I cannot submit to such an unjust demand . . . and I hereby make it known to you that . . . it is my intention to distribute as a gift amongst the poor and deserving families, all the eggs, milk, pigs, poultry and fruit which shall in future belong to me, as the small tithes arising upon the several occupations of Messrs. Samuel Barnes, Gibbs Murrell, R. G. Rudd, John Gent, Robert High, John Newman snr., James Smith and Thomas Middleton.'

Collett's tactic of 'naming and shaming' represented a clerical counter-attack against the farmer-labourer alliance. It called the farmers' bluff: if they were prepared to submit tithes in kind they could not object to the produce being given directly to the poor. On 28 December the farmers named by Collett struck back. In their letter to the Norfolk Chronicle they described the impossibility of communicating directly with a rector who insisted upon delegating everything through his agent. Furthermore,

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49 Evans, Contentious Tithe, pp. 2 – 4.
50 At West Winch, the curate James Irvine wrote a lengthy supplement to his visitation return, cataloguing the moral ills and the triumph of Nonconformity in a parish where the incumbent never set foot (N.R.O. DN/VIS 64/14 Lynn Rural Deanery Visitation Returns, 1838). The Rev. Henry Lloyd, taking a permanent rest-cure by the sea at Kessingland, allowed his curate Thomas Weatherhead £30 per year to look after the West Norfolk parishes of Docking, Sedgeford and Fring (N.R.O. DN/VIS 36/12 Heacham Rural Deanery Visitation Return, 1801). For the parish of Barmer the Rev. Edward Senckler completed his visitation return with minimalistic simplicity: 'I do not visit the parish officially', he wrote (N.R.O. DN/VIS 64/2 Burnham Rural Deanery Visitation Returns, 1838).
51 N.M. 18.12.30
Collett had stubbornly refused to abate tithes that were much higher than in neighbouring parishes, thereby limiting their scope for increasing wages to labourers:

‘When [on 4 December] we paid our tithes to his agent, we enquired what terms we might expect for the next year, and received for answer that he would not alter one farthing from what he had previously fixed. [Collett’s] suggestion that we may have been accessories to the unlawful oppositions at the Ferry-house is without any foundation, and altogether uncalled for.’

Collett’s post had in effect become a complete sinecure. At the Tithe Commutation Award of 1843 he was awarded a rent-charge of £309 for the defunct parish of St. Saviour’s, whose boundaries could no longer be traced on maps or on the ground, while the Rev. Scott, resident clergyman and vicar of the existing church of St. Mary’s was awarded £101 for his parish even though he was effectively the minister of the whole of Surlingham. The rector of a church that was an ivy-clad ruin and of a parish that had disappeared from the landscape, Collett presided over the ecclesiastical equivalent of a rotten borough. His refusal to contribute towards a Surlingham ‘Hail Storm’ fund was a further indication of the myriad small ways in which many clergymen managed to alienate themselves from their communities.

Social withdrawal from the community was not confined to the absentee clergyman, however. At least one correspondent to the *Norfolk Chronicle* became so exasperated by the failure of the resident clergy in their pastoral role and, in particular, the failure of many to acknowledge their responsibilities when it came to social upheavals like the ‘Swing’ riots, that he recommended to one of them, the rector of Stoke Holy Cross, a reading of ‘Goldsmith’s beautiful poem of the Deserted Village’. In it ‘he will see such a portrait of what a Christian minister ought to be that, if he is not too absorbed by worldly pursuits, he will not repent having read it’.

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52 N.C. 1.1.31
53 N.R.O. PD 611/18 Surlingham Tithe Commutation Award, 1843.
54 An entry in the vestry minute book for September 1843 records that a letter had been sent to Collett inviting him to contribute to a fund set up ‘towards alleviating the injury of the sufferers of the late Hail Storm’. An addendum notes that ‘Rev. William Collett did not contribute to the appeal sent to him and the Parish raised among some of the inhabitants the sum of £19 19s.’ (N.R.O. PD 611/24 Surlingham Vestry Minute Book).
55 N.C. 8.1.31.
'Thus to relieve the wretched was his pride / And even his failings leaned to virtue’s side / But in his duty prompt at every call / He watched and wept, he prayed and felt for all.'

That the archaic legacies of absentee rectors, remote tithe-holdings, and wealth discrepancies among the clergy lingered throughout the nineteenth century is illustrated by a correspondence between the Rev. J. Dudley Suffling of Norwich and the Rev. A. W. Upcher of Wreningham. In November 1893 Suffling wrote to Upcher:

‘Can you kindly reduce the amount of tithe I pay to you for land farmed by a Mr. Welton? I am compelled to ask you, because my income grows so small that I shall seriously have to consider whether it will not be my duty to resign and go back to a curacy again . . . [Mr. Welton] pays me £47 and out of that you receive £16 16s. 0d. yearly as tithe . . . I believe the land is at Wreningham . . . and what I get from [it] is the sole stipend of St. Mary's Coslany [in Norwich].’

Upcher’s response was to write to his land agent, asking him to check whether he did indeed receive £16 16s. per year from this land, and to consider what might be done to relieve Suffling’s burden. Between them, Upcher and Suffling illustrated a paradox: the complexities of land ownership were such that clergymen could be tithe payers as well as tithe owners, and among poorer clergymen tithes could represent a considerable financial burden. Above all the Upcher-Suffling correspondence demonstrates just what an arcane mystery the tithe system had become in places, even to those who derived their livings from it: Upcher had no idea of his tithe income or its geographical origins; Suffling was unsure of the whereabouts of the land that provided him with his principal income.

The Personal Dimension

Despite the provision in the 1836 Act for tithes to be compulsorily commuted, by 1852 62.7% of commutation (nationally) had been achieved by voluntary agreement. Tithing had frequently been conducted in an atmosphere where clergymen had taken less than their due or eschewed all annual increases ‘in order to

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57 N.R.O. PD 60/33 Wreningham glebe and tithe correspondence, Suffling to Upcher 2 November 1893.
58 Evans, *Contentious Tithe*, p. 141.
buy peace and maintain a viable ministry’. Even conservatives were aware of this trend: George Burges at Halvergate identified it as grounds for some kind of regulation, given that hostility to the system was leading incumbents to under-claim, thereby diminishing the value of the income for their successors.

It was possible, even in the weeks of ‘Swing’, for clergymen to be feted as local heroes. In the prevailing climate the Rev. Atwell Lake of West Walton could have been forgiven for fearing the worst when he peered out of his rectory and saw a large crowd gathering there. Instead, ‘to his surprise and gratification [the crowd] gave him three cheers’ in recognition of his recent tithe abatement and of ‘his character and conduct as their resident Minister and neighbour’. This type of rapport contrasted sharply with the climate in parishes like Sharrington and Saxlingham where an early attempt at voluntary commutation foundered on the attitude of the Rev. Atwood, ‘who has so frequently tampered with the occupiers of land in these parishes that he has taught them how to gain by delay and litigation’.

The unquantifiable factor in any tithing arrangement was, of course, the personality and political outlook of the incumbent. Local tithe management having been left in the hands of individuals, it was unsurprising that a whole panoply of individualistic arrangements developed, the viability of each one frequently hinging on the character of the clergyman or of the parishioners with whom he had to deal. One result was a potentially huge disparity in the tithe values claimed on lands that were essentially similar. In his evidence to the 1833 Parliamentary Committee on Agriculture, Robert Wright reported that ‘in the Flaig Hundred there is one case where 14s. an acre had been taken out . . . for 14 years; at the same time there was land of a similar quality let at 5s. 6d.’.

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59 Evans, Contentious Tithe, p. 72.
61 N.M. 11.12.30
As was the case in Great Witchingham at the end of the eighteenth century, the combination of a new rector intent on establishing his full tithe rights, a failed attempt at a voluntary commutation, some contentious land exchanges and a simmering disagreement over rights of way, could cause a local dispute to assume Byzantine proportions. The Great Witchingham affair was given added impetus by the conduct of the Rev. Jeans which was, according to the land agent, 'so very over-bearing and out of the way that he has laid himself open to nine tenths more abuse and ill behaviour from his Parishioners than he would otherwise have had'.

At Banham, the refusal of the Rev. John Surtees to sign any glebe terriers between 1813 and 1845 because of a contested modus was paralleled by his obduracy when it came to reaching agreement over commutation. Between March 1837 and November 1844 Surtees refused to budge from his commutation demand for £1300, despite repeated letters from his parishioners seeking a compromise solution. As was the case with Collett at Surlingham, the problem was exacerbated by the fact that Surtees was an absentee rector who insisted on conducting all business through an intermediary. If granted, Surtees’s commutation demand would have brought Banham’s tithe onto a level with the nearby, much larger, parishes of Attleborough and Pulham, and a tithe burden per head of £2 1s. 9d. would have been much higher than that borne by any other parish in the neighbourhood. Tithes were eventually commuted in Banham for £950.

The problem of litigious rectors, anxious to maximise their tithe revenue, was by no means confined to the early part of the study period. In 1904 Mr. Neville of Sloley suddenly found himself served with a demand for payment ‘in respect of some land in Ashmanhaugh which [the rector says] is owned by me’. Writing to his lawyer son he went on, ‘I have never paid tithe to the Ashmanhaugh rector . . . as far as I am aware.

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64 N.R.O. FEL 374, 552 x 4: Fellowes papers, Fellowes’ arbitration in the Great Witchingham Tithe Dispute (c. 1793).
65 N.R.O. FX 189/1 Minutes of vestry meetings concerning tithe commutation in Banham, 15 December 1836 to 28 November 1844.
Wd. you tell me when the tithe claimed by the Rector... becomes barred by the Statute of Limitations?  

This was not to say, of course, that clergymen had a monopoly on awkwardness, and where relationships had irretrievably broken down it was sometimes the case that major landowners would step in and rent tithes from the clergyman. This occurred at Heydon  and at Earsham and, as the Rev. George Day of Earsham acknowledged in a letter to Sir Windham Dalling, the intention was ‘solely to put an end to the bickering which must always exist where tithes are pd. in kind.’ Dalling’s intervention, made by renting the tithes from Day in 1820, had clearly been an attempt to end the conflict over Day’s entitlement to tithe on former common land, recently enclosed and occupied by farmer Thomas Spilling. The dispute had begun almost from the moment of Day’s accession to the living in 1812, and Day had even made an attempt at ‘commutation by coercion’, demanding that every farmer and tenant sign a legally binding document setting out the amount of tithe each was obliged to pay. Thomas Spilling’s document was endorsed with the words: ‘Mr Spilling will pay the above composition but had rather not sign anything’. In the event Dalling’s tithe rental agreement was short-lived as Day fell out with Dalling’s land agent, Edmund Woolterton. Writing in 1831, Day observed that ‘Sir W. Dalling once hired the Tithe at £500 per annum, but Mr. Woolterton made such mischief between us that he soon gave them up’. Day’s suggestion, made in the same letter, that Dalling might like to consider renewing the arrangement received a short and pithy answer.  

The Heydon and Earsham tithe-rental cases are significant because they demonstrate tithe to have been such a key issue of principle that its preservation came to over-rule consideration of what were, in other aspects of nineteenth-century life, vitally important common interests. These included the common interests of the clergy -

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66 N.R.O. NEV 11/31, 592 x 2: Neville papers, Neville to his son Reginald (10 February 1904).  
67 N.R.O. BUL 11/341, 617 x 8: Bulwer papers, John Richardson to W.E.L. Bulwer (6 December 1831).  
68 N.R.O. MEA 7/8, 660 x 9: Earsham tithe dispute, Day to Dalling (28 July 1820).  
69 N.R.O. MEA 7/8, 660 x 9: Tithe payment agreements (1819).  
swept up in Day’s whirlwind of litigation was the Rev. William Chester of Denton who happened to own titheable land in Earsham parish and, particularly at Heydon, they included the common interests of kinship. In the 1830s the Heydon estate was owned by William Bulwer and managed by John Richardson. Within the estate boundaries a number of parish churches had become ‘dynastic incumbencies’ for members of the Bulwer family. In February 1833 Richardson received a letter from the Rev. Edward Bulwer’s legal representative concerning Newell Wood in Bulwer’s parish of Salle: ‘understanding that since the year 1818 Trees have been felled and Hurdles made in this wood [the Rev. Bulwer] is surprised that no notice has been given him at any time previously that he might have the Tythe belonging to the Rectory’. Richardson calculated the amount due to be £1 10s. 9d. which he sent on account with an accompanying note stating: ‘Mr. Richardson is informed by Messrs. Foster & Unthank that no claim for Tithe can be made for more than 6 years back, such claim being barred by the Statute of Limitation’. It is striking that in the context of an estate closely tied by kinship, and with an annual turnover in 1833-34 that exceeded £15,500, both parties were prepared to take legal advice over the provenance of a sum of £1 10s. 9d. Similar caution was also demonstrated over the commutation at Cawston. Far from the Rev. Augustine Bulwer’s proposal for rent charge being accepted at face value, his suggestion was taken as the cue for ‘John Richardson, Samuel Hickling, Mr. Bird and Mr. Fisher [to] form a committee to examine into the statement given us by the Rector . . . and report the same at the next meeting’. It is axiomatic that the issue of personality had some role in the interminable tithe disputes that beset some Norfolk parishes. What must be borne in mind, however, is that some of the most intractable characters who emerge from the historical record were, as they saw it, simply the most determined defenders of a system that would at

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71 N.R.O. MEA 7/9, 660 x 8: Francis & Turner (solicitors) to Gen. Robert Meade (16 February 1822).  
72 N.R.O. BUL 11/342/1: Bulwer papers, Rev. E. Bulwer’s agent to John Richardson (18 February 1833).  
73 N.R.O. BUL 11/342/4: Bulwer papers, Richardson to Bulwer (n.d.).  
74 The Heydon Estate turnover figures have been calculated from the Estate Account Book 1833 – 1842 (N.R.O. BUL 11/135, 616 x 1)  
75 N.R.O. BUL 11/347, 617 x 8 Cawston Tithe Commutation Meeting, 11 April 1838.
once perpetuate the link between church and state and maintain the income and social status of future incumbents. It is notable that when the Tithe Commutation Act finally took some of the sting out of this debate by offering a nationwide principle of settlement that no longer hinged upon the relationship in individual parishes between tithe-owners and tithe-payers, some of the most highly-contentious parishes found it possible to reach an amicable agreement. Such parishes included Earsham and Edingthorpe, where tithe disputes had set people at each other’s throats for over twenty years.

Tithe custom and the law

Many tithe disputes stemmed from a desire on the part of the clergyman to move local collection away from ‘custom’ and onto a ‘legal’ footing. This was despite the fact that the whole concept of tithing was, in origin, symbolic as well as economic, representing an attempt ‘to link pastors with the productive toil of the community’ and in so doing to formalise the links between a clergyman and his parish. Woodforde, for instance, described a well-established tithe audit custom in which the payment of tithe assumed calendrical significance as a day of feasting and entertainment:

“This being my Tithe Audit Day the following People waited on me, paid me their respective dues and dined and spent the remaining part of the day with me, they left me about 12 o’clock at night, well pleased with their entertainment.”

The attitude of many arch-proponents of the tithing system was often very close to the notion of custom, demonstrating an implicit belief in the ability of bonds of mutual trust and respect to deliver up all that the clergyman felt was his due by divine right. For most clergymen, however, lawyers were essential allies in the struggle to ensure

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76 The clash between custom (in its broadest sense) and the documentary law is discussed in detail in Chapter 6.
77 Evans, Contentious Tithe, p. 86.
that tithe rights and obligations were crystal clear to all: from experience it was known that once legal definitions became confused or lost the impenetrable ‘law’ of local custom would rapidly take over. It was for this reason that new incumbents were among the keenest to assert their rights, as was the case at Great Witchingham and at Earsham, where the ministries of the Revs. Jeans and Day were characterised by tithe disputes almost from day one.

Glebe terriers were frequently employed as the means by which church and parish might regularly come together and set down in black and white the precise details of the clergyman’s property and entitlements. These documents could, themselves, be the frequent cause of disputation, but the failure to ensure an understanding of who owned what could be the recipe for disaster. So keen had the parishioners of Great Witchingham been for Jeans to become a resident clergyman that ‘he was enabled to get nearly 10 acres of land about his house; ... [Jeans] was allowed to make this exchange almost as he wished, and has since never produced any account of the same ... but the land has been occupied by him and [various] tenants the same as if a regular exchange had taken place’. 79 As a consequence the parish was plunged into years of litigation.

The imperative to avoid the establishment of ‘custom’ was probably what drove Edward Bulwer to challenge the Heydon estate over his tithe rights in Salle (cited earlier), for not only would he have understood that a tithing opportunity missed could rapidly become a custom of ‘no tithe’, he would also have been aware that custom could be invoked by the wealthy landowner as readily as by the poor tenant. John Richardson, on behalf of the estate, was quick to do this when challenging the Cawston tithe commutation in April 1843: ‘we the undersigned ... do hereby claim a custom of paying three half-pence for every Cow and Calf in lieu of tithe of Calves and Milk, to the Rector’. 80 Custom could even, when the occasion demanded, be

79 N.R.O. FEL 513, 552 x 4: Fellowes papers, Fellowes’ arbitration in the Great Witchingham Tithe Dispute (c. 1793).
80 N.R.O. BUL 11/347, 617 x 8: Bulwer papers, Richardson to the Tithe Commissioners (28 April 1843).
claimed by the clergyman. This had been, in essence, the basis of Philip Jeans’s claim when an irate neighbour blocked the access way to his newly-acquired glebe land.81

Legal cases intended to break down moduses were usually heard in the Court of Exchequer, a process so notoriously slow that many litigants died without seeing the outcome of their suit. Among Norfolk tithe disputes, those at Burgh St. Peter, Earsham, Southtown and Great Witchingham found their way into the Court of Exchequer. Only in the case of Southtown was anything like a definitive resolution reached, and the historical record leaves it on the verge of an appeal in the House of Lords.82 The fact that the legal establishment was beginning to feel the pressure of a seemingly limitless case-load is suggested by the fact that, in 1830, the Rev. Robert Wilson of Ashwellthorpe received a circular letter from the Tithe Commission, recommending that if ‘involved in, or contemplating litigation’ incumbents should await the outcome of King vs. Joddrell, currently making its way through the courts, in case any important precedents were set for tithe law.83 In 1832 an Act of Parliament redressed the balance slightly in favour of custom by decreeing that ‘defendants of a modus’ had only to prove thirty years of continuous payment ‘to have the courts declare it valid’.84

The determination of many early nineteenth century clergymen to break down customs and to place the tithe system on a firmer legal footing was indicative of a change in wider society. An older order, based more on oral tradition and local custom, was giving way to a more legalistic and authoritarian approach to parish affairs. As a consequence the system was becoming more and more heavily weighted towards the interests of those who could read legal documents, those who could afford to have them drawn up, and those who held them in their possession.

81 N.R.O. FEL 513, 552 x 4 Fellowes papers: Fellowes’ arbitration in the Great Witchingham Tithe Dispute, c. 1793. A witness claimed that Jeans had tried to invoke customary right when a neighbour he had antagonised blocked-off an access way that had been established by Jeans’ predecessor. The incident is an interesting precursor to the right of way disputes discussed in Chapter 6.
82 N.R.O. Y/D 32/1 Southtown Mills dispute, 1826.
83 N.R.O. PD 60/33 Rev. Robert Wilson, glebe and tithe correspondence, Ashwellthorpe, 30 August 1830.
84 Evans, Contentious Tithe, p. 122.
Disputes and their legacy

In their richest form, tithe disputes could embrace elements of custom, litigation, enclosure disagreements and personality clashes. Such was the case at Earsham where, between 1812 and 1831, George Day kept local landowners and farmers busy with a constant and ever-changing barrage of claim and counter-claim concerning the exact make-up of his tithe entitlement. Compared to some of his clerical contemporaries, Day’s attitude to tithe was relatively prosaic: he regarded it as ‘only an Income, a Remuneration for Divine Service & therefore not like real property’. Consequently he believed that he was only exercising his right to maximise his income, an entitlement earned because of the high level of pastoral care and ‘constant residence’ that he offered. 85

Day had a number of on-going disputes with local farmers concerning modus payments on recently enclosed land and customary rights of cattle-grazing, but the dispute that ran the longest, and eventually reached the Court of Exchequer, was the case that Day brought against General Sir Robert Meade, a close friend and associate of Earsham’s principal landowner Sir William Dalling. So significant was Day’s choice of opponent in this case that some suspected his action to be nothing short of a ‘who governs?’ challenge for authority in the parish. The defence case voiced this suspicion directly: ‘The present suit . . . is only instituted by the Plaintiff from a litigious spirit and it is the more ungracious . . . on his part . . . as he well knew Sir Windham would make the cause his own and it is therefore in effect a suit instituted against his own Patron’. 86

Day’s case against Meade was partly one of slander (in so far as Meade had asserted that Day ‘exacted more than the Farmers contracted to pay’) and partly one designed to break custom, specifically that of tithing barley and oats in ‘swathe’ rather than in

85 N.R.O. MEA 7/8, 660 x 9: Earsham Tithe Dispute, Day to [?] (7 December 1830).
‘cocks’. Day’s insistence on the latter method was a mystery to all concerned, given that ‘no advantage whatever arises to the plaintiff from taking the tithe . . . by the cock as agriculturalists of experience and judgment are of the opinion that the best way for the parson to take it is by the swathe’. Day claimed that swathes made it more difficult to establish the exact quantity of corn that he was being given, but it seems more likely that a principle was at stake here and that a custom was being challenged for its own sake. The case ran for seven years in the Court of Exchequer before a settlement was reached by both parties that they should withdraw, pay their own costs, and afterwards ‘stand in the same situation in all respects whatsoever as they did previously to the filing of the Bill in this cause’.

Disputes of this kind could poison the atmosphere in a community for years to come. Certainly, by March 1831, correspondence suggesting that Day was either terminally ill or facing retirement through ill health was strikingly devoid of any note of personal sympathy. Sir Windham Dalling received a business-like note from his legal adviser:

‘[I have been advised of] the precarious state of health of Mr. Day in reference to the next presentation of the living . . . Assuming it is the next presentation . . . and not the Advowson that you wish to dispose of . . . I doubt whether the state of health of the present incumbent can be made a matter of valuation; [However] it certainly will form an inducement to any one to purchase [and may enable the living to] command a higher price’.

The letter is pregnant with implications: that Dalling had had his fingers burnt with the appointment of Day and was anxious to be relieved of the responsibility with the next incumbent; that relations were so strained between Parsonage and Hall that the rector’s precarious health was seen as nothing more than a bargaining chip to enhance the value of the living; that the whole atmosphere between church and parish was one of business rather than spirituality, having its origin in Day’s determination to maximise both his income and his authority; and that livings were still possessions to be bought and sold for profit, patronage and political influence.

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87 Ibid.
While most commutations after the 1836 Act passed off smoothly, tithe files for some contentious parishes sounded an echo of past trouble. Commissioner Mered was still having to deal with queries about Thomas Spilling's grazing-land in Earsham twenty-seven years after the enclosure award, and commutation was problematic in the parishes of Burgh St. Peter, Cawston and Stoke Holy Cross. Reverberations from the Stoke Holy Cross dispute were felt well beyond the parish boundary. So incensed was the Rev. Peter Skrimshire Wood of Middleton, in the west of the county, by the Stoke farmers' declaration of January 1831 that 'the rapacity and extortion of the clergy' prevented them from paying adequate wages, he published a pamphlet entitled *A Defence of the Clergy*. In it he attempted to prove that 'the moderation [of] the clergy in the exaction of their dues has entitled them to the thanks of the country'. Unfortunately, Wood did not confine his pamphlet to generalised observations, 'but thought fit . . . to make allusion to certain circumstances which occurred in his own parish'. One parishioner named by Wood was a farmer called Howes who had, it was alleged, refused a composition of tithe and was now fraudulently withholding large portions of his tithe in kind. The consequence of Wood's pamphlet was that Howes brought an action against him for libel. In court it emerged 'that for some time the Rev. Defendant has not been upon the best of terms with some of his parishioners', among them the plaintiff. The judge advised the jury that they had been presented with a clear cut case of libel, and they awarded Howes £100 in damages. The case demonstrated that tithe disputes had the potential to send shockwaves across the county, especially to places where clergymen were eager to demonstrate solidarity with the tithing principle. Wood's actions were considered particularly inflammatory as they had raised the political temperature just as Norfolk's 'Swing' uprising was beginning to subside.

90 P.R.O. IR 18/5896 Earsham Tithe File, 1839.
91 P.R.O. IR 18/5821 Burgh St. Peter Tithe File, 1838.
92 N.R.O. BUL 11/347, 617 x 8: Bulwer papers, Cawston Commutation correspondence.
93 N.R.O. DUN 172, 108 x 4 Stoke Holy Cross Commutation Appeal, 1844.
94 I have not been able to trace this document, but its existence is alluded to in the *Norwich Mercury* of 31 July 1831.
95 N.M. 31.7.31.
Four years before the challenge to tithing by ‘Swing’ rioters, the Souhtown Mills dispute of 1826 illustrated how the economic landscape was changing and already beginning to expose tithe as an anachronism. The case, brought by the Rev. Brown of Souhtown against three millers and heard in the Court of Exchequer, hinged on whether the millers derived their profit from grinding corn (which would have been titheable) or from trading in corn as corn merchants (which would have been tithe-free). There followed a convoluted debate about the purpose of mills, the nature of milling, and the distinction between grinding corn for use and for sale. In effect the court was placing tithe, a medieval taxation system for maintaining the rural church, at the interface with a modernising economy. When one of the presiding judges went on to rule that ‘if he please [a landowner] may let his land go to waste; he is not bound to produce any tithes... the tithe-owner must take his chance as to that’ the fragility of one of the central planks of local authority and economic power was dramatically laid bare.96

Political implications

The most widespread argument against tithing before and during the nineteenth century centred on the way in which the system tended to militate against agricultural improvement: the more a landowner improved and increased his yield, the more he found himself paying in tithe. David Ricardo was one of those who attempted to broaden perceptions of the economic damage that tithing could do. He argued that as tithes pushed up prices – and thus acted to the detriment of consumers as well as producers – they should be regarded as a universal concern.97

Evidence of Norfolk farmers to the 1821 Parliamentary Select Committee on Agriculture, however, indicated that Ricardo’s argument was struggling to gain acceptance. Of far more immediate concern to farmers like George Brown George of Mangreen was the way in which tithe payments completely failed to mirror

96 N.R.O. Y/D 32/1 Southtown Mills dispute, 1826.
97 Evans, Contentious Tithe, p. 77.
fluctuations in wheat prices. George found that new, higher tithes were imposed immediately after a year of high prices, and that the new rate ‘stuck’ without regard for any subsequent fall in income. Over the course of several years the cumulative effect of this trend could be very marked. George’s evidence suggests, for example, that in 1795-6 his income from 40 acres of wheat would have been £360. A tithe rate of £14 9s. meant that he was paying 1d. tithe for every 25d. received for wheat. In 1818-19, however, his wheat income had dropped to £229 10s. A tithe rate left over from the high-price years of the Napoleonic wars meant that he now paid 1d. tithe for every 8d. received from wheat. Nevertheless, when invited to describe how this phenomenon led to higher prices, Robert Harvey of Alburgh did not give the expected response. The consumer was largely protected, he argued, because landlords abated their rent in the leanest years.98 Harvey’s suggestion, that landlords effectively subsidised tithe, might go some way towards explaining the antipathy of landowners towards high-tithing clergymen that was such a feature of intra-parish disputes in the 1820s and 1830s.

Although very few commentators advocated the abolition of the tithing system, the rapacity demonstrated by certain clergymen was causing an increasing demand for its reform. In an editorial on New Year’s Day 1831, the Norfolk Chronicle said: ‘it is not the tithes . . . which constitute the real grievance to the public . . . [but] the appropriation of them under circumstances unconnected with the cure of souls and in the large receipt of them by ecclesiastics who perform little duty’.99 Almost seventy years apart, the cases of the Salle woodland and the Ashmanhaugh tithes cited earlier were examples of demands by clergymen that antagonised tithe-payers: in both cases legal advisers had been engaged to trawl through title deeds and to ensure that tithe income was maximised by resurrecting long forgotten obligations. In many ways this was the mirror image of the law of custom which clergymen were, in other circumstances, so anxious to stamp out. The practise was so widespread that in 1834

98 George and Harvey both gave evidence to the S.C. on the Depressed State of Agriculture, IX (1821), pp. 89, 33.
99 N.C. 1.1.31.
an Act was introduced which prevented tithe-owners from pursuing claims that had lain dormant for more than sixty years.\textsuperscript{100}

The tithe question began to play an important role on the wider stage of national politics. As early as 1821 ‘A Norfolk Parson’ had seen the anti-tithe agitation as political propaganda whipped up the Whig landed gentry,\textsuperscript{101} and by the 1830s there was a growing appreciation that the Church of England was the soft underbelly through which the Tories could most readily be attacked.\textsuperscript{102} The concepts of political reform and tithe reform became intertwined and, as Evans says, ‘it is no accident that tithe reform did not happen until the larger nettle of political reform had been grasped . . . by a new Whig government in the 1830s’.\textsuperscript{103} William Blamire, the first Commissioner to be appointed to oversee commutation in 1836 was a Whig-radical who had declared in 1831: ‘I hope a reform in Parliament is a prelude to a reform in the church . . . I believe tithes to be the most improper, the most iniquitous mode of payment ever devised by the ingenuity of man’.\textsuperscript{104}

Some Radicals regarded the 1832 Reform Act as the great prize of the social unrest and anti-tithe agitation that had been demonstrated in 1830-1. William Cobbett argued that Reform ‘owed more to the country labourers than to all the rest of the nation put together’ on the grounds that alarmed Tories had deserted Wellington and ushered in a reform-minded Whig administration, fearing a full-scale revolution unless some political concessions were made.\textsuperscript{105} There is plenty of evidence to show that tithe riots were believed to stand on a political continuum that would, if not broken, lead inexorably via reform to revolution. Writing in 1831, George Burges of Halvergate declared, ‘if this deep foundation stone of the Tithe System be removed . . . the empire, overwhelmed with dissent upon dissent, will exhibit all the features of a

\textsuperscript{100} Evans, Contentious Tithe, p. 77.
\textsuperscript{101} ‘A Norfolk Parson’, Fair Play.
\textsuperscript{102} Evans, Contentious Tithe, p. 109.
\textsuperscript{103} Evans, Contentious Tithe, p. 76.
\textsuperscript{104} Evans, Contentious Tithe, p. 136.
\textsuperscript{105} R. Wells, ‘Mr. William Cobbett, Captain Swing and King William IV’, Agricultural History Review, 45 (1997), 48.
fanatical protectorate’. The fact that Fairfax Francklin at Attleborough and Samuel Colby at Great Ellingham sent a report of their experiences direct to the Home Secretary is a further measure of how seriously anti-tithe agitation was taken. Francklin’s report, in particular, suggests that the rioters had a revolutionary agenda: ‘towards evening a Tricolor flag was hoisted, and the language of the Rioters was of the most violent and inflammatory description’. In the same tranche of correspondence a letter from the landowner G. Berney of Morton Hall urged Melbourne that ‘if [military] measures be not instantly adopted . . . we are lost. A radical Reform is begun in earnest’.

At Stoke Holy Cross the agitation hardened into a form of civil disobedience that seriously threatened one of the key elements in the establishment’s armoury for restoring order. The farmers and occupiers of that parish presented the Rev. Drake and Sir R. J. Harvey – a lay impropriator – with a proposal for increasing labourers’ wages that was posited on the reduction of rents and tithes. When the proposal was rejected out of hand the parishioners, en masse, refused to be sworn in as special constables. An uneasy truce was only called when the tithe-owners agreed to arbitration.

Together the 1832 Reform Act and the 1836 Tithe Commutation Act successfully defused the threat to disestablish the Church of England. William Cobbett may well have celebrated the role that social unrest played in bringing about Parliamentary reform but, in retrospect, the way that the 1832 Act brought middle-class dissidents back into the establishment fold was an essential factor in the postponement of other, more radical political and social changes.

106 Burgess, Remarks, p. 11.
107 P.R.O. HO 52/9 Francklin to Lord Melbourne, 7 December 1830.
108 P.R.O. HO 52/9 Colby to Melbourne, 6 December 1830.
109 P.R.O. HO 52/9 Berney to Melbourne, 2 December 1830.
Conclusion

A feature of several of the tithe riots was their tendency to ebb and flow over a period of days: in the cases of Burgh St. Peter, Attleborough and Edingthorpe the unrest was characterised by successive episodes of confrontation, negotiation, dispersal, re-grouping and return. The implication must be that these incidents were far more then eruptions of beer-fuelled bravado: they were considered, organised protests with a clear and serious purpose.

Everywhere tithes were conflated with rents as the primary source of grievance, an association which suggests that the objection to tithe was economic rather than ideological. By this criterion arson attacks against the property of landowning clergymen must be interpreted as attacks on landowners rather than on clergymen. Nevertheless, the assault on tithes as an economic target was only a qualified success. Commutation took much of the sting out of the situation in 1836, but its perpetuation of the ‘seven-year average’ calculation was bound to cause long-term problems in an economy that was subject to fluctuation and deflation rather than inflation. Writing in 1880 one observer pointed out that the principal defect of commutation was that it did not ‘fluctuate with agricultural changes as it used to . . . nowadays the payment . . . is apt to be highest when the produce is least’.111

Beyond economic considerations, tithe unrest was unquestionably associated with anti-clerical feeling. Clergymen were widely held to have been the disproportionate and undeserving beneficiaries of enclosure at the very time that they seemed to be withdrawing more and more determinedly from their social and pastoral obligations. Nevertheless, the reform sought by the vast majority of farmers and landowners was commutation rather than abolition. This highly significant fact must place tithe at the interface between status quo and the unthinkable alternative. Only seven years after the town’s own prolonged and violent tithe riot, no fewer than ninety Attleborough...

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111 W. Watt, Tithes Ordinary and Extraordinary: How to deal with them (London, c. 1880).
landowners were able, without fuss or rancour, to reach agreement that they would between them pay £1504 per year to the church. Attleborough seemed to be in denial that any element of the 1831 riot had had anything to do with perceptions of tithe as a symbol of social and legal oppression.

Some major landowners negotiated this course with even greater subtlety. The decision by some of them, notably Bulwer at Heydon and Dalling at Earsham, to rent tithes from the rector and thus to position themselves as a ‘buffer’ between clergymen and tithe-payers was indicative of the wider political importance of tithes. In parishes where tithe collection was a constant source of conflict, the intervention of landowners in this way was suggestive of a desire to ‘ride out’ a particularly contentious incumbency until harmony could be restored with the appointment of a new and more emollient rector. This could, of course, be a very long haul indeed, and at Earsham Sir Windham Dalling found himself having to hand back the poisoned chalice. Nevertheless, such men probably saw themselves as defenders of the tithing — and property — principle against the damage that could be done to it by a rapacious clergyman.

For a few years in the early 1830s tithes really must have been seen by some, on both sides of the political divide, as the last creaking floodgates that were holding back a tidal wave of radical change. Men like Day at Earsham and Burges at Halvergate found themselves facing an uncongenial ‘cultural shift’, characterised by the burgeoning readiness of increasingly commercial communities with increasingly secular ideals to take on those elements of the ancien regime that conflicted with their interests. Day’s endless litigious correspondence, like the Rev. Edward Bulwer’s determination to extract every last penny-piece of tithe due to him from the woods of Salle parish, represented the counter-action of the church’s ‘conservative’ wing. The dogged insistence on ‘right’ transcended mere financial considerations: tithe was an issue of the highest principle and it was not in the gift of any incumbent to pass up what God had ordained he should receive.

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112 P.R.O. IR 18/5704 Attleborough Tithe File, 1838.
Weighed against this, however, must be the consideration that custom could be – was usually – conservative: much of the social unrest associated with ‘Swing’ was in defence of custom and against change, a fact that could cast the zealous tithe-owner in the new light of radical reformer and challenger of ancient parish shibboleths. Tithe-owners as conservatives, tithe-payers as reformers, and tithe-rioters as radicals are labels that grossly over-simplify the complexities of the situation.

What can be said is that tithe commutation and political reform did much to bring the disaffected middle-classes back into the establishment fold. In the process the labouring classes were again alienated and marginalised. The fact that so many of the high-profile tithe riots culminated in court appearances for the main protagonists is evidence that any concessions granted had been short-term expedients rather than genuine attempts to address real grievances. The price paid by the church was felt over the longer term, and became visible in the returns for the 1851 Religious Census: declining church attendance, flourishing Nonconformist congregations, tetchy and defensive responses from Church of England clergymen. On 30 March 1851, in the thirty-one Norfolk parishes that had experienced serious anti-clerical unrest twenty years earlier, 8202 people attended Church of England services, while Nonconformist congregations totalled 8638.113

Even in parishes without a Nonconformist meeting-place, disaffection with the church could be almost tangible. In his return for the 1851 census, the Rev. Sisson, who had only recently taken over from Richard Adams at Edingthorpe, reported that:

‘The parish has been for the last 60 years cruelly neglected and the Parishioners with but few exceptions Dissenters . . . The number of attendants at Church when I first commenced the duties there were not more than 6 or 7.’114

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114 Ede & Virgoe, Religious Worship, p. 66.
Chapter Three

Encountering social, religious and political dissent

Introduction

One striking feature of the landscape of rural Norfolk is the number of Nonconformist places of worship to be found there (Plate 7). A few of these are still in use, some have been converted into private residences, and many more stand on or over the brink of dereliction. Whatever their twenty-first century fate, they represent a remarkable landscape testimony to something dramatic that briefly stirred in the rural society of nineteenth-century Norfolk before subsiding again almost as quickly as it had appeared. In the course of less than 150 years, many Nonconformist chapels moved through the successive stages of demand, conception, design, construction and extension – often in a climate of political opposition and financial constraint – before entering into a rapid spiral of contraction, decline and abandonment. This chapter considers whether a remarkably widespread and yet dramatically short-lived religious revival really is discernible here, or whether a convulsion of a much more complex type – social, economic and political – is hinted at by these last visible landscape relics. It seems apposite to ask, for example, how tiny Primitive Methodist chapels came to negotiate and claim their own space in a wider political landscape, where estate villages like Heydon were making visual statements that proclaimed a very different aesthetic of landownership and ecclesiastical authority. In this chapter an attempt is made to investigate the connections between social, religious and political dissent in the nineteenth-century countryside, and, in conjunction with the following chapter, to understand the role of the clergy in the development of power networks that left a political legacy deep into the twentieth century.

When, in 1911, F. Henderson delivered an address to the Norwich Labour Church on the topic 'Politics in the Pulpit', he drew together many of the threads of dissent that had been present in rural communities for over 100 years. During that time, in the popular
perception at least, the Anglican clergy had forcefully argued that the issues of social justice and political emancipation had no place in the Christian pulpit, even though they were themselves sitting at the very heart of the web of vested interests that denied these prizes to the labouring poor.¹

In order to help understand the widely differing experiences of dissent in rural communities across the county, my methodological approach has been to synthesise the findings from a range of secondary and primary sources² and to classify each parish in a way that illustrates the nature of dissent recorded there. An explanation of the classifications applied, along with the number of parishes falling into each category, is given in Appendix C. It can be broadly argued from this that parishes fit within a progressive range from ‘type 1’ (experiencing least dissent) through to ‘type 12’ (experiencing most dissent). These parish classifications were entered into an S.P.S.S. dataset where they could be tested against other variables. The results of these tests are discussed in this and other chapters.

**Encountering the politics of Nonconformity**

From the hijacking of a cart-load of corn at Sharrington, recorded by Mary Hardy in 1789,³ to an act of incendiarism in Brandon in 1912,⁴ instances of social unrest can readily be found throughout and beyond the study period. Furthermore, if religious Nonconformity and agricultural trade unionism are bracketed with unrest as expressions of social dissent, the geographical as well as the temporal coverage is very broad. In his

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¹ F. Henderson, Politics in the Pulpit (Norwich, 1911).
² These sources are primarily:


study of unrest and collective protest, Archer enumerated 1,133 incidents in Norfolk between 1830 and 1870 alone.\(^5\) He attempted to identify epicentres of unrest, and suggested a theory of ‘adjacency’, with different outbreaks of unrest occurring in different – but often juxtaposed – parishes. Everett, meanwhile, in searching for patterns in the distribution of rural Nonconformity, suggested that communities relatively free from squirearchical authority, demonstrating high levels of independence in employment, or standing geographically distant from the parish church, were the more likely to experience dissent.\(^6\) In the course of discussing these and other theories, my own work will demonstrate that very few nineteenth-century Norfolk parishes exhibited no sign of dissent at some stage during the century. Even among the 85 parishes classified in Appendix C as ‘type 1’ (no dissent), 48% of clergymen were recording the presence of some religious Nonconformity by 1850.\(^7\)

By 1866 there were at least 98 religious denominations in England and Wales,\(^8\) and this diversity has generated a number of theories regarding the position of Nonconformity in relation to the established church and to politics.\(^9\) Whatever truths lie behind these theories, it is certainly the case that by the time of the 1851 religious census, Nonconformity in Norfolk had acquired such strength that a number of clergymen were reduced to giving evasive responses designed to conceal the increasing weakness of their position. Frequently, it seemed, Anglican congregations on 30 March 1851 succumbed to sickness or bad weather, while the Rev. William Howard at Great Witchingham concluded that any comparison between his attendance figures and those of the chapel were devalued ‘for I know that efforts were made to get a peculiarly full house on that day for the purposes of this return’.\(^10\)

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7 Sourced from an analysis of visitation returns for 1850, held under the classmark DN/VIS at the Norfolk Record Office.
8 Everett, Patterns, p. 6.
9 See, for example, R. Currie, ‘A micro-theory of Methodist growth’, Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society, XXXVI (October 1967), 66 for an argument that Methodism was strong where Anglicanism was weak.
10 Ede & Virgoe, Religious Worship, p. 110.
To what extent, then, can resurgent Nonconformity be said to have had firm links with ongoing social unrest and with the future development of trade unions? Circumstantial evidence suggests that contemporary observers, as they struggled to make sense of the riots and unrest around them, suspected the involvement of religious dissenters. In 1817, for instance, an unknown author complained of a proliferation of sects, 'totally destructive of society and subversive of government', while Lord Walsingham's land agent in 1830 considered that the anti-tithe agitation in Great Ellingham was given momentum by the fact that the parish was 'greatly divided between Churchmen & Dissenters'. Newspaper correspondence of the late 1830s alerted people to the arrival of 'Mr. Stephens', an itinerant preacher who travelled the country preaching the 'damnable doctrine' of Chartism.

Attempts to quantify the links between Nonconformity and unrest produce conflicting results. S.P.S.S analysis comparing the prevalence of unrest with the size of the Primitive Methodist population, for instance, produces an entirely random result, implying that no causal connection existed. However, a year-by-year analysis of Meeting House registrations for all Nonconformist denominations between 1810 and 1851 does produce one suggestive result (Fig. 3.1). Surges of licence applications can be detected close to the generally accepted peak years of unrest (1816, 1822, 1830 and 1843). Implied by this trend, though not easily understood, is a visceral connection between social unrest and religious dissent: perhaps Nonconformity was seen as the next best option when riot, as the traditional form of protest, had failed, or perhaps Nonconformist preachers deliberately targetted known troublespots, either opportunistically or with a mission to calm things down. Primitive Methodists, at least, seemed dimly aware of a connection. In their centenary celebration programme of 1907 they declared that their mission into Norfolk had commenced at a time when 'poverty and ignorance, brutality and superstition were rife. Low wages, a countryside drained . . . by war . . . This was the

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11 N.R.O. WLS XLVIII/63, 426 x 5: Walsingham papers, (16 November 1817).
13 N.C. 1.12.38.
state of things when “the Primitives came preaching” and told how the necessaries of life were to be had\textsuperscript{14}.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{fig31.jpg}
\caption{Nonconformist Meeting Houses Licensed in Norfolk, 1810 - 1850}
\end{figure}

The significance of Nonconformity – and especially of Primitive Methodism – as a bridge between the unfocused spasms of anger represented by incendiaryism and riot and the structured protest of trade unionism – has been the subject of some academic debate. Did, for example, the ‘Swing’ riots of 1830 – 31 accelerate the decline of the agricultural working class into that ‘slow-moving, ox-like and demoralized mass’ that was only revivified by the trade union movement of the 1870s\textsuperscript{15}, or were the relatively quiet middle decades of the nineteenth century spent in learning new skills and developing a new political maturity?\textsuperscript{16}

\textsuperscript{14}N.R.O. FC 17/169 Primitive Methodist Centenary Celebration Programme, 1907.
Scotland’s work has demonstrated closely intertwined links between rural Methodism and the trade union movement, and it is incontrovertible that many union leaders traced their own political awakening to the Nonconformist chapel, where the tenets of social justice were being given a new clarity and focus. ‘Try how one may one cannot divide labour from religion,’ wrote George Edwards: ‘with my study of theology I soon began to realise that the social conditions of the people were not as God intended they should be.’ This trend was given added impetus by trade union antipathy towards Anglicanism. Arthur Clayden’s contemporary account of ‘the Revolt of the Field’ stresses that ‘no sketch of this strange rural awakening would be complete which did not notice the attitude of hostility to the established church . . . which its leaders from the first assumed’.

If dissent was perceived as a potentially subversive political force as well as a religious one, what were the attitudes of Anglican clergymen towards it? The formulation of early nineteenth-century visitation returns indicates that the matter was taken seriously: incumbents were required to determine and define the exact nature of dissent in their parish, the identity of the people behind it, the extent of its spread, the social class of its adherents, and the standard of their behaviour. Unfavourable attitudes can be discerned from a number of sources, ranging from the relatively mild ‘a rough lot’ through to ‘extremely ignorant and thoughtless’ and ‘the great pest of my parish’. Primitive Methodists themselves felt that their ministers were particularly despised by Anglican clergymen, with the Nonconformists’ appropriation of the terms ‘reverend’ and ‘minister’ attracting special opprobrium. As the *Primitive Methodist Magazine* observed, ‘the clergy look upon Nonconformist ministers with contempt and disdain, as upstarts and interlopers who assume functions for which they have neither qualifications nor authority’.

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17 Scotland, Methodism, passim.
19 Cited in N. Scotland, ‘Rural war in later Victorian Norfolk’, *Norfolk Archaeology* 38 (1981), 82.
Nevertheless it is important to note that the overwhelming view expressed by clergymen in their visitation returns was that Nonconformists were peaceable and respectable rather than potential troublemakers. The Rev. Thomas Skrimshire's return for Houghton in 1820 is illustrative of many responses which acknowledged Methodists as a more orderly and civilised influence in the parish than many churchgoers: 'They are of very quiet & orderly life and set an example worthy [of] the imitation of some of the established church'.

Taking over at Great Witchingham, the Rev. William Wayte Andrew noted that 'the Methodists perhaps have preserved the people from heathenism' during a neglectful Anglican incumbency, while at Bawdeswell the curate, William Thomson, clearly implied that a move to clean-living Wesleyanism represented a socially-aspirational step up for two of his parishioners who had been the children of dissolute churchmen.

This sense of mutual respect and tolerance had its origins – in part at least – in a degree of ambiguity as to what actually constituted 'dissent' and as to whether Methodists qualified. The distinction between 'dissenters' and 'Methodists' was more clearly drawn in the eighteenth century when the Wesleyan movement was still part of the Church of England. A benefactor of Mattishall chapel, for instance, specified that he would give money only towards 'a congregational assembly of dissenters' and not towards 'a Methodist congregation'. Directions for class leaders in the Wesleyan Society's Class Book of 1848 reiterated the eighteenth-century rule that 'none of us shall, either in writing or conversation, speak lightly or irreverently of the Government under which he lives . . . The oracles of God command us to be subject to higher powers'. This conservatism was echoed in many visitation returns by incumbents who recorded high levels of church attendance among those who were nominally dissenters. At Watlington in 1813 the Rev. John Plesford found it difficult to define dissenters 'because all who

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24 N.R.O. DN/VIS 52/8 Burnham Rural Deanery Visitation Returns, 1820.
26 N.R.O. PD 155/35 Bawdeswell curate’s list of parishioners, 1842.
attend the Methodist church attend the parish church as well', 29 and at Gissing in the same year even Mr. Hunt, the Nonconformists' teacher, was 'constant in his attendance at church and communion'. 30 In fact the Wesleyan Societies' Rule Book was explicit in its refusal to allow services which clashed with Church of England service times, unless there was insufficient accommodation in the parish church for all who wanted to attend, or the incumbent was 'a notoriously wicked man'. 31

Some favoured places achieved something of an ecumenical idyll. At Itteringham:

'there are very few persons who have any decided objection or hostility to the Church but there is a congregation of Methodists and one of Ranters . . . There are very few persons who never attend at church; yet very few who do not sometimes go to the above mentioned meetings . . . The people have no idea of drawing any proud distinction on the subject but there is no acrimony; the most active supporters of the Meeting are regular communicants & bring their children to the Font'. 32

To the sceptical eye of the Rev. Charles Campbell of Weasenham, however, such arrangements were symptomatic not of harmony but of ignorance. Dissenters who were bona fide should know and understand what it was they were dissenting from, 'but as the great bulk of Dissenters is made up from amongst the lower and uneducated classes of society, I have no hesitation in saying that not one in a thousand of them is capable of dissenting upon principle'. 33

While Campbell was probably right insofar as few rural chapelgoers were likely to have had a deep understanding of such burning issues as sacerdotalism or the administration of religion by the civil power, it is fair to say that many of the great matters of theological principle demonstrated a trickle-down effect into the parish community, often having a damaging impact on social relations when they arrived there. One such issue was that of Nonconformist baptisms and burials. Long-term controversy surrounding these rites can readily be found in the Norfolk record, from Andrew Gibson's denial of the validity of

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29 N.R.O. DN/VIS 49/7 Fincham Rural Deanery Visitation Returns, 1813.
31 N.R.O. FC 17/169 Rules of the Methodist Societies.
33 Rev. Charles Campbell, Conversations with a Rantier (Swaffham, 1834), p. v.
infant baptism at South Lopham in 1598 to Joseph Arch’s speech on the proposed Burial Bill at Castle Acre in 1876. Whatever principle was at stake here – and much was written about the challenge to the property of the Church of England if Nonconformist ministers were allowed to officiate at these rites – it was most frequently experienced by the labouring poor as a high-handed refusal by the clergyman to perform funeral rites at the burial of their dead, unbaptised children. To the parents of seven-month old Rose Emma Goodrick of Watton, who ‘not having been baptised was silently interred’ in 1869, or the parents of an unidentified child in Wormegay in 1844 who, in desperation having had their infant baptised in extremis by a dissenting minister, now found the perennially unpopular Rev. William Henslowe refusing to bury her, the Church of England presented a cold and unforgiving aspect. For their part the clergy expressed their irritation at the growing trend for parents to see baptism as a quasi-secular ‘naming ceremony’ and for non-churchgoers to use the parish church for the rites of passage of birth and death and for no other purpose: as one old man told Benjamin Armstrong, ‘I ollus say begin and end with the church whatever you do between-whiles’.

On a political level, wealthy dissenters had the potential to make much bigger waves. The Watton Burial Case of the 1880s, in which a prominent dissenter, John Alexander, accused the Rev. Brookes Wrenford of reneging on an agreement made by his predecessor to reserve a burial plot for the Alexander family, was brought by Alexander before the Select Committee of the House of Commons on Ecclesiastical and Mortuary Fees (1882/3). Wrenford printed a hasty rejoinder to Alexander’s allegations, but then found himself in hot water with the local landowner, Lord Walsingham, for damaging

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36 N.R.O. FC 44/1 Watton Congregational Church Burial Register, silent interrment, 11 November 1869.
37 Henslowe’s self-justification of his actions in this case were published in a pamphlet: Rev. W. H. Henslowe, Facts and Tracts in Evidence of the Apathy, Dereliction and Degradation of the National Clergy (London, 1944), passim.
40 N.R.O. WLS LX/43, 429 x 8: Walsingham papers (31 January 1883).
relations with the (powerful and wealthy) dissenting community in Watton. In fact, Wrenford’s rejoinder did much to clarify the abstract link in the Anglican mind between dissent and political radicalism. Alexander was accused of making waves on a number of fronts: in the day-to-day business of the church by being involved in the burial dispute; in the broader interests of the church by challenging its endowments of tithe and glebe land; and in politics by being an opponent of the House of Lords (as constituted with bishops) and by attempting to influence newly-enfranchised labourers. Dissent like Alexander’s was political because it challenged the status quo.

With these contexts in mind it is significant that the ‘Burston Rebellion’, starting in 1914 and representing conflict between parish and church at almost all social and political levels, included its own high-profile demonstrations of the importance of baptism and burial. Between June 1914 and June 1919 baptisms were carried out by the dissenting minister John Sutton, often in the defiantly public setting of Burston village green. Table 3.1 indicates the extent to which strike supporters in the village refused to use the parish church for baptisms during the height of the dispute. The right-hand column on the table identifies the number of family kinship groups that continued to have their children baptised in the parish church, giving an indication of the depth of loyalty that the Church of England enjoyed. As well as a drop in the numbers of baptisms from the peak decades of the 1860s, almost thirty families ceased to use the parish church for this purpose during the rebellion. No child of an agricultural labourer was baptised in the parish church from October 1914 until 1921. At least two Burston villagers, including John Potter, a veteran of Joseph Arch’s union, also left express instructions that they were not to be buried by the Rev. Eland, and, perhaps most poignantly of all, when Harry Garnham learnt that his son had been named on a World War I memorial in the parish church he entered the building and attempted to smash the tablet with a hammer.

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41 N.R.O. WLS LX/43, 429 x 8: Wrenford to Walsingham (31 August 1885).
42 N.R.O. MC 31/39, 478 x 1 Burston strike papers.
44 N.R.O. MC 31/63/1 Letter from Tom Higdon to [?l, 26 July 1915.
Table 3.1: Burston Parish Church: Baptisms 1850 – 1929, indicating the depth of kinship use and desertion of Anglican rites.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Decade</th>
<th>Total baptised</th>
<th>Total number of surnames of baptised children present in the parish baptism register</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1850 - 59</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1860 - 69</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1870 - 79</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1880 - 89</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1890 - 99</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1900 - 09</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1910 - 19</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920 - 29</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SOURCE: N.R.O. PD1O1/3, 70 Burston parish baptism registers, 1850 – 1930

Harry Garnham’s action gives a vivid sense of the alienation that working people felt from the church. As was partly the case at Burston, and as William Thomson found when he took over from the unpopular Rev. Herring at Bawdeswell, this alienation could stem from local difficulties with a particular clergyman. But Anglican churchgoing was also being made less congenial to many by the tendency towards Ritualism and the associated marginalisation of congregational involvement, and one of the chief affronts to the labouring poor was the church’s ongoing inability to accommodate them without at the same time feeling obliged to give them a sharp reminder of their social station. Box pews and their more open, eastward-facing successors had either banished the rural working-class to the ghetto of the free seats or had gathered them into family and household authority groups. Nonconformist churches had their own systems of seat appropriation, of course, and it could be that they, too, eventually mutated into a visual statement of who was who in the wider community, but at the outset, at least, they were understood to be a necessary and positive means of fund-raising, a badge of inclusivity rather than

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46 N.R.O. PD 155/35 Bawdeswell curate’s list of parishioners, 1842.
47 The politics of accommodation and seat appropriation is discussed in Chapter One. For an analysis of the broader significance of appropriated seating and attendance rates see K. D. M. Snell & P. S. Ell, Rival Jerusalems: The Geography of Victorian Religion (Cambridge, 2000).
exclusivity, and part of the process of building a new religious identity. When he attended
the parish church, by contrast, the nineteenth-century labourer saw more than just 'the
Tory party at prayer': laid out in serried ranks before him was the entire parish hierarchy
in all its grisly detail with the labourer himself positioned firmly (and, apparently,
irrevocably) at the bottom.

Equally alienating was the attitude of the gentry/clergy axis to the trade union movement
which, when not motivated by naked hostility, often appeared cynical and patronising.
'Take my advice,' said Lord Walsingham to striking labourers on his Merton estate in
1890, 'don't make fools of yourselves because some lazy talking chap wants to wheedle
your sixpences out of you, to try and make him or somebody else a gentleman without
the breeding'. 48 According to Walsingham’s estate agent, ‘to give further to some of
these men... would not benefit their families so much as the landlord of the Cock Inn’.
49 Organisations like the Primrose League and the various Hundred Associations divided
the labourers into classes and categories, judging them and giving them awards in a way
that scarcely differed from the treatment of livestock at an agricultural show. ‘Clergymen
could not be more pleasingly occupied,’ said the Rev. John Lubbock of Belaugh in 1844,
‘than in selecting those among their flocks most deserving the rewards offered’, and the
chairman of the South Erpingham Association proudly declared at the same meeting that
‘nowhere is the truth of [the] proverb “union is strength” better exemplified... as in the
state of society as at present constituted, where there are no broad lines of demarcation,
[but] each class blends imperceptibly into the other’. 50 In both cases the speakers
delivered their self-congratulatory eulogies – without conscious irony, apparently – only
after the Association had divided for dinner: ‘workers’ to a nearby schoolroom for roast
beef and plum pudding, ‘members’ to the Black Boys Inn at Aylsham.

Labourers must have been deeply conscious of the fact that the velvet glove of
paternalism frequently concealed the iron fist of authority. Even while Lord Walsingham
was addressing his striking estate workers and reassuring them of his certainty that ‘the

48 N.C. 15.11.90.
49 N.R.O. WLS LX/VII/27, 479 x 1: Walsingham papers, Henry Woods to Walsingham
(25 May 1887).
50 N.C. 19.10.44.

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dispute that has arisen between us does not come from you, but from others who are outsiders to this estate', his agent was busily compiling a list of those on strike so that punitive action could be taken against them after the immediate crisis had passed.\textsuperscript{51} Walsingham also collected data from neighbouring landowners, who between them had developed an \textit{ad hoc} test with which to confront those claiming poor relief: 'Here the Guardians relieve no man who belongs to the Union – but order them into the house',\textsuperscript{52} one of Walsingham’s neighbours advised him. Some clergymen did speak out against the concept of employers’ unions and farmers’ defence associations. The Rev. John Wilder of Brandeston identified a specific link between trades unions and decades of social injustice: ‘It was either [the farmer’s] short-sightedness or his greed to make money out of the labourer, or both, that has brought him to the present dilemma of having to form a union against his mighty antagonist, the labourer’\textsuperscript{53} But these were often isolated voices, and ones that continued to espouse paternalistic rather than radical solutions. Even Lord Walsingham recognised that trade unionism presaged a ‘new’ era in economic and social relations, and though he railed against it, and warned that it would mean job losses,\textsuperscript{54} the Nonconformist chapels, with their inherent rejection of church-sponsored paternalism and control, had captured the working-class imagination, and were beginning to exercise a magnetic appeal for the labouring poor.

Elite responses to collective action among the poor seemed to underestimate both its longevity and its sophistication. For instance, cyclical patterns in the nature of labour protest can be discerned throughout the nineteenth century: riots and incendiarism predominated in November when the labourers went onto winter working hours and rates of pay, while strikes were most prevalent at harvest time. The working man thus demonstrated an appreciation of the relative strengths and weaknesses of his changing position within the seasonal economic cycle, and an awareness, too, of some of the precepts of political economy. When weakest, of course, his position could be desperate. When William Mann and others approached Edward Oldfield at Ashill in October 1833

\textsuperscript{51} N.R.O. WLS LX/XLVIII/40, 479 x 3: Walsingham papers, List of the men on strike on the Merton estate (18 November 1890).
\textsuperscript{52} N.R.O. WLS LX/XVIII/40, 479 x 3: Sir William Bagge to Walsingham (28 February 1873).
\textsuperscript{53} N.M. 8.3.73.
\textsuperscript{54} N.C. 15.11.90.
and told him— in his dual role as farmer who would not employ them and overseer who would not relieve them—that they had received only 18s. for fifteen days work in the previous six weeks, Oldfield ‘refused to give [Manni] a farthing, and said his wife might go and w[hore] for it’.  

Agricultural trade unionism also had a tradition that long pre-dated its eventual, fully-organised appearance in 1872. The labourers of Heacham, Snettisham and Sedgeford met in 1795, for example, ‘in order to consider the best and most peaceable mode of obtaining a Redress of all the . . . Hardships under which . . . they have for many years patiently suffered’. Their Biblically-inspired rallying cry was one that would reverberate around the fields of Norfolk for over a hundred years: ‘the labourer is worthy of his hire’. Labour relations in the countryside became increasingly embittered after some farmers profited from price rises during the Napoleonic wars, and by 1832 Walsingham magistrates were issuing a generalised warning that striking and protesting labourers were threatening to destroy ‘the free agency of the master’ by demanding as a right that ‘which was now awarded to them as a reward for their labour’.

When the Rev. John Wilder of Brandeston reported that ‘A Ranting Sell is formed in a sandhole in the parish and is used very frequently’, he identified a type of meeting—without pretention to architectural quality or material comfort of any kind—that was to find an exact echo twenty years later in the gathering-places of some trade union branches. There was a commonality, too, in the type of men who were to be the prime movers in both movements. Jacob has identified husbandmen, woolcombers, yeomen, millers, worsted weavers, cordwainers and schoolteachers among those applying for meeting house licences in the late eighteenth century, men of whom it might be said, just as Howkins has said of pioneer trade unionists, that ‘they occupied a twilight zone

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55 B.P. 23.10.33
56 N.C. 14.11.1795.
57 Scotland, Methodism, pp. 17 – 19.
58 B.P. 18.4.32.
60 For example the sand-pit at Swanton Morley, described in Howkins, Poor Labouring Men, pp. 92 – 3.
between the . . . labourers and small tradesmen of the market town; . . . in [village society] and of it, but also linked to the world outside by their slightly better social position and self-education'. Given these significantly, if marginally, elevated social origins, can Primitive Methodism be said to have remained true to the proletarian promise of those early sand-pit meetings? Certainly, one of the declared aims of the Primitive Methodist evangelist Robert Key was to sweep aside the ‘small, feeble cause' of Wesleyanism, which was, after all, a denomination that could harbour a wealthy landowner like William Hardy who remained a churchwarden and ‘[did] not account himself a member of the Methodist sect'.

The Primitive Methodists regarded themselves as the movement that represented the ‘true mission' into Norfolk, far outweighing in social significance anything done by the Wesleyans. They were firmly, in Scotland's words, a 'church of the working-class, a “labour sect”'. The Rev. William Upjohn observed their recruitment methods in Field Dalling in 1838 and described how their numbers had been swollen by ‘a few zealots who go from cottage to cottage, persuading the poor, . . . the lowest of the people, . . . to leave their church and go to them’. The new sense of purpose that organised Nonconformity brought to inchoate dissent was hinted at by Robert Key, who launched his mission in an area ‘terrorised by incendiariism’ but who was able to say at the end of it that ‘these very men are now good Christians’. Nonconformity imposed a rigid code of self-discipline, backed up by the brotherly love and eternal vigilance of other church members who scrutinised each others’ social, legal and financial dealings with puritanical zeal.

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62 Howkins, Poor Labouring Men, p. 66.
64 N.R.O. DN/VIS 53/2 Holt Rural Deanery Visitation Returns, Letheringsett 1820.
65 N.R.O. FC 17/169 Primitive Methodist Centenary Celebration Programme (Norwich, 1907).
67 N.R.O. DN/VIS 64/4 Holt Rural Deanery Visitation Returns, 1838.
68 N.R.O. FC 17/169 Primitive Methodist Centenary Celebration Programme (Norwich, 1907).
69 This had long been apparent within the denominations of ‘old dissent’, and was a system of internal behavioural control that was enthusiastically endorsed by ‘new’ Nonconformist congregations. Examples of brotherly vigilance abound in the Church Book of the Worstead Baptist Chapel, for instance (N.R.O. FC 42/2 Worstead Baptist Church Book 1717 – 1912, 13 January 1828).
The point can be argued, though, that in its turn Primitive Methodism underwent a process of compromise, during the course of which much of its radical edge was lost. Perhaps the seeds were sown by the movement's puritanical adherence to the principle of teetotalism, a tenet that immediately created a tension with wider popular culture. This existed alongside attitudes to dancing, Sabbath observance, Sunday cricket and the Harvest Home that were as ascetic as anything propounded by the established church, and which must have made some aspects of Anglicanism appear relaxed and tolerant by comparison. Later, a wedge was driven into the political relationship between Nonconformity and the Norfolk labourer when strike action – like that at Horsham St. Faith in 1910 - failed to attract the support of the Liberal Party. Union activists began to move towards the Independent Labour Party, and a forty-year tradition of linkage between chapel, union and Liberal Party was severed.

It can be argued, too, that the political threat posed by religious dissent was tamed by an establishment that embraced it and gradually drew it into the mainstream where it could be more readily controlled. Williamson's work on the building dates and locations of Nonconformist chapels – identifying a later association with the use of more prominent village centre locations – carries a heavy implication of increasing wealth, confidence and mainstream acceptance, all of which had the potential to go hand-in-hand with a more conservative social outlook. The fact that the Earl of Orford laid one of the cornerstones of Wickmere Primitive Methodist chapel in 1897 (Plate 7) clearly places the movement a world away from its proletarian struggles for land and accommodation in the earlier decades of the century.

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71 For hostile Nonconformist attitudes to dancing and Sabbath-breaking see N.R.O. FC 17/169, Rules of the Methodist Societies (London, 1848); to Sunday cricket see Key, Gospel, p. 72; to Harvest Home see N.R.O. FC 88/29 Ingham & Stalham Baptist Church Records 1774 – 1884 (undated entry, early C19th).
72 Howkins, Poor Labouring Men, pp. 96 – 103.
73 T. Williamson, 'The Norfolk Nonconformist chapels survey: some preliminary results', in Virgoe & Williamson, Religious Dissent, pp. 63 – 71. A further discussion on this topic can be found in Chapter Four.
By the 1870s the religious-political divide was an established feature of rural society and of rural labour relations in particular. The Rev. F. B. de Chair described the division as he saw it in 1873 — 'the majority of the farmers [are] church people and the Dissenters [come] chiefly from among the labourers' — and it had permeated so many levels of social interaction and administration as to appear truly intractable: 'The farmers and landowners who pulled down cottages to prevent settlement...and who maintained a poverty-stricken casual workforce were the same men who refused land to build chapels, discriminated against Nonconformist workmen [and] supported the Church of England and the Tory party,' writes Howkins. Even so it remains very questionable whether Primitive Methodism could ever be described as a 'class movement' in the Marxian sense. For one thing there was often a gender division of church attendance within families: as the Rev. William Hipper observed at Catfield in 1851, 'the adult male labouring population are in this parish very regular attendants. Many of their wives and daughters attend a small conventicle (Ranters) in the village'. Certainly wider Nonconformity should never be confused with working-class interests, as much of it was socially middle-class and politically conservative. On 1 January 1832 the congregation of Ingham and Stalham Baptist Church observed a day of prayer for the passage of the Reform Bill, a measure which, arguably, was to contribute to a rupture in middle- and working-class interests that would pave the way for a new set of social relations, exemplified by the New Poor Law. Nonconformity had also attracted a number of prosperous Norfolk businessmen into its ranks, among them the families of Jarrold, Colman, Fison and Gurney. It was James Fison, maltster and corn merchant of Thetford, who told the Parliamentary Select Committee on Agriculture in 1836 that 'the Poor Law...is the very best measure that ever was devised for the effectual relief of the agricultural interest, with respect to the farmer.' For Fison the special appeal was that the obligation to offer employment to the poor, whether needed or not, that existed under the old Poor Law, had been replaced with a system that allowed farmers to make much more business-

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75 Howkins, Poor Labouring Men, p. 48.
76 Cited in Ede & Virgoe, Religious Worship, p. 54.
77 N.R.O. FC 88/29 Ingham & Stalham Baptist Church Records 1774 – 1884.
like decisions.78 And Nonconformist ministers like the Rev. George Hallatt, with his pamphlet entitled *Infidel Socialism Calmly Considered,*79 demonstrated that any Anglican clergyman could be matched when it came to roundly denouncing the tenets of Socialism.

### The politics of Anglicanism

All denominations, including Primitive Methodist congregations, began to show clear signs of a fear of guilt by association with the trade union movement. Increasingly, notices were issued by chapel trustees and connexional leaders forbidding the use of chapel premises for trade union meetings.80 It could be argued that a dissenting movement that was becoming more mainstream, more wealthy and more politically cautious had ensnared itself in the very political and economic power nexus that it had once aspired to challenge. A wider significance can certainly be read into the fact that one of the few allies of the Rev. Charles Tucker Eland during the Burston rebellion was a farmer, glebe tenant and school manager who was also the *local chapel leader.*81

In rare cases it was even possible for the Anglican clergyman to have a more supportive relationship with trade unionists than the local chapel could manage. At Little Massingham in 1874 the trustees of the Primitive Methodist chapel threatened ‘decisive steps’ against anyone who continued to defy their ban on union meetings:82 this in a parish where the Rev. Brereton was described by the *English Labourers’ Chronicle* as ‘a friend of the working man’.83 The Necton land agent Barlow Giles saw reflected in the local pro-union incumbent, the Rev. William Walker, a tendency for clergymen to be endlessly on the receiving end ‘of exaggerated reports of poverty & distress as they are naturally looked upon as the dispensers of charity & principal alms givers of the

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78 S. C. on Agriculture III (1836), p. 168.
79 Published in Norwich, 1840.
80 Scotland, ‘The role of Methodism’, pp. 131 – 152 for a discussion on the use of Nonconformist chapels for trade union meetings.
81 N.R.O. MC/31/63/1 Burston papers, Tom Higdon to [?], 26 July 1915.
83 Scotland, ‘The role of Methodism’, p. 301.
Even conservative clerical observers of the 'Revolt of the Field' acknowledged that an understandable body of resentment had grown up among the labourers: 'The men have been underpaid,' wrote the Rev. F. B. de Chair, '...they have been turned out of work on wet days ... They have been harshly spoken to ... Their interests, their comforts, their social improvement have by the farmers been too little thought of'.

Clerical sympathy for the union cause seems to have been sufficiently widespread for one letter-writer in the Norwich Mercury - identifying himself only as 'A Tenant Farmer' - to generalise angrily about 'weak-minded canons' who habitually interfered in matters about which they knew nothing. The Rev. John Wilder of Brandeston - certainly no Radical - responded with a letter of his own, in which he identified farmers as the authors of their own misfortune: 'For twenty years they have been losing their influence over men [who] have been treated like machines, and their families uncared for'.

While few clergymen would have fully endorsed the Rev. Maynard Currie's enthusiastic welcome for the trade union movement as the overdue flowering of a too-long downtrodden spirit - 'at last the sluggish waters are stirred!' - a subtext can be found to even the harshest trade union criticisms of Ritualism that suggested an awareness that it had supplanted a brand of clericalism once much more generally sympathetic to the labourer. A poem in the Labour League Examiner of September 1874 made the point:

'We had a minister once, sir
'Twas long before you came
A man that was a minister
Not only in the name
Your decorations, copes and stoles
He didn't need much aid
He cared too much for our poor souls
To think how his gown was made.'

84 N.R.O. WLS LX/XLVIII/40, 479 x 3: Walsingham papers, Giles to Walsingham (25 February 1873).
85 Currie & de Chair, The Clergy and the Labourers' Movement, p. 90.
86 N.M. 23.3.72.
87 N.M. 30.3.72.
88 Currie & de Chair, The Clergy and the Labourers' Movement, p. 73.
89 The poem, cited in Scotland, 'The role of Methodism', p. 278, is further discussed on p.5 of this thesis.
However, notions of Ritualism and Evangelicalism, Conservatism and Liberalism in the nineteenth-century church remain full of contradiction and paradox when it comes to understanding who stood where on the social questions of the day. The Rev. Maynard Currie’s Liberal enthusiasm for the agricultural unions, for instance, waned markedly when it came to proposing practical action: “the clergy are not bound to provide a solution for the economic problem; . . . they ought not to interfere as partisans of one side or the other,” he said.90 Conversely, John Wilder at Brandeston was able to condemn “the people [as] extremely ignorant and thoughtless”91 at the same time as acknowledging that they had suffered from a “reckless inattention to the well-being of [the] labouring classes”.92 Wilder’s appeal was for a return to older values of kindness and paternalism, but these were themselves, of course, often the deeply conservative mechanisms of social control. When seventeen-year old Fanny Curson of Great Witchingham had the rare opportunity to give evidence to a parliamentary commission in 1867, her local clergyman, William Howard, made it his business to sit with her and — no doubt with kindly intent — steer, interpret and embellish her answers.93

One difficulty facing the Church of England, and the reason for many of the conflicting signals that it sent out to society, lay in the fact that between ‘about 1800 to 1870’, it was ‘simultaneously in a state both of transition and of continuity with the past’.94 Perhaps in an unconscious attempt to make sense of this situation, William Thomson, the curate at Bawdeswell, conducted a detailed survey of his parish in 1842.95 His findings are summarised in Table 3.2, and they reveal that he, at least, perceived no division between churchgoers as ‘respectable’ and dissenters as ‘dissolute’. While all parishioners of independent means were churchmen, more Methodists than Anglicans fell into the ‘respectable religious’ category, hinting strongly that in this parish there were a number of socially aspirant, middle-class dissenters. Significantly, it was also deemed possible for people to have no professed religion and still to be considered respectable. Roughly

94 Knight, Nineteenth Century Church, p. 4.
95 N.R.O. PD 155/35 Bawdeswell curate’s list of parishioners, 1842.
equal proportions of church- and chapel-goers were designated ‘bad characters’.
Thomson was not, in any case, a man to be bound by conventional notions of what was politically or socially acceptable. Of Stephen Haylett he wrote, ‘the leading Methodist & Liberal in disposition. I have always been on the best of terms with him’. And of the family of labourer Edward Custance, he said: ‘House not tidy, Husband idle ... I rather like them’.

Table 3.2: Curate’s register of social class and religious affiliation in Bawdeswell, 1842

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Class</th>
<th>Total No. in class</th>
<th>No. churchgoers in class</th>
<th>No. of Methodists in class</th>
<th>No. of those with ‘no religion’ in class</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
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<td>II A</td>
<td>111</td>
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<td>49</td>
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<td>III</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>III/IV</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The social class categories were defined in the original document as follows:
I - independent, gentlemen; II A - respectable, with religious allegiance; II B - respectable, without religious allegiance; III - ordinary church- and chapel-goers; III/IV - ‘bad characters’.

SOURCE: N.R.O. PD 155/35

By the mid- to late-nineteenth century the Church of England faced a crisis of relevance as far as its social role was concerned. Part of that crisis was associated with issues of clergy wealth and residency. Disaffection on these grounds is difficult to quantify, but a preliminary hint that the greater the amount of wealth extracted from his parish by an incumbent, the greater the level of dissent is provided by Fig. 3.2. The complexity of this issue is illustrated by the - apparently contradictory - facts that high-value livings tended to be associated with ‘close’ and ‘estate’ parishes which were, in other respects, places of less dissent. Nevertheless a correlation may be posited here, and one that is not difficult to understand in psychological terms: the greater the extent of a clergyman’s wealth, the more likely his parishioners were to turn against the Church of England and the social structures that it supported.
Fig. 3.2: Degree of unrest in all Norfolk rural parishes, relative to the value of the Anglican living

![Chart showing degree of unrest in Norfolk rural parishes, relative to value of Anglican living.]

chi-square: 173.083  
sig.: .000

SOURCES: y axis: The measurement of the 'degree of unrest' and its sources is fully explained in Appendix C. Broadly speaking, parishes at the lower end of this scale experienced less social, political and religious dissent than those towards the top. x axis: The 'value of living' is based on the 1887 Tithe Rent return, as cited in P. W. Whitfield, 'Change and continuity in the rural church: Norfolk 1760–1840' (unpub. PhD, University of St. Andrews, 1977). Livings coded '1' realised an annual value of £500 or more, those coded '2' had a value of £300 to £499, '3' a value of £200 to £299, and '4' a value of £199 p. a. or less.

Paradoxically, the attempt to make clergymen more relevant to the life of their parish by enforcing residency may, in some respects, have made matters worse. As the policy on residency changed, a new and visible symbol of clergy privilege began to appear, as palatial new rectories and vicarages were constructed in rural parishes. In due course these would become millstones around the necks of later incumbents, and it is their twentieth-century dilapidation reports which often provide an insight into the massive scale and social significance of the nineteenth-century rectory. At Lammas in 1925, for instance, diocesan surveyors reported gloomily on the condition of a Rectory House with
seven bedrooms, a drawing room, an entrance hall, a dining room, cellar, pantry, store cupboard, study, kitchen, kitchen pantry, scullery and no fewer than thirty six outhouses, sheds and yards.

Table 3.3: Summary of Rectory extensions and new buildings carried out in the Norwich Diocese, 1791 – 1906.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>No. of new building and extension projects</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1790 – 9</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1800 – 09</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1810 – 19</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>1820 – 29</td>
<td>12</td>
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<tr>
<td>1830 – 39</td>
<td>29</td>
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<tr>
<td>1840 – 49</td>
<td>84</td>
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<tr>
<td>1850 – 59</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
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<td>1860 – 69</td>
<td>85</td>
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<td>1870 – 79</td>
<td>80</td>
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<tr>
<td>1880 – 89</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1890 – 99</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1900 – 09</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SOURCE: N.R.O. DN/DPL 1/1/1 – 17; 1/2/18 – 75; 2/1/3 – 547 Norwich Diocese, Rectory building and extension plans 1791 – 1906

Diocesan records house the plans of 619 new rectories and rectory extensions built between 1791 and 1906, and Table 3.3 offers a breakdown of the total number decade-by-decade. Two peaks may be discerned in Table 3.3, each with its own poignant social significance. In the 1840s a rush of rectory building and extension coincided with attempts by parishioners to come to terms with the impact of the New Poor Law, while between 1860 and 1880 a similar surge took place against the backdrop of a growing awareness of the scandalous living conditions endured by many labourers and the rise

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98 The impact of a survey into labourers' accommodation which, in 1863, had lifted the lid on insanitary, over-crowded and disease-ridden conditions, is further discussed in Chapter 5.

123
to political prominence of the agricultural trade union movement. In contexts such as these, rectories were cultural impositions on the landscape. Alongside the Gothic schoolroom and the restored parish church a new iconography asserted itself on the rural skyline: the rectory as 'country residence', with sweeping, rhododendron-lined drives and its lawns shaded by towering Cedars of Lebanon (Plate 8).

The new rectory posed new questions about the relevance of the clergyman to his community. In Burston it was noted that the Rev. Charles Tucker Eland, his wife and two children, occupied a twelve-bedroomed house 'with winding paths and sheltering trees, cricket and croquet lawns, orchards and ornamental gardens' which, together with a salary of £495 per year, were his to enjoy 'because he preaches a sermon once a week to three old ladies and the sexton'.99 Forty years earlier the Rev. F. B. de Chair had sensed a distinct chill in the air as disparities between incomes and standards of living became increasingly visible, and increasingly politicised. The clergyman, he wrote:

'has been surprised, perhaps, since the labourers' movement began ... to see how some who always met him with a friendly greeting now look the other way or give him the coldest nod of recognition ... The men believe that it is entirely through him and the clergy generally that they have been so badly paid in the past'.100

As a source of political tension in the community, certain aspects of Nonconformity can be argued to have been a 'labourers' movement' that long pre-dated agricultural trade unionism.101 It was a form of collective action that existed outside the sanction of the church, and as such the gathering of a Nonconformist congregation was usually viewed with some alarm. When the Rev. Philip Bell of Wimbotsham expressed the opinion that 'one cause ... of the increase of Dissenters in this parish is, I have no doubt, the increase of Meeting Houses lately in the neighbourhood',102 his logic seemed to imply that meeting houses could in themselves generate dissent. On occasions clergymen attempted to prevent this by taking direct action against chapels being built in their parishes. The

100 Currie & de Chair, The Clergy and the Labourers' Movement, p. 92.  
101 The argument cannot be pursued too vigorously as much Nonconformity was middle-class and conservative in its make-up and outlook.  
102 N.R.O. DN/VIS 49/7 Fincham Rural Deanery Visitation Returns, 1813.
parson at Freethorpe rode out 'and knocked down part of a wall' of a chapel under construction, while at Hempstead the vicar persuaded the local landowner to withdraw his permission for a chapel to be built, bought up the cottage that the dissenters were using for their services, and then brought a case of obstruction against them when they transferred their meeting to the roadside. These cases were, however, exceptional. When clerical action against Nonconformity occurred elsewhere, it was generally more subtle and based on the withdrawal of those privileges which the clergyman had in his gift. At the forefront was parochial charity: in November 1863 a correspondent identifying himself only as 'one who is not a Primitive' wrote to the Norfolk News of 'a sifting' that took place 'at the annual break up of the clothing club, which is managed by the clergyman’s wife. . . “I hear, Mrs. E., that your husband is a Rantier.” Mrs. E. answered “yes”. “Then your name must be crossed out.” Nonconformist paupers, of course, had few privileges to withdraw, but this did not always protect them from action that some contemporary opinion regarded as petty and vindictive. On 5 August 1851 an extraordinary meeting of Tunstead and Happing poor law guardians was called to discuss the request of a blind, elderly inmate of the Smallburgh workhouse to attend the Baptist chapel at Worstead. His request was refused, an act described by the Norfolk News as 'worthy of the dark ages and of which [the guardians] ere long will be heartily ashamed'. One of the guardians who opposed the pauper's application was the Rev. John Gunn of Irstead, the collector and publisher of the folk tales and memories of Mrs. Lubbock, an elderly Irstead washerwoman. Mrs. Lubbock’s kinsman, Leonard, was later to be convicted and fined for his part in a harvest strike by a bench that included the Rev. E. Wilkins, another Tunstead and Happing guardian: it can be argued that antiquarian sentimentality about the lives of the poor often had a very shallow provenance, and actually concealed a hard-headed and authoritarian view about their 'proper place'.

104 N.R.O. FC 69/4 Hempstead Wesleyan Methodist chapel appeal, 1895.
105 N.N. 21.11.63. The political and social management of charities is examined in detail in Chapter 5.
108 N.N. 26.8.65.
Political, religious and social dissenters had their own techniques and tactics in this particular theatre of 'rural war': Mr. Bunting, a Radical shopkeeper in Swaffham, piled his yard high with 'bricks and heaps of rubbish' so that members could not gain access to the neighbouring Conservative Club;\footnote{N.R.O. WLS LX/51, 429 x 9: Walsingham papers, W. M. Pheasant to Walsingham (12 February 1859). For Pheasant’s role as the Tory headmaster of Swaffham National School in a dispute that divided the community along religious and political lines, see Chapter Seven.} the Nonconformist J. E. Alexander refused to sell land that he owned abutting Watton churchyard so that the burial ground could be extended;\footnote{N.R.O. WLS LXVIII/29, 479 x 1: Rev. Caley to Walsingham (9 December 1890).} and when Heydon firefighters attempted to tackle a blaze in the Rev. Bulwer’s wagon shed they found that ‘the villain or some accomplice [had] cut through the leather pipes of the engine in two or three places’.\footnote{NM. 23.4.31. This action transcended ordinary sabotage as fire engines frequently appeared at scenes of disturbance and were used as instruments of crowd control. Examples of this are recorded at Diss in 1770 (N.R.O. FC 17/169) and at Reepham in 1830 (Key, Gospel, p. 18).} Nevertheless, clergymen seem to have been the immediate targets of unrest on remarkably few occasions. Of the 1,133 incidents catalogued by Archer between 1830 and 1870 only 60—just over 5%—were specifically directed against the land, property or person of clergymen.\footnote{Archer, ‘Rural protest’, passim.} Tithe riots and protests accounted for 31 of these, the exact motivation behind the other 29 now being obscure. Some incidents were simply bizarre: the Rev. Maxwell was chased around his rectory at Thorpe before the intruders ‘ate the damasin cheese and nuts that were in the parlour’.\footnote{N.C. 15.1.31.} Others seemed to have an agenda comprehensible only in the context of alleged mismanagement of local charities: a suggestive target in this respect was the headquarters of the Clergyman’s Widows’ Trust.\footnote{R. Lee, ‘Midnight crimes and guilty consciences: rural war in N.E. Norfolk 1815 – 1875, the search for a radical agenda’ (unpub. M. A. dissertation, Leicester University, 1999), p. 12.}

The fact is that Methodists were as likely to be subjected to violent attacks as Anglicans, particularly in the early decades of their mission into Norfolk. Mary I-Tardy recorded a number of such incidents in the 1780s,\footnote{Cozens-Hardy, Letheringsett, p. 69.} asafoetida was blown through the keyhole of a meeting house in Roydon in 1789,\footnote{C. Jolly, The Spreading Flame: The Coming of Methodism to Norfolk 1751 – 1811 (Norwich, 1972), p. 50.} the Methodist minister Joseph King was assaulted...
and abducted in Aylsham in 1808,\textsuperscript{117} and at East Dereham a dissenter was burned in effigy in the market-place in 1853.\textsuperscript{118} On more than one occasion Robert Key suspected the involvement of clergymen in attacks against him, and his suspicions were confirmed when he complained to the (clerical) magistrates of Reepham after one particularly violent incident in the town:

"The magistrates told me that I had no business to preach in the market place . . . and if I did so any more they would bring the water engine to play upon me . . . so we parted, for I had had quite enough of clerical magistrates and parsons' justice to satisfy me for fifty years to come."\textsuperscript{119}

**Conclusion**

Any discussion of unrest and political factionalism that is nominally based on religious tension must acknowledge the level of unrest that existed within dissenting groups. The acrimonious split between mainstream Wesleyanism and Wesleyan Reform in 1850, posited mainly on the tension between central and local authority, provides a dramatic illustration of this. The 1851 religious census returns are studded with responses from Wesleyan ministers, recording pitifully small attendances and blaming 'violent and disgraceful proceedings' for the destruction of their congregations.\textsuperscript{120} When the superintending minister of the North Walsham District Wesleyans, the Rev. Charles Povah, attempted to reassert the authority of the Conference he found himself besieged in the chapel at Lenwade. 'At length [he was] compelled to break off the service, and while he and his friends were leaving the building they were assailed with stones'.\textsuperscript{121}

Everett has described how denominations divided 'as much from the errors of their fellow Dissenters as from those of the established church',\textsuperscript{122} a situation that had been

\textsuperscript{117} Jolly, *Spreading Flame*, p. 80.
\textsuperscript{118} Armstrong, *Armstrong's Norfolk Diary*, p. 45, 6 December 1853.
\textsuperscript{119} Key, *Gospel*, pp. 17 – 18, describing an incident in 1830.
\textsuperscript{120} For instance: Ede & Virgoe, *Religious Worship*, p. 93 (Cawston) and p.110 (Great Witchingham).
\textsuperscript{121} N.C. 28.12.50.
\textsuperscript{122} Everett, *Patterns*, p. 63.
summed up by the Anglican Rev. Charles Campbell in *Conversations with a Ranter*, in which he described how dissenters, having left the Church of England, made their way from one sect to another, finding some disagreement and disillusionment in each. Campbell concluded that 'there is no telling where a man will stop' once he embarked upon dissent. Nonconformist congregations could also be vulnerable to demographic change. During the attempt to oust him as Independent minister at Thetford in 1846, the Rev. John Ashby was advised that 'the number of [new residents] forms a new era in our religious affairs, and . . . it is an obvious duty to say that your ministry fails to interest [them].'

Contexts such as these lead to the unavoidable conclusion that any notion of a 'dissenting interest' or a 'Nonconformist conscience' is misleading and unsustainable. Interdenominationalism could happen (at Wymondham ‘a few . . . left their denominations and met simply as Christians’) but it was rare, and generally frowned upon by established and dissenting churches alike. The landscape legacy of this – the proliferation of Nonconformist church buildings in the Norfolk countryside – is indicative of one stark and incontrovertible fact: very few nineteenth-century rural parishes were without a dissenting presence of some kind at some time. Many parishes that seemed dissent-free in 1851 may have previously had a licensed meeting house that had fallen into disuse, or may have harboured a latent Nonconformist congregation that had not yet organised. Even in those parishes where chapels were never built a handful of dissenters probably travelled to worship every Sunday in the meeting house of a neighbouring parish.

Attempts by later eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century clergymen to deal with the 'spreading flame' of Nonconformity demonstrate a good deal of inconsistency. Whereas some clerical magistrates executed a crackdown that could even extend to turning a blind-eye to anti-Methodist violence, other clergymen pleaded ignorance of

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123 Campbell, *Conversations*, p. 21.
developments in their own parish on the grounds of non-residency.\textsuperscript{126} Similarly, while some incumbents took a relaxed attitude to Methodism, considering its adherents to be generally well-behaved, the Rev. Edward Whitwell at Wood Norton made it his business to target every newcomer and every waverer who threatened to bring or to allow Nonconformity into the parish:

‘One Henry Dye . . . had at his coming first into this Parish been connected with the Methodists; on my first hearing of this, as He could not read Himself, I ordered to be read to Him Dr. Stebbing on Religious Delusion, wch seemed to have had a proper Effect’.\textsuperscript{127}

There was as little consensus among clergymen when it came to explaining outbreaks of social unrest. Seven Norfolk clergymen were asked to contribute their views on the ‘causes and consequences’ of the ‘Swing’ riots to the Poor Law Report of 1834.\textsuperscript{128} They gave seven different reasons: revenge against unpopular farmers; the influence of ‘foreigners’; a failure of law and order; a concerted attempt to reduce rents and tithes. One respondent had ‘no idea’ of the cause; another thought the attacks were indiscriminate; the Rev. James Ward of Coltishall attributed them to a ‘general spirit of insubordination’ then found himself contradicted by his churchwarden, who cited ‘the dreadfully depressed condition of many of the . . . labourers’.

Maintaining the distinction between Nonconformist denominations is important, as some were much more working-class and politically radical than others, but when the overall picture is viewed from the perspective of the established church and its clergy, the wider concept of religious dissent as something ‘other’ must also be borne in mind. In a society where the political and religious establishment was as one, and where it held a position of central constitutional importance, religious dissent, disillusion and non-participation inevitably and axiomatically became political acts. The point was made by the

\textsuperscript{126} At Garvestone, for instance, the Rev. Roger Hall left visitation questions on Nonconformity to his curate on the grounds that he ‘resides within a mile and enters it every week’. The curate, G. W. Smith, refused to answer the questions because the rector ‘best knows whether [everyone] pays him his legal dues’. (N.R.O. DN/VIS 48/4 Hingham Rural Deanery Visitation Returns, 1813).

\textsuperscript{127} N.R.O. DN/VIS 29a/9 Sparham Rural Deanery Visitation Returns, 1784.

\textsuperscript{128} Poor Law Report Appendix B, 1834.
Nonconformist minister J. Alexander in 1836 when he wrote that 'dissent . . . is a relative term, and is applied to such persons . . . [as] dissent from all establishments of religion by the civil power'.129 Almost forty years later the agricultural trade unions took up the baton of opposition to a national church and its local representatives:

'We impeach the clergy of the Church of England of gross and shameful neglect . . . of moral delinquency and moral cowardice . . . of scandalizing [their] high office . . . The evil of a corrupt clergy is a canker that is sapping the spiritual work of our national life. A serf clergy can never properly train a free people'.130

The overwhelming impression is that hostility to the clergy strengthened and deepened during the nineteenth century as it acquired a sharper, more definite political edge. This was undoubtedly attributable in large measure to the close association between the Church of England and the Tory party, but an important secondary consideration is the notion that political understanding among the working class developed at a speed that could not be countered from the confines of the Rectory study. In the early twentieth century, the Burston School Strike owed its celebrated status, in part at least, to an awareness that even within the confines of a tiny 'local difficulty', myriad issues of national social and political significance were being brought into focus. 'The Burston rebellion,' wrote the Labour Leader in 1916, 'is merely the local happening of something that has its roots in deep underlying forces that are beginning to find expression in active revolt'.131 This was a sophisticated view of a changing world, to which Charles Eland could only respond with the kind of posturing that would have signalled his considerable power in 1816, but in 1916 seemed merely petty, vindictive and desperate.132

But Burston was unusual, too, insofar as it contained elements of direct action taken against each other by both the clergyman and his parishioners. Elsewhere this seldom – if

130 Labourers' Chronicle, 11.10.73, cited by the Rev. F. B. de Chair in Currie & de Chair, The Clergy and the Labourers' Movement, pp. 94 – 5.
132 Eland’s response to the Burston School Strike is revisited at intervals in this thesis. The measures he took included the eviction of glebe tenants and the withdrawal of Rectory business from tradespeople who had not supported him.
ever – happened. It remains a fact that anything approaching a general and visible front-line role for clergymen in the 'rural war' steadfastly refuses to emerge from the historical record. It seems that working-class anti-clericalism must have had its roots in other, more subtle understandings of the clergy’s position in the great social and political power networks of the time, and it is to this issue that the next chapter will turn.
Plate 7: Wickmere Primitive Methodist Chapel, 1897.
Architecturally plain, geographically remote, but with a corner stone laid by the Earl of Orford.

Plate 8: The Victorian Rectory as country house.
(Framingham Pigot)
PART TWO

MANAGING THE POOR
Chapter Four

Managing Dissent: Networks of authority, influence and power

'I give you to understand – I will rule this parish and the minister shall be subservient to me'\(^1\)

Introduction

This chapter is concerned with power in the nineteenth-century countryside: how it was disseminated from the highest levels by means of social, marital and political alliances; how the church was implicated in the development of parochial authority structures; and how counter-structures grew up, posited on proletarian networks and Nonconformist church circuits. In the process the concept of 'spheres of influence' is introduced. By this it is suggested that the administrative unit of the parish was heavily overlain by networks of marital and social, political and religious contact – often with clergymen at their hub – and that these reveal the traditional understanding of 'open' and 'close' parishes in landownership terms to be largely inadequate as an explanatory theory for nineteenth-century social relations. It is relevant to consider, too, the extent to which the clergyman's desire and scope to intervene in matters of social justice was compromised by his links into the local governing elite. In this respect the rural poor were often left unprotected by all branches of religion: Primitive Methodism may well have had links into the trade union movement, but other denominations had their own elite networks (often middle-class), their own political agendas (often conservative), and their own, often unwelcoming, codes of morality and asceticism.

The *prima facie* evidence suggests that, between 1815 and 1914, the Norfolk labourer progressed from being faceless, voiceless, and with recourse only to riot as a means of attracting attention to his plight, to being unionised and enfranchised. He was responsible for electing a County Council of such relatively humble social origins that 40 of its 57

members in 1912 did not feature in Walter Rye’s ‘who’s who’ of Norfolk society.² But had elite control really yielded to this extent? To answer this it is worth considering, first of all, some of the mechanisms by which control was exercised.

Firstly, early nineteenth-century methods of punitive control, including transportation and execution for acts of riot or arson, dropped from the statute books but left behind a folk memory of class-driven injustice. This existed alongside a sense that elites still had the potential to make life so uncomfortable for the social or political dissident that much the same level of ‘social-cleansing’ could be achieved without recourse to law. As one contemporary observer of the Burston Rebellion put it,

‘the squire and the parson have been the Lord High Tololorums of the countryside for centuries. To dispute their divine authority, or to question their insolence, oft means social ostracism, or a tour abroad without a Cook’s guide. Emigration returns will prove this’.³

Secondly, events in Burston provide an example of the way in which nineteenth-century authority systems still exerted an iron grip upon the management of some twentieth-century institutions: among the six members of the Burston School Committee were the Rev. Charles Tucker Eland, Mrs. Eland, the Rev. Millard of Shimpling, Millard’s churchwarden, and one of Eland’s glebe tenants.⁴ Thirdly, the pre-eminence of ‘Oxbridge’ as a self-perpetuating means of providing a governing elite - in which clergy and gentry were inculcated with a shared value system – may have been diluted by the early twentieth century, but it, too, remained substantially intact.⁵ Fourthly, the demands of the farming year continued to militate against democratic participation. Newly-enfranchised labourers in 1885 found that their working hours prevented them from getting to the polling booths as effectively as they had precluded them from attending vestry meetings.⁶ Fifthly, even the forces of traditional liberalism seemed to see good quality housing and decent working conditions as little more than an effective and

² W. Rye, Norfolk Families (Norwich, 1913).
³ N.R.O. MC 31/2, 478 x 1, The Burston School Strike, p. 1. The direct linkage between transportation and emigration as punitive sanctions is an interesting and significant one, and is discussed further in Chapters Five and Six.
⁴ N.R.O. MC 31/2, 478 x 1, The Burston School Strike, p. 8.
⁵ F. Knight, The Nineteenth Century Church and English Society (Cambridge, 1995), p. 3.
⁶ For a description of Joseph Arch’s problems in getting his supporters to the polls before they closed, see P. Horn, Joseph Arch (1826 – 1919) The Farmworkers’ Leader (Kineton, 1972), p. 182.

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trouble-free means of preserving the status quo. As the Liberal landowner Robert Gurdon wrote (about the rise of trade unionism) in 1873:

'[there has been] no bother in this neighbourhood with our men, nor do I anticipate any as our cottages are good at very low rents, which is more use than anything else in giving one a hold over them.'

Although originating from a very different political tradition, the Primrose League was constituted on exactly the same premise: an outward display of pastoral care and charitable kindness would help create the illusion of a ‘community of interest’ in the countryside and would encourage the labourer to cleave to his traditional masters in preference to the transient and unsustainable promises of ‘strangers’. In time this metamorphosed into what Howkins has described as an ‘ideology of idyllicism’ which, with its reconstructed pageantry and ‘Golden Age’ allusions, came to inform both Conservative and Socialist ideas of how rural life should be lived.

Landownership and political authority

Landowners’ and employers’ organisations like the Hundred Associations had, from early in the century, been seen by some as an essential complement to the administration of the poor law. At best the combined effect of the two measures could, as the Rev. J. B. Collyer of Hackford observed, ‘suppress the indolence, idleness and crime that too generally prevail’. By the 1870s similar organisations appeared that had a much harder political edge: these were the Farmers’ Defence Associations which, while still

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7 N.R.O. WLS LX/XVIII/40, 479 x 3: Walsingham papers, Gurdon to Walsingham (15 February 1873).
9 The reconstructed pageantry of ‘Merrie England’ is referred to on a number of occasions throughout this thesis. The over-riding concept is a conservative one, but the fact that it was also a favourite theme of liberals and socialists should not be forgotten. The last decades of the nineteenth century, and the first decades of the twentieth were characterised by a zeitgeist of conservatism that transcended notions of party politics.
10 Associations rewarding loyalty and longevity of service, and organised by the farmers and landowners of Norfolk’s old administrative Hundreds, sprang up across the county in the 1830s. The Hundreds were geographically similar – though not identical – to the post-1834 Poor Law Unions. The belief that a mobile labour force was behind incendiary fires partly explains why these associations put such a premium on loyalty and longevity, even though it was the farmers’ own preference for casual labour that had become a major factor in the high turnover of employees.
11 N.C. 22.11.34.
offering rewards for loyalty and compliant behaviour, now choreographed lock-outs and the denial of poor relief to trade union members. As the Conservative landowner William Bagge advised Lord Walsingham, their premise was that ‘the poor fellows believe strangers in preference to their real friends’, and their intention was to act ‘not against the men but against Jacobine Advisers who have attached themselves to the Union’. In reality all employers’ associations exhibited a fear of working-class organisation that stemmed from the elite’s own appreciation of the effectiveness of collective action. They also exemplified the ‘carrot and stick’ approach to social control that had been a feature of rural government since the bread riots of the eighteenth century and earlier. Newby has described this as a pattern of ‘tension management’: a crackdown to restore stability; a more ‘moderate’ follow-up to restore the deferential-paternalistic balance; and an occasional exercise of full powers as a reminder of relative social positions.

Of great significance, too, was the degree of employment intimidation that elites could bring to bear in their attempts to ensure political conformity within their ‘spheres of influence’. This was so widespread that fear of ‘the screw’ lingered long after the introduction of the secret ballot in 1872. At best labourers were suspicious of a system that still seemed to rely on traceable ballot papers, at worst they faced the naked intimidation of employers who ‘threatened to discharge for the winter months any of their labourers who went to the poll on election day, while those who refrained were to be kept on at 10s. a week’. In 1895 mid-Norfolk Liberals expressed their anxiety to avoid a by-election when their M.P. resigned the party whip, on the grounds that ‘Liberal tradesmen dread elections and no wonder, all the farmers are Tories and they make no secret of boycotting them and dealing elsewhere’.

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12 N.R.O. WLS LX/XVIII/40 479 x 3: Walsingham papers, Bagge to Walsingham (28 February 1873).
16 Horn, Joseph Arch, p. 170.
17 N.R.O. KIM 6/33, Kimberley papers: J. Wodehouse to Lord Kimberley, 8 February 1895.
On the Merton estate of the Conservative Lord Walsingham, political intimidation had been honed to a fine art, and had become the self-declared *modus operandi* of the estate agent Henry Woods: ‘[I] can see that I am getting the men in hand,’ he wrote, ‘I am of the opinion that the men begin to see some fear’. Fear was certainly apparent in the letter that Walsingham received in January 1891 from W. Herring, the shop-keeper at Tottington on Walsingham’s estate:

> ‘Honoured sir, To our surprise and consternation we received this morning . . . a notice to quit . . . if it is something to do with this strike it is a great injustice . . . the only reason we have been in the union is because the men tell us they wouldn’t give us no work if we wasn’t in but if his lordship wishes us to give it up we will with pleasure and if he don’t like the men being at our shop we will make them keep away in fact we will do anything . . . Please sir intercede for us as it will be utter ruin to my father & mother.’

The theme of employment intimidation continued to run strongly into the twentieth century. At Burston Charles Eland withdrew all Rectory business from the shoemaker Harry Ling and evicted him as a glebe tenant when he refused to give the clergyman his support over the school strike, while in the aftermath of the 1910 Horsham St. Faith strike the daughter of a union member was refused employment in domestic service and the strikers themselves were still on an invisible blacklist two years later.

One notorious case occurred on the Melton Constable estate of Lord Hastings immediately after the general election of 1900. Hastings was president of the local Conservative Association, his tenant Burrell Hammond was a prominent Nonconformist and Liberal. When Sir Brampton Gurdon, the Liberal candidate, won the division, Hastings responded by giving Hammond notice to quit, stating that ‘I am anxious to have a tenant who would act on more friendly terms with his landlord, and also one not so hostile to the clergy and everything connected with the Church of England’. Hastings also evicted another, less prominent Liberal supporter, ‘a lame man named Cooper’ who, with his wife, had done the servants’ laundry at Merton Hall for 24 years. The editorial of the *Eastern Daily Press* expressed outrage:

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20 N.R.O. MC 31/63/1 Burston papers: Letter from Tom Higdon, 26 July 1915.
22 This summary of the case is based on an *E.D.P.* report, 19.10.1900.
'Have we . . . at the dawn of the twentieth century . . . to fight the battle of free speech and free thought over again? . . . In Norfolk alone the finger could be pointed to dozens of country estates whose owners exert immense influence and yet of whom it could never be said that they attempt . . . to interfere with the political & religious opinions of the men who [create their wealth].'

Table 4.1: Tenants' voting preferences in six Norfolk estates 1802 – 1858 showing the percentage of votes cast in accordance with the political leaning of the principal landowner

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Estate</th>
<th>1802</th>
<th>1806</th>
<th>1817</th>
<th>1832</th>
<th>1835</th>
<th>1837</th>
<th>1841</th>
<th>1858</th>
<th>Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Walsingham</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>n.d</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>n.d</td>
<td>n.d</td>
<td>n.d</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(CON)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coke</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>n.d</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(LIB)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Astley</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>n.d</td>
<td>n.d</td>
<td>n.d</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(LIB)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evans-Lombe</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>60</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(CON)</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evans-Lombe</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>63</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(LIB)</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suffield</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>90</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(CON)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suffield</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>81</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(LIB)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wodehouse</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>98</td>
<td></td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(CON)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wodehouse</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>68</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(LIB)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SOURCE: Norfolk Poll book data, 1802 – 1858, transcribed copies held in Leicester University library: LDM 001118 (1802); LDM 001119 (1806); LDM 001116 (1817); LDM 001121 (1832); LDM 001126 (1835); LDM 001122, 001123 (1837); LDM 001122 (1841); LDM 001122 (1858)

But was the *Eastern Daily Press* deluding itself? Could it really be argued that the political leanings of landlords were not widely reflected in the voting patterns of those who were dependent upon them for jobs, tenancies and patronage? One way of testing this is to conduct an analysis of poll book data. Table 4.1 gives an indication of voting preferences in the first half of the nineteenth century on the estates of six prominent
Norfolk landowners. The appropriateness of the terms ‘Conservative’ and ‘Liberal’ – especially before the 1830s – is debatable, but the ‘party’ designation matters less in this context than the extent to which voting patterns mirror the political leanings of the landowner.

The estates dealt with in Table 4.1 can broadly be divided into Conservative (Walsingham), Liberal (Coke and Astley), two that changed allegiance during this period (Evans-Lombe and Suffield) and one (Wodehouse) that had two seats of power, one Liberal and one Conservative. The figures on the table are the percentages of votes cast for the landowner’s favoured candidate on his own estate. A figure of 100% would represent complete voting unanimity, while anything less than 50% would mean that more votes were being cast against the landowner’s favoured candidate than for him. The tendency towards political conformity was high in all these cases – with the possible exception of Evans-Lombe – and was at its highest on the Liberal estates of Coke and Astley. The percentages of Conservative and Liberal votes cast on the two estates of the Wodehouse family are, interestingly, the same, in each case tending to echo the very different politics of the two branches of that family. The issue of a landowner changing allegiance and the impact that this could have on voting behaviour is clearly illustrated in the case of the Suffield estate at Gunton. Here the third baron, whose radicalism had been forged in the angry aftermath of Peterloo, had succeeded his Conservative father and brother in 1821, and by 1832 had encouraged or allowed a 90% Tory vote to become 81% support for the Liberals.

How could such a turn-around have been achieved? In its report of the incident on the Hastings estate, the Eastern Daily Press remarked that successive Cokes at Holkham had had a policy of gathering ‘a body of tenancy who were attached to [them] by a

23 The analysis of voting behaviour is made more complicated by the fact that few elections were straight contests between two candidates. Most had three or four candidates and ‘block votes’ were cast, almost always favouring two candidates in tandem against one or two opponents. Where this has happened, the higher number of votes cast for the ‘tandem’ candidates is taken as the vote for that political leaning. For instance, in 1832 votes tended to be cast in tandem for Cholmondeley and Peach against Windham and Keppel. The votes cast on the Suffield estate for each candidate were: Cholmondeley 15, Peach 17, Keppel 69, Windham 74. 74 was thus taken as the ‘block vote’ figure for Keppel/Windham and 17 was taken as the ‘block vote’ for Cholmondeley/Peach.
community of sentiment’ and that tenant families had, as much as the Cokes themselves, ‘inherited the same great political principles’. However, the evidence of Table 4.1 suggests that ‘political principles’ were not the issue here. At the end of the nineteenth century Hastings was either acting more typically than the moral outrage implied – and some tenant evictions and appointments continued to be politically motivated – or tenants’ political principles were sufficiently elastic to coincide with those of the landlord.

If the evidence of Table 4.1 suggests that the tenant farmers of great estates were politically biddable, could the same be said of the estates’ clergymen? Table 4.2 has, first of all, to be seen in the context of all clerical votes cast during these elections, 75% of which, across Norfolk between 1802 and 1858 were cast in support of Conservative candidates. Bearing this in mind, the results on the Liberal estates of Coke and Astley show a remarkable deviation from the clerical voting norm, with 88% and 62% respectively of estate clergymen voting Liberal. This strongly suggests that, just like the tenantry, clergymen were either being appointed on the strength of their political allegiances or that many clergymen regarded political unity with the local landowner as a matter of over-riding social importance. Results on the Conservative estates of Walsingham and Wodehouse are, perhaps, more in line with expectation. Only Suffield goes badly awry, with a large Conservative vote being cast by the clergy on a Liberal estate, an anomaly probably explained by the survival of appointees of the old Conservative regime long after the arrival of the radical young third baron. The fact that such men did not change allegiance is indicative of a certain political resilience among some Conservative clergymen. From all the parish voting returns covered by these six estates, only 18 clergymen voted against the preference of the landowner and of their parishioners. Of these, 16 stood isolated as the only Conservative voters in otherwise solidly Liberal parishes.

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24 E.D.P. 19.10.1900.
25 Hastings took his action more than forty years after the last election depicted in Table 4.1 and it could be argued that expectations regarding landowner interference in the political process had changed, particularly since the advent of the secret ballot. For evidence of continued political gerrymandering on the estate of Lord Walsingham in the 1880s and 1890s, however, see p.163.
Table 4.2: Clergy voting preferences on six Norfolk estates 1802 – 1858 analysed by political leaning of landowner

Mainly Liberal Leaning Estates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Estate</th>
<th>Voting Preference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Coke</td>
<td>88% LIB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Astley</td>
<td>62% LIB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evans-Lombe</td>
<td>51% LIB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suffield</td>
<td>81% CON</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mainly Conservative Leaning Estates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Estate</th>
<th>Voting Preference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Walsingham</td>
<td>100% CON</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wodehouse</td>
<td>76% CON</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SOURCE: Norfolk Poll book data, 1802 – 1858, as detailed for Table 4.1.

Kinship and patronage

Often bound up with the political links between gentry and clergy, and often less visible, were the social and family ties between them. Anything that falls short of the most comprehensive investigation into these kinship links is bound to fail, defeated by the Byzantine network of intermarriage that must remain impenetrable to all but the most dedicated genealogist. It is possible, however, to offer a pointer to some of the ways in which kinship networks of power and influence were forged and spread across the county. A newspaper cutting listing Norfolk’s wealthiest landowners, carefully pasted by the Rev. George Crabbe into his Merton Annals, detailed 72 individuals whose landholding was worth more than £3000 in 1876. Only three of these individuals – Henry Lombe of Bylaugh, William Keppel of Lexham, and John Micklethwait of Taverham – were clergymen, but 44 of the 72 families (and 33 of the top 42) sent representatives into the Church of England during the nineteenth century. In all, 121 family names which, according to Rye, could lay claim to some kind of gentrified provenance in the county, cropped up among the clergymen making visitation returns in

\[\text{NR.O. PD 532/32, Rev. G. Crabbe, Merton Annals (1876). The list is reproduced as Appendix H.}\]

\[\text{Rye, Norfolk Families, passim.}\]
the first half of the century, and it was at this secondary level – the ‘younger sons who went into the church’ – that many crucial networks and contacts seem to have been consolidated. Mills has talked of the clergy as the political agents of absentee landlords, and it is hard to avoid the sense that these junior associates of powerful dynasties were expected to ‘deliver’ a parish politically. One could take the analogy further and describe the role of some of Norfolk’s nineteenth-century clergy as being akin to that of colonial governors, sent by the county’s ruling elite into their ‘heart of darkness’, the rural parish. Essentially those 121 names, certainly incomplete as a list, provided the clergymen for at least 301 rural parishes at some time between 1750 and 1850.

The power of patronage – the doors that it opened and the security that it provided – lay behind the otherwise seemingly unfathomable decision of so many of the country’s best-educated young men to live out their lives in these rural backwaters: they were, metaphorically, accepting a commission into an ongoing campaign for social and political control. In July 1874 the *Labour League Examiner* offered a sketch of how the system worked:

‘The beardless curate, fresh from “wines” and “bump suppers” at Oxford . . . the marks of the oar still upon his hands . . . dropped down into a country town or rural village finds himself at once a leader . . . his power gets established, he has dined with the county member, my lord has spoken of him as a “rising young man”, my lady has been pleased to approve his family connections . . . it is all plain sailing’.29

Once established, ‘a man could buy himself or his relative a living . . . and secure its transmission to following generations of his family more securely than he could hope to do in any other profession’.30 The right of advowson was guarded as jealously as any other piece of property during the nineteenth century. By 1866 it was calculated that the surnames of the incumbent and the patron were the same in 1,290 of the 6,000 English

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livings in the gift of private patrons. The impressionistic sense that clergy and gentry were linked by kinship ties can further be quantified by an analysis of ‘surname concentration’. Essentially a means of keeping track of the surname links between incumbent, patron and landowner, this measure is a potentially powerful tool for studying patterns of authority and spheres of influence. The higher the ‘surname concentration’ the less frequently the key surnames changed in the parish and, consequently, the closer the kinship links can be assumed to be between patron, incumbent and landowner. A complementary measure is that of ‘average incumbency length’, simply arrived at by calculating the number of years between the start of the incumbency in place in 1815 and the end of the incumbency in place in 1914 and dividing by the number of incumbencies in that period.

Any preconception that ‘close’ and ‘estate’ parishes might be places of high surname concentration and long incumbencies is not, however, borne out by the evidence. S.P.S.S tests show no significant correlation between these measures and parish type. The parish of Stratton Strawless, a ‘close’ parish and the personal fiefdom of the Marsham family, lives up to expectations by having a high surname concentration (4.0) and a long average incumbency length (34.3 years), but in being the only ‘close’ parish to follow this pattern it rather demonstrates the fact that kinship links and ‘dynastic incumbencies’ were as likely to occur in ‘open’ parishes as in ‘close’.

Neither can any substantive difference in these measures be discerned between the Conservative estate of Lord Walsingham and the ‘Liberal’ estate of Lord Suffield. In the parishes of these two estates the average surname concentrations were 2.3 (Walsingham) and 2.4 (Suffield), and average incumbency lengths were 24 years and 25.5 years respectively. The fact that modes of administration operated so universally, however

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31 Calculated by E. Batrum, Promotion by Merit Essential to the Progress of the Church (1866), and cited in Roberts, ‘Private patronage’, p. 204n.
32 Full details of this measure and its method of calculation can be found in Appendix F.
33 As a measure, ‘incumbency length’ is, of course, always at the mercy of the chance element of clergy life-spans.
34 It is just possible that a relatively high turnover of clergy in close parishes reflects their use as ‘grooming parishes’, where young gentry/clergy could learn their role in an atmosphere of peace, patronage and preferment.
nominal 'liberal' the context in some places, was a testimony to the solidarity with which the interests of church and political state were bound. Suffield, for instance, was radical enough to believe in the election of clergymen by parishioners, but as the patron of several livings in Norfolk and Lancashire he was still capable of acting imperiously when the occasion demanded. Controversially denying the curate of Aldborough a promotion because he had become too friendly with the local farmers, Suffield announced— as if to prove his even-handedness— 'that I am not aware of ever have [sic] seen or written to him in my life'.35

The assertion by landowners of a 'class interest' that transcended 'political interest' was supported by a network of marital, social and kinship ties between gentry and clergy that was too dense, complex and widespread to fully reveal itself within the confines of a parish or an estate. The diaries of Anne Howes, for instance, wife of the Rev. Thomas Howes of Morningthorpe, reveal her to have been the sister of the Rev. Fairfax Francklin of Attleborough and the sister-in-law of the Rev. George Howes of Spixworth. The Spixworth landowner Francis Longe's mother had been Tabitha Howes of Morningthorpe. When Francis Longe died in 1812 he bequeathed to Thomas Howes lands in Harleston that had been acquired through marital links into the Frere family, a succession of the sons of which held various livings in south Norfolk.36 A further route into the labrynth may be sought in the bequests contained in clergy wills. At Smallburgh in 1841, William Gunn left money and property to his son John (rector of Irstead) and to a social network that embraced the incumbents of the neighbouring parishes of Sloley, Hoveton, Wroxham and North Walsham.37 Gunn had also cultivated strong and beneficial links with the landed families of these and other parishes: the Macks of Sloley (into whom Gunn had married); the Aufreres of Hoveton St. Peter; the Blofelds of Hoveton St. John; the Prestons of Beeston; the Norris's of Barton Hall; the Cubitts and the Postles of Smallburgh.38 Most of these families had clerical sons of their own. It was

35 N.R.O. GTN 35/1 Suffield papers, Suffield to Norgate, 30 October 1832.
37 N.R.O. MF 490 f.203, will of the Rev. William Gunn of Smallburgh, 1841.
their collective encouragement and sponsorship that had enabled Gunn to go on his European Grand Tour in 1785.

How, then, did these elite networks affect the lives of the poor? At one level they provided a clear context for social control, and the pursuit of the ‘deferential ideal’ – whereby church, state and the labouring poor nurtured each other in unalterable mutuality – was exemplified by the speech that the Rev. George Crabbe of Merton wrote to celebrate the succession of the sixth Lord Walsingham in 1872. The speech, which was delivered by the three oldest tenants on the estate, was a paean to ancestral continuity: ‘My lord . . . we do not forget that for 800 years your family has held the lands of Merton . . . Permit us to express a hope that your estate may continue in your family as it has done in times past, that our descendants may entertain the same feelings towards yours as we now do towards you, connected with you as we are by more than ties of tenancy’.39 Ties like these were, explicitly, the ties of authority and paternalism, and ones that were untouched by any taint of democracy. Writing in 1834, the Rev. Charles Campbell of Weasenham made clear his belief that ‘army officers draw their authority from the King’s Commission; in just the same way clergymen have a lawful commission which should not be challenged . . . the labourers on your Master’s farm, might with as much reason say they had a right to choose who should be the steward, or the children in the Parish-school choose the master, as the people have to determine who shall be the Ministers of Christ’.40

At another level, however, elite networks exerted a kind of ‘gravitational pull’ on the lives of the classes below them. This can most readily be seen in census returns, where servants’ places of baptism often show them to have been following their employers from place to place. Occasionally something more subtle is suggested, and the notion of ‘shadow networks’ may be posited: movements of the rural poor that tracked landownership patterns among the wealthy and led, in time, to the formation of kinship networks among labourers that echoed the kinship networks of the elite. One example of

40 Rev. C. Campbell, Conversations with a Ranter (Swaffham, 1834), pp. 18, 53.
this is provided by the links between Banningham and Shipdham. In Chapter One it has been suggested that the appeal of a Banningham woman for help from a Shipdham 'wise man' (in 1871) was indicative of the powerful pull of belonging: the woman had originally come from Shipdham and was seeking assistance among old neighbours rather than new. The issue is given additional depth, however, by the papers of the Rev. Thomas Paul. Between 1767 and 1814 Paul was the absentee rector of Banningham, living in Shipdham and conducting a series of land exchanges between the two parishes. The implications of this, if they extend beyond mere coincidence, are profound. They indicate that elite networks did more than establish and consolidate the command posts of local government: they laid a template that shaped at least some of the migration and movement of the classes below them.

There were signs that some clergymen felt suffocated by their perpetual closeness to gentry patrons, and there was an awareness that the relationship could be detrimental to the church as a career and as a pastoral mission. In 1880 Benjamin Armstrong wrote of his bitterness at being passed over for the post of Rural Dean because of the 'low church' Bishop’s policy of preferring ‘those who are dependents of the “great houses” . . . Thus [of the successful candidates] Currie is related to the Kimberleys and Garnier is the protégé of the Gurdons’.

To the Rev. William Wayte Andrew at Ketteringham, the geographical juxtaposition of church and Hall appeared as a metaphor for the constant struggle that raged between himself and squire Boileau over the boundaries of secular and spiritual authority: as Owen Chadwick described it, ‘the church, standing almost beneath the shadow of the hall, must have seemed in earlier days like a private chapel to the squire.

The clergyman might be called upon for his advice, as was the case with Crabbe and Brereton over the Merton Estate strike, or he might give his advice unsolicited as the

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43 Chadwick, Victorian Miniature, p. 34.
44 N.R.O. WLS LX/XVIII/40, 479 x 3: Walsingham papers, Crabbe to Walsingham and Brereton to Walsingham (24 February 1873).
Rev. Campbell Wodehouse did over the standard of labourers' cottages in Attlebridge, but he was as frequently reduced to making obsequious-sounding comments of a kind that might appease the political sensibilities of his patron: ‘My Lord,’ wrote the Rev. Brookes Wrenford to Lord Walsingham, ‘I am much obliged to your lordship for kindly sending me a brace of pheasants . . . I view the action of Mr. Gladstone and his party with great concern, and I am not able to understand how any lover of his country can do otherwise’.  

As early as 1838 the Rev. Kemp of Whissonsett was expressing regret in his visitation return that the ideological battle between Anglican and Methodist was increasingly being fought on the issues of finance, patronage and influence rather than religious doctrine. If anything these battle lines had become hardened by the end of the century. As Roberts has written, despite some inroads into the way patronage operated, ‘private patrons . . . were well protected by the laws of real property. They were extensively represented in the legislature . . . and, in addition, they were able to legitimise their stand as a defence of lay rights against clerical and professional encroachment. In this way they ensured their survival into the early twentieth century.

‘Enrolling Actors’: Encountering and managing rural activists

The nineteenth-century gentry of Norfolk were a far from homogenous group - ranging from small ‘gentleman farmers’ to huge land magnates – but by 1880 over half the county was held by landowners of more than 1,000 acres. The larger landowners, particularly, constituted a magisterial and political elite that networked across the whole county, and one which could draw upon a range of experience and expertise to help it deal with any crisis. So far-reaching were the tentacles of landowner influence and power that it was a very real fear among Liberals – including Gladstone himself – that newly-

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45 Evidence to the R.C. on the Employment of Children, Young Persons and Women in Agriculture (1867), p. 151
46 N.R.O. WLS LX/43, 429 x 8: Walsingham papers, Wrenford to Walsingham (27 January 1886).
47 N.R.O. DN/VIS 64/1, Brisley Rural Deanery Visitation Returns, 1838.
enfranchised agricultural labourers might wreck Liberalism in the countryside by voting deferentially for their old masters. Even in the event this did not happen: rural Norfolk’s parliamentary seats became – for the most part – Liberal strongholds between 1885 and 1914, and the Norfolk County Council began to demonstrate a gradual drift away from the old seats of power. Even so, one Conservative vision - that ‘the best regulated parishes are where the living is in the gift of the squire, who nominates some desirable relative or friend’, continued to exert a powerful appeal in the eyes of many. In challenging this vision, religious Nonconformity challenged something that lay close to the heart of nineteenth-century power structures. Almost one hundred years apart two Nonconformist voices in the county made it clear just how far they dissented from traditional notions of authority: ‘We engage to be obedient and loyal subjects to our civil governors, so far as their injunctions appear to us to be consistent with God’s laws’, declared the founders of Harleston Independent Church in 1786, while at a Nonconformist meeting in East Dereham in 1873 the dissenting minister Barrett argued that the business of a free church was to ‘witness not to the truth of authority but to the authority of truth’.

Views like these, combined with an awareness on the part of the establishment that charismatic speakers could have great influence, informed many of the alarms and warnings against ‘strangers’ that sounded throughout the nineteenth century. From the notice posted in Diss in 1783, warning that ‘several disorderly persons styling themselves Methodist preachers, go about raising routs and riots’, through the Chartist meetings held ‘under the pretence of preaching in south Norfolk in 1839, to the ‘outsiders who have nothing to do with you, or with me, or with this estate’ who threatened the

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51 Between 1889 and 1912, Norfolk County Council went from 29 out of 57 councillors to 17 out of 57 councillors with kinship networks recorded in Rye’s, Norfolk Families. The names of Norfolk County Councillors were listed annually in trade directories. The above figures have been calculated using White’s Directory (1890) and Kelly’s Directory (1912).
53 N.R.O. COL 8/83 Browne Collection. (The italics are mine).
54 N.R.O. FC 17/169, Historical Sketches & Tales of the Town of Diss.
'independence and liberty' of labourers on the Merton estate in 1890,57 'strangers' were usually thought to be somewhere in the background whenever there was trouble. As early as 1830 William Cobbett had dismissed the notion of 'strangers' and 'foreigners' as a smokescreen to deflect attention away from those who were 'the real cause of the mischief', 58 but a number of visitation returns demonstrate that the notion of sinister itinerants disrupting the harmony of parish life had taken hold: 'Itinerant preachers... creep into houses and lead captive silly women';59 'a few Anabaptists [in the parish] seduced by something peculiar in [the preacher's] manner';60 'their Teachers are numerous generally Strolers and their Rank such as have impudence to harangue a mob for a Bellyful of coarse Food'.61

Of course, these notions would be easier to dismiss were it not for the fact that charismatic, hard-working individuals could have an enormous impact, and that they were in some instances capable of developing 'spheres of influence' of their own. In the course of discussing 'actor network theory' as an alternative to traditional concepts of power dissemination, Spencer considers the significance of the 'enrolling actor, who plays a pivotal role at crucial times'.62 Enrolling actors who emerge from the Norfolk record – and who substantially changed the face of social relations in the county – include Robert Key, whose mission into Norfolk saw Primitive Methodist membership rise from 1,917 in 1829 to 8,017 in 1835;63 Thomas Mendham of Briston, who gave form and focus to the growing disillusionment that the influential Hardy family felt towards Anglicanism;64 John Farman, 'the founder and father of Methodism in the... West Flegg

57 N.R.O. WLS LX/XVIII/40, 479 x 3; Walsingham papers, Speech delivered by Lord Walsingham at the Tottington schoolroom to estate workers in dispute (1890).
62 Spencer, 'Reformulating', p. 92.
63 Howkins, Poor Labouring Men, pp. 43 – 4.
district’; and, in a trade union context, Zacharias Walker, who presided over an increase in union membership from 4,254 in 1889 to 10,000 in 1891.

The Church of England tried to counter this menace with ‘enrolling actors’ of its own. At Syderstone the curate John Stewart – despite large numbers of Wesleyans and Ranters in the parish – was able to report in 1838 that ‘the church is filled. When I arrived the “congregation” amounted to Eleven Persons’. At Burston, one of the complaints made against the Higdons by Charles Eland was that they, as schoolteachers, were abdicating their responsibility by failing to attend church: they should be exerting their influence and encouraging the schoolchildren to attend with them. In the worst cases, however, ‘spheres of influence’ could actually work in reverse: when he took over as curate at Bawdeswell from John Herring, the Rev. William Thomson found a number of people who no longer attended church ‘on account of Mr. Herring’, or who told him that ‘Mr. Herring changed [them] to Methodism’.

From the survey of his new parish, Thomson concluded that what Bawdeswell desperately needed was some kind of moral exemplar, a ‘respectable resident inhabitant [or] a resident clergyman. Ignorance and rudeness arise from [the want of these]’. Thomson was not alone. In a lengthy addendum to his visitation return of 1838, James Irvine, the curate at West Winch, recorded the mounting toll of idleness, ignorance, absenteeism, and drunkenness in the parish, and attributed it directly to the lack of a resident clergyman and:

‘the frequent changes of curates, which have prevented any one from gaining much influence over the people, which is a work of time . . . The consequences of this neglect are now painfully felt & are seen in the . . . unavowed belief on the part of several of the people that the Church establishment is maintained for the advantage of individuals, & that the sole motive of the Christian minister is his own temporal advantage’.

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67 N.R.O. DN/VIS 64/2 Burnham Rural Deanery Visitation Returns, 1838.
69 N.R.O. PD 155/35, Bawdeswell curate’s list of parishioners, 1842.
70 N.R.O. PD 155/35, Bawdeswell curate’s list of parishioners, 1842.
71 N.R.O. DN/VIS 64/14 Lynn Rural Deanery Visitation Returns, 1838.
Certainly there was much resentment and cynicism about absentee clergymen, particularly when they continued to collect revenues and entitlements without ever setting foot in the parish. The problem was self-perpetuating. Absentee clergymen fuelled the climate of disaffection in which rural activists flourished. Their absence also meant that the moral lead – so anxiously sought by Thomson and Irvine as the only way to counteract dissent – could not be forthcoming.

Table 4.3: Non-residency licenses granted in sixty parishes of the Norwich diocese, calculated in twenty-year blocs between 1810 and 1910 and showing the relative levels between parishes with ‘most’ and with ‘least’ dissent as defined in Appendix C.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parish type</th>
<th>No. parishes in sample</th>
<th>Licenses granted 1810 - 30</th>
<th>Licenses granted 1850 - 70</th>
<th>Licenses granted 1890 - 1910</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I (least dissent)</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>271</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II (most dissent)</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>269</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>419</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The problem of absenteeism was addressed vigorously by the Church in the second half of the nineteenth-century, and Table 4.3 offers a brief summary of non-residency licenses granted in sixty parishes of the Norwich diocese (measured in twenty-year blocs) between 1810 and 1910. The sixty parishes are divided equally between those experiencing least dissent and those experiencing most, but have been randomly selected within those defining groups. The table demonstrates that, while the number of licenses granted declined sharply across the board as a result of the Pluralities Acts of 1838 and 1850, they were consistently granted at almost twice the rate in ‘peaceful’ as in ‘dissenting’ parishes. This may be attributable to a number of causes, not least the size of the parish and the feasibility of having a residence built there, but the ‘colonial governor’

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73 For a clarification of how these definitions have been arrived at, see Appendix C.
model of clerical placement suggests itself once more: was greater importance being attached to ensuring that resident clergymen were in place in ‘troublesome’ parishes?

Encountering pressure for social justice

A Church that was reluctant – or unable – to change was left doubly exposed by the fact that rural patterns of living and working were undergoing a revolution during the nineteenth-century. In the vanguard of this revolution was the change from ‘living-in’ to the ‘casualisation’ of labour, with all the attendant consequences in terms of a new, proletarian workforce. Socially, the change meant both a decline in direct control and diminished opportunity for the labourer to save money, to be prudent, and thus to marry later in life when he was more financially secure. Casual employment also meant that work horizons expanded, and mobility of labour often equated to the mobility of ideas and social contacts. Even in a ‘close’ parish like Heydon – a traditional ‘at the park gates’ estate village – inhabitants in 1861 had come from 61 different places of origin, indicating considerable fluidity of movement among the labouring classes. Dunbabin has seen this revolution in employment structure as one of the keys to the growth of the trade union movement, an analysis borne out by the autobiographical account of George Edwards, who chronicled his frequent changes of workplace during the 1860s and 1870s and described the way in which he was radicalised by his encounters, in almost every one, with new forms of employer tyranny or influential new Methodist or trade unionist colleagues.

The impact that rural trade unionism had on traditional systems of parochial government was presaged by the concerted attempts of mid-Norfolk trade unionists to gain control of

75 N.S.L. RG 10/1081 Heydon census, 1851.
76 J. P. Dunbabin, ‘The incidence and organisation of agricultural trade unionism in the 1870s’, Agricultural History Review ,16 (1968), passim.
parish vestries in the 1870s. By 1902 Clare Sewell Read, Conservative M.P. and spokesman for the tenant farmers, complained to a diocesan conference that ‘the clergy had lost the influence they once had over the agricultural labourer’, and placed the blame for this squarely at the door of the trade union movement. Other Conservative commentators acknowledged that the ground of anti-clericalism had been made fertile by many of the actions of the clergy themselves. The ‘Lady Farmer’ cited ‘indifference’ and ‘mismanagement’ as the means by which the clergy had weakened the ‘[Englishman’s] natural preference for the Church of [England]’. To these indictments anti-clericalists might well have added duplicity – as in the case of the Rev. J. F. Bateman at South Lopham, who raked up an ‘old grievance of five years ago [to] create an ill-feeling between the labourers and the Farmers’; or spite – citing the clerical poor law guardians who refused a pauper permission to attend Worstead Baptist Chapel; or pettiness – as experienced by the son of a union branch secretary in Gingham: ‘I was in the choir... and the parson told [us] to stay behind after [Christmas morning] service. He gave all the men five bob, he give the boys half a crown, and he give me sixpence’.

As damning in the eyes of their critics as clergy interventionism, was the deafening silence from many incumbents on the great contemporary issues of social justice. The New Poor Law may well have broken ‘the links of the chain of social dependence’: what followed, in the opinion of many, was a rift between capital and labour, deepened and intensified by the farmers’ desire to differentiate themselves from their labourers ‘in dress and speech and manner of living’.

As early as 1830 an editorial of the East Anglian had warned the land-owning classes that ‘the bitterness of actual privation is

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78 Vestry coups at Swanton Morley, Garvestone, Ringland, Shipdham and East Dereham are recorded in N. Scotland, ‘Rural war in later Victorian Norfolk’, Norfolk Archaeology 38, pt. 1 (1981), 84.
79 Cited in Howkins, Poor Labouring Men, p. 35.
80 ’A Lady Farmer’, Norfolk and the Squires, p. 23.
81 N.R.O. PD 86/213 Leaflet attacking Bateman, South Lopham 1872.
82 N.N. 9.8.51.
83 Oral testimony of George Harvey, cited in Howkins, Poor Labouring Men, p. 83.
inexpressibly aggravated by a comparison with the luxury that surrounds it'.\(^{86}\) Such bitterness may have been further aggravated by the fact that, over forty years on, the Rev. F. B. de Chair was proclaiming the same thing to his colleagues as if it were a new finding:

"There can be no greater stumbling block to a labouring man than to see one whose special calling is to lead him from earth to heaven, living . . . as if this earth and its affairs were the chief thing after all".\(^{87}\)

In the intervening forty years the Church’s stance on poverty had remained substantially unchanged: that it was somehow providential, and that it existed alongside great wealth for divine and inscrutable reasons. The best that could be hoped for was an amelioration of its worst effects.

One of the most obvious and visible signs of rural poverty lay in the quality of workers’ housing, and from the survey of such accommodation carried out by ‘The Society for the Participation of Useful Knowledge’ in 1793,\(^{88}\) through Arthur Young’s assertion that housing provision in south-west Norfolk on the eve of the 1822 riots was the worst in the county,\(^{89}\) to the Higdon-inspired attempt to capture the parish council with a mandate to improve housing conditions (which precipitated the crisis at Burston),\(^{90}\) labourers’ cottages were at the heart of many of the social and political battles fought in the nineteenth-century countryside. The issue loomed large in the work of the 1867 Royal Commission on Agricultural Employment, the report’s author, the Rev. James Fraser, concluding that ‘it is impossible to exaggerate the . . . physical, social, economical [and] intellectual ill effects of such a state of things’.\(^{91}\) The scandal was exacerbated by the fact that it was one of exploitation as well as proximity: men ‘living in the lap of luxury receive rents for hovels that are as mud to marble compared with the handsome mansions in which they themselves reside’.\(^{92}\) Clergymen, instead of being seen to take a moral

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\(^{87}\) Rev. F. B. de Chair in Currie & de Chair, The Clergy and the Labourers’ Movement, pp. 103 – 4.

\(^{88}\) N.R.O. COL/9/76 – 92.


\(^{90}\) N.R.O. MC 31/3 478 x 1 The Burston Rebellion, c.1916.

\(^{91}\) R.C. on the Employment of Children, Young Persons and Women in Agriculture (1867), p. 35.

\(^{92}\) Y.K. 24.10.63.
stand on the issue, acquired a reputation for retreating behind their usual position of resistance to change. As the Rev. Augustus Jessopp was forced to acknowledge, 'it is a reproach upon us clergy . . . that we are a good deal too ready to submit to the continuance of scandals and abuses rather than face the risks which ANY change is likely to bring upon our order'.

When, in 1863, the *Norfolk News* ran a series of articles exposing the extent of the rural housing scandal, a number of parishes emerged as the victims of truly shocking neglect and exploitation. One of the worst cases was that of Corpusty, a parish with properties owned by Bulwer of Heydon Hall but otherwise demonstrating a complete absence of any resident paternalistic presence. Although technically ‘close’ in landownership terms, Corpusty was a thoroughly proletarian parish and in many respects followed the model of notorious ‘open’ parishes like Castle Acre. The *Norfolk News* revealed a number of housing outrages in Corpusty: a family subsisting on ‘tea’ made from burnt toast crumbs; a father sleeping in a roof void so that his children and grandchildren could share the one bedroom; a widow who had had every possession taken in lieu of rent default, ‘not even leaving me a knife to cut a bit of bread’, and who slept side-by-side with her 23 year-old son on some rags on the floor. The reports made clear, too, that these were conditions which could kill: ‘one poor woman told us that she herself could count 34 children who had been carried off [by fever] within . . . three months’. The accuracy of this figure was disputed – indeed, tellingly, the only official response to emerge from the Heydon estate was a letter from the agent, H. J. Ireland, challenging the exact number of children that had died - but the Corpusty parish registers prove that something dramatic was happening among the families living beside the village’s heavily polluted watercourse. Between 1850 and 1865 the Rev. Samuel Ashby – or his curate – buried fourteen members of the Jarvis family, ten of them under the age of 28; nine members of the Pegg family, seven of them under the age of 22; and six members of the Carr family, all of

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95 N.N. 31.10.63.
96 N.N. 12.11.63.
them under the age of 8. Whether this holocaust registered in the mind of the Rev.
Ashby we cannot know: certainly his voice is silent in the historical record.

The Heydon estate which owned many of these Corpusty cottages had an average annual
turnover in the 1860s of approximately £19,000, and usually realised a profit of between
£400 and £450. In 1861 the estate paid a half-yearly poor rate of 9s. 5¼d. levied on its
Corpusty cottages, a figure which might tellingly be contrasted with the 8s. expended on
a ticket for the Eynsford Hundred Association dinner on 17 January of that year.

Cottage repairs costing a total of £13 14s. 11d. were authorised for Corpusty in 1864, in
the same year that a new family vault was proposed for Heydon church, comprising
’split flint facing . . . Whitby stone windows . . . York flag-stones [laid in] white and red
[diagonals] . . . a good foreign Deal roof . . . Cathedral tinted glass . . . 5 inch gutters with
proper descending pipes . . . [all] done in a good, sound, substantial manner [for the price
of] four hundred and twenty five pounds sterling’. The juxtaposition of wealth and
poverty was, it seemed, ordained to prevail in the next life as well as in the present.

As a political issue, housing conditions went hand-in-hand with other matters. On the
Merton estate of Lord Walsingham a scarcity of housing was said to be a deliberate
complement to the gang system of labour, ‘with flocks of boys and girls brought from a
distant village’ to work together on some of the estate farms. This was refuted by
Walsingham’s agent Henry Wood, but his refutation was, in its turn, attacked as an
indictment of the way that Conservative landowners were attempting to manage social
relations on their estates. The Norfolk News riposte to Woods encapsulated the growing
sense that the ‘moral trickle-down’ effect of new rectories and restored churches had

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97 N.R.O. MF/RO 559, Corpusty Burial Registers, 1850 – 65. ‘Extended’ families or kinship groups should be understood here rather than ‘immediate’ families, although a series of deaths among young children in one immediate family named Jarvis can certainly be inferred from the record. Ann and Josiah Jarvis lost seven children between 1850 and 1863, four of them dying in May 1863.
98 N.R.O. BUL 11/27 615 x 7; BUL 11/30 615 x 7; BUL 11/31 615 x 7; BUL 11/232 616 x 7; BUL 11/272 617 x 1 Heydon estate accounts, 1860 – 1870.
102 N.N. 21.11.63.
103 N.N. 28.11.63.
come too late to satisfy a rural community that needed immediate solutions and would, in the next ten years, find the voice to demand them:

'It is useless to boast that churches have been improved, that clergymen's residences have been erected, and that new and enlarged farm houses have been built, when the subject under consideration [is] the insufficiency of cottage accommodation for the poor'.

**Spheres of influence and networks of power**

It is counter-intuitive to suppose that there was no 'proletarian network' before the rise of trade unionism, but the exact form that it took and the impact that it might have had on society remain elusive qualities. Certainly there is a sense that religious Nonconformity was hardening into an attitudinal and spatial network of working class interest. Attitudinally this can be seen in the way that a commitment to sobriety and thrift as the route to social mobility could co-exist with good old-fashioned intimidation, as experienced by a woman whose husband would not join the union: 'on several occasions they had spit in her face, hooted at her, and while sitting in chapel they had thrown grey peas and other things at her'. Spatially, Methodism broke the mould of parochial reliance on what Scotland has described as 'the oligarchical troika of parson, squire and farmer': it widened horizons and introduced 'the concept of a wider brotherhood' by virtue of being circuit- rather than parish-based.

By looking at comparative parochial endogamy rates we can find an illustration of the way in which circles of contact - defined in Table 4.4 by marriage horizons - were much broader among Nonconformists than among Anglicans. If we understand parochial endogamy to mean that both parties were resident in the parish in which the marriage took place, we can see that less than half of all Nonconformist marriages were endogamous to the Anglican parish and that 28% were 'foreign' (which is to say that

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104 N.N. 28.11.63.
106 Scotland, Methodism, p. 175.
both parties were normally resident outside the parish where the marriage took place. By contrast almost 70% of Anglican marriages were endogamous, and the number of ‘foreign’ marriages was vanishingly small.

Table 4.4: Comparative parochial endogamy between Nonconformist and Anglican congregations in thirteen Norfolk parishes 1837 – 1914

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Nonconformist</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Endogamous</td>
<td>181</td>
<td>42.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exogamous</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>28.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>28.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No data</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>426</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Anglican</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Endogamous</td>
<td>1575</td>
<td>69.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exogamous</td>
<td>683</td>
<td>30.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No data</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>2266</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Sources:** Nonconformist Marriage Registers (all N.R.O.): FC 48/5 Great Bircham Primitive Methodist 1911-14; FC 36/1 Burnham Westgate Congregational 1853 – 1914; FC 23/1 South Creake Congregational 1858 – 60; FC 48/3 Dersingham Primitive Methodist 1902 – 14; FC 48/8,9,10 Downham Market Wesleyan Methodist 1907 – 14; FC 88/17 Ingham & Stalham Baptist 1900 – 14; FC 48/39 Sheringham Primitive Methodist 1911 – 14; FC 48/43 Shouldham Methodist 1913 – 14; FC 100/1 Swaffham Baptist 1859 – 71; FC 48/44 Thetford Primitive Methodist 1911 – 14; FC 48/46 North Tuddenham Primitive Methodist 1905 – 14; FC 61/81 Walsingham & Docking Primitive Methodist 1869 – 96; FC 44/1 Watton Congregational 1869 – 1908; FC 20/16 Wymondham United Reform 1837 – 52. Anglican Marriage Registers (all N.R.O. and all studied for the same dates as above): PD 34/7 Great Bircham; PD 573/8 Burnham Westgate; PD 603/9 Dersingham; PD 333/17 Downham Market; PD 262/9 & microfiche 15 Stalham; PD 310/6 Ingham; PD 658/10 Upper Sheringham; PD 580/3 Lower Sheringham; PD 356/149 Shouldham; PD 52/491 & microfiche 39 – 44 Swaffham; PD 168/9 Thetford St. Cuthbert; PD 169/113 & MF/RO 380A Thetford St. Mary; MF/RO 377 Thetford St. Peter; PD 387/6 North Tuddenham; MF/RO 44 Docking; microfiche 8 & 9 Little Walsingham; microfiche 11 Great Walsingham; microfiche 20 – 23 Watton; MF/RO 371 Wymondham.
Table 4.4 shows us a social network in its developmental stage, and one that, underpinned by chapel and circuit organisation, was beginning to act as a counterweight to the established networks of the gentry/clergy power bloc. Circles of social contact were, after all, frequently circles of exchanged experiences and ideas. In some cases this social network sprang from occupational contacts. One group of workers with a long-standing reputation for militancy was the weavers, suspected of involvement in many outbreaks of sedition and dissent throughout the nineteenth century. At Martham in 1801, for instance, the Rev. Paul Whittinghain identified the Methodist preacher – a weaver from Norwich called Chamberlain – as espousing a doctrine ‘productive of much discontent amongst the lower orders’, while in the urban fringe parish of Sprowston the population in 1813 was divided, in the eyes of the Rev. Henry Banfather, between a ‘rural’ half who were churchgoers and a ‘weaving’ half who were dissenters. Sixty years later, Lord Walsingham was keeping an eagle-eye on the weavers of Glemsford in Suffolk who seemed intent upon spreading their unionised militancy among the agricultural labourers that worked Walsingham’s lands in the neighbourhood, and at North Lopham the Rev. Bateman – who had waged a determined campaign against the social indiscipline and political waywardness of the weavers in his parish – found himself being given a sharp reminder of his standing in the community: ‘one dark night when [the weavers] knew their victim would be late to bed, Bateman bumped his head against his own effigy, hanging inside the Rectory gate.’

107 A number of contexts should be borne in mind when viewing Table 4.4. Firstly, the data are gathered from a broad range of dates (1837 – 1914) and parochial endogamy tended to become less intense in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Secondly, parochial endogamy was likely to be higher in larger centres of population where marriage opportunities were greater. Thirdly, the rate of ‘denominational endogamy’ is not known. Background work conducted on the registers of the Aylsham Primitive Methodist circuit (N.R.O. FC 47/39 Aylsham Primitive Methodist Circuit Marriage Register 1836 – 1888) revealed clear cases of inter-marrying between cousins and of sets of brothers marrying sets of sisters, and the overall impression was that denominational endogamy rates were very high. Nevertheless, a rate of 100% has been assumed in the construction of Table 4.4, a level which was, of course, unlikely to have been achieved in reality.

108 J. H. Clapham, in ‘The transference of the worsted industry from Norfolk to the West Riding’, Economic Journal XX, (1910) argued that one reason for the wholesale departure of the Norfolk textile industry was the militancy of its workers.


110 N.R.O. DN/VIS 49/2 Taverham Rural Deanery Visitation Returns 1813.

111 N.R.O. WLS LX/53 430 x 1: Walsingham papers, Woods to Walsingham (1 January 1873).

Spasmodic attempts by weavers to form radical political alliances with agricultural labourers constitute most of the visible signs of collaboration between urban and rural workers in the nineteenth century. Chartism, strong in Norwich, seems to have made little impact in the countryside, although the Rev. Pakenham Spencer became sufficiently alarmed by a Chartist Association in Harleston to have penned an urgent letter to the Home Secretary. Their gatherings, he claimed, amounted to ‘between 200 & 300. They meet regularly once a week and a delegate from Norwich attends occasionally . . . on a Sunday, under the pretence of preaching’. Historians have pondered the apparent anomaly of low-levels of Chartism in agricultural districts, and some have concluded that it may have been more widespread than the direct evidence suggests. Even so, there are few signs of its organisation in rural Norfolk, and there is every reason to suppose that the first body to achieve high levels of co-ordinated interest and action between urban and rural workers in the county was the Norfolk and Norwich Amalgamated Labourers’ Union of 1890.

Historically it was from the direction of religious dissent that the ruling classes had longest feared the arrival of an effective proletarian network. In 1801 the Rev. John Burrell of Letheringsett looked-on every Sunday as his parishioners ‘of the lowest class’ set off for their meeting in Briston — ‘it is to be feared too ripe for sedition’ — while at Reepham in 1830 a nervous gentleman onlooker warned the clerical magistrates who were preparing to deal with the itinerant preacher Robert Key, ‘you had better be careful, as to what you are doing, for the people are coming from all the neighbourhoods round to defend him; and if the engine is brought out it will be dashed to pieces, and the pipes cut, and no doubt blood will be shed’. Even to a relatively broad-minded commentator like the curate Thomson at Bawdeswell, an articulate dissenter could be ‘one of the plagues of a village . . . one who stands in the way of poorer & more ignorant men, as an

115 Howkins, Poor Labouring Men, p. 76.
example'. Trade unionists gave a clear indication of the anticipated role of dissenting religion in their struggle. 'I hope our ministers will do their duty . . . and give political lectures', wrote Richard Colman, Swaffham District Secretary, in 1885, while Josiah Sage expounded the political agenda that underpinned disestablishment: 'the church with its landed estates [is] part of a rotten landed system that helped to enslave the labourer'.

The changing dynamic between dissenting proletarian networks and established authority was demonstrated in a visible way by the different locations in which chapels were built. Scotland has described chapel building as a visual act of defiance towards farmers and clergy, but in reality the siting of chapels was often an infinitely more complex business, and one that can offer insights into Nonconformity's relationship with itself as much as with wider society. For one thing it should not be forgotten that, while nineteenth-century dissenters could not escape many facets of the parish's legal and administrative omnipotence, they could attempt to free themselves from its religious influence. Chapel locations had to be chosen with reference to the requirements of the circuit rather than the parish, and were chosen especially for their convenience and accessibility to circuit preachers and congregations. Freethorpe chapel, for instance (Plate 10), was built in 1814 at a cross-roads location with 'Halvergate on the north, Wickhampton on the east, Freethorpe on the west, each within a distance of one mile and a quarter'. The imperative of circuit convenience also helps to explain why the parish of Claxton, despite having a meeting-house that was drawing congregations from miles around, had only a modest population of home-grown dissenters: 'There are about half a score . . . of quiet & disorderly life', reported Claxton's rector in 1820.

Certainly there were chapel locations that expressed defiance – as at Mattishall, where dissenters who had been given a particularly rough ride by the clergyman managed to

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118 N.R.O. PD 155/35, Bawdeswell curate's list of parishioners, 1842.
119 Scotland, 'The Role of Methodism', p. 140.
120 Scotland, Methodism, p. 22.
121 Scotland, ‘Rural war’, p. 86.
123 N.R.O. DN/VIS 54/6 Brooke Rural Deanery Visitation Returns 1820: Rev. Webster, Claxton.
finance 'a chapel within a few yards of the church wall'\(^{124}\) – but in the first half of the nineteenth century chapels were more likely to be tucked away in side streets, or in 'chapel end' hamlets at some remote corner of the parish (Plate 11). Such hamlets could, however, be as indicative of wealthy and confident withdrawal as of social ostracism: the Baptist Meeting House at Worstead, for example (Plate 12), rebuilt in 1829, gathered around it a whole settlement of well-built, architecturally unified properties which included 'almshouses, stables, a school and houses for minister, schoolmaster and caretaker'.\(^{125}\) Elsewhere buildings could vary in style from the utterly plain Wesleyan Reform chapel close to the site of Smallburgh workhouse (c. 1870) to the imposing Wesleyan chapel with portico and pedimented gable that fronts the High Street at Cley, in the shadow of the residence of its benefactor, Clement Cozens-Hardy.\(^{126}\)

If considerations of 'circuit convenience' are set aside – and this became less of an issue later in the nineteenth century as circuits contracted and became more densely packed with chapels - much can be inferred from the relative locations of chapel and parish church. At Kenninghall, although the buildings were proximate, Williamson has noted the way in which the Wesleyan and Primitive chapels were sufficiently oriented towards the edges of the village for their congregations to make a physical gesture towards the parish church – to 'turn their backs upon it' – when they attended services.\(^{127}\) At Swanton Abbott, by contrast, a large, well-constructed Wesleyan Reform chapel of 1851 stands in its own plot of land at a central location beside a village-core road junction, while the parish church is isolated over a mile away in fields to the north (Plates 13 & 14). Map and fieldwork analysis suggests that geographical remoteness of chapel from church is as likely to be due to the effects of population shift – leaving the parish church stranded in an anachronistic medieval location - as to the voluntary or compulsory withdrawal of the Nonconformist congregation. However, when a location survey is restricted to the

\(^{124}\) Key, Gospel, p. 51.


\(^{126}\) The Wesleyan chapel at Cley was built in 1829 but substantially improved and enlarged in 1866. Architectural comments on these chapels are based on fieldwork observations. Dates are taken from Ede, Virgoe & Williamson, Halls of Zion, pp. 63, 50.

\(^{127}\) Ede, Virgoe & Williamson, Halls of Zion, p. 13. The issues of availability and cost of land must, of course, constantly be borne in mind when considering chapel locations.
Primitive Methodists something interesting begins to appear. The results of fieldwork observations are presented in Table 4.5.

Table 4.5: Primitive Methodist chapels in rural Norfolk. A visual assessment of geographical location, classified and compared by date of chapel building.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date chapel built</th>
<th>Number of chapels surveyed</th>
<th>Chapels at village centre</th>
<th>Chapels at village edge</th>
<th>Chapels in hamlet</th>
<th>Chapels remote from settlement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre 1859</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1860 – 69</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1870 – 79</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1880 – 89</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post 1890</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SOURCES: Fieldwork survey for chapel locations; Ede, Virgoe & Williamson, Halls of Zion pp. 47 – 68 for chapel dates

The table indicates that chapels built in the 1860s had a tendency to be more withdrawn from centres of settlement. In this decade, more than any other, Primitive Methodists were building their chapels in scattered hamlets. They even, in one case, chose an entirely isolated location within the Anglican parish. This tendency was reversed in subsequent decades, when much more emphasis seems again to have been placed upon the desirability of being close to the centre of village life. When this evidence is set against a decade-by-decade assessment of the prevalence of unrest – which identifies the 1860s as a much more peaceful decade than its predecessors 28 – a period of quiet withdrawal and retrenchment does seem to suggest itself.

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28 J. Archer ‘Rural Protest in Norfolk and Suffolk 1830 – 1870’ (unpub. PhD, University of East Anglia, 1981) identifies 386 incidences of unrest in Norfolk in the 1830s, 284 in the 1840s, 235 in the 1850s, and 163 in the 1860s.
Fig. 4.1 is based on the information given by Primitive Methodist respondents to the 1851 religious census. It demonstrates a surge in building and licensing activity from the 1833–1835 period, a phenomenon that might justifiably be linked to ‘Captain Swing’ and the Poor Law Amendment Act. After a brief lull a further burst of activity becomes apparent between 1843 and 1845, dates associated with an upsurge in arson attacks and the investigations of Thomas Campbell Foster.

**Fig. 4.1: Primitive Methodist chapels built and licensed in Norfolk, 1813-1850**

[Graph showing the number of chapels built and licensed from 1813 to 1850.]


The cumulative evidence of the pre-1851 period and of the 1860s is that Primitive Methodist chapels were being built in times of unrest and in times of peace, but were being sited differently within the parish. It could be that the 1860s— in other respects a ‘quiet’ decade in the context of this study— needs to be re-interpreted as the fulcrum on which a century of popular action turned: a period during which Primitive Methodism regrouped and re-organised, eschewing the bolder statement of village-core locations and

129 171 respondents gave a post-1813 date for the building or licensing of their meeting house. Those who returned a pre-1813 date have been omitted from the survey on the grounds that they would almost certainly have been describing a building designed for other purposes, licensed for use by the Primitive Methodists, but built before the foundation of the movement.
establishing itself in the village margins and hamlets where working people actually lived, until it was ready to re-emerge, closely linked to trade unionism as a new form of collective action in the 1870s. At Knapton, in the immediate post-union decade of the 1880s, a defiant and brazenly confident face was presented to the world by the new Primitive Methodist chapel. Here, in a unionised parish, the chapel was built in the centre of the village, by a cross-roads, almost cheek-by-jowl with the parish church (Plate 15).

If chapel locations are sometimes indicative of the relationship that Nonconformist congregations had with the wider community in their home parish, meeting-house ‘spheres of influence’ can tell us something about the way in which dissent was transmitted across parish boundaries. This was a two-way process, with congregations travelling out to parishes with meeting-houses and itinerant preachers travelling in to parishes with none. Based on visitation returns, and the perceptions of the clergy recorded there as to where dissent was originating, the ‘spheres of influence’ of Norfolk’s ten most active Nonconformist chapels and ten most active preachers between 1820 and 1838 can be reconstructed. Geographically predominating in the north and east of the county, the ten chapels attracted congregations from a total of 133 parishes, while the ten preachers evangelised into 154. Some of these ‘spheres of influence’ overlapped – particularly in the North Walsham area – and built into a cross-fertilising network of religious contact. Four ‘hotspots’ can be identified where both preacher and chapel were especially active: Henry Upton at Claxton, Edward Trivet at Worstead, John Sykes at Briston, and William Cooper at Buxton.

Taking the case of Claxton Baptist Chapel, Table 4.6 examines the way in which dissenting influence could radiate across concentric bands of neighbouring parishes.\textsuperscript{132}

\textsuperscript{130} Briston Independent; Buxton Baptist; Claxton Baptist; Diss Baptist; Ingham Baptist; Mattishall Primitive Methodist; Necton Baptist; Walsingham Wesleyan; Wickhampton Wesleyan; Worstead Baptist.

\textsuperscript{131} James Brown (Bradfield); William Cooper (Buxton); - Norris (Framingham Pigot); Thomas Pickers (Stalham); William Spurgeon (Neatishead); - Stevens (North Walsham); - Sydstaff (North Walsham); Edward Trivet (Worstead); Henry Upton (Claxton).

\textsuperscript{132} The parishes in the concentric bands that surround Claxton can be identified as follows:

\textbf{Band One} (parishes adjoining Claxton): Ashby, Hellington, Rockland St. Mary, Strumpshaw, Buckenham, Ferry, Carleton St. Peter; \textbf{Band Two} (parishes adjacent-but-one) Thurnton, Bergh Apton, Alpington, Bramerton, Surlingham, Sisoland, Chedgrave, Langley; \textbf{Band Three} (parishes adjacent-but-two):
From early on Claxton and its preacher had a broad geographic reach, influencing communities more than two parishes distant and establishing a hinterland that did not substantially contract during the ensuing fifty years. Its influence was widest in 1813, when it evangelised over half the parishes within its sphere, and the marginal decline by 1838 was probably due to the formation of other meeting-houses in the neighbourhood.

Table 4.6: Dissenting ‘spheres of influence’: Claxton Baptist chapel and its hinterland, 1784 - 1838

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concentric ‘Band One’ parishes adjacent to Claxton</th>
<th>No. parishes in band</th>
<th>No. parishes influenced 1784</th>
<th>No. parishes influenced 1813</th>
<th>No. parishes influenced 1838</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>集中圈‘第一乐队’教区及周边教区</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>集中圈‘第二乐队’教区及周边教区</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>集中圈‘第三乐队’教区及周边教区</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SOURCE: N.R.O. DN/VIS/29/1, 29a/2 (1784); 48/2, 45/3 (1813); 63/5, 65/2 (1838) Brooke Rural Deanery Visitation Returns

Apparent narrowing of the ‘sphere of influence’ is readily seen in those denominations that were organised into circuits. The declining ‘reach’ of a circuit may be taken as an indication of the denomination’s growing strength: new chapels were filling in the gaps within circuits and new locations were developing as ‘circuit centres’. The phenomenon can be seen by comparing the relative sizes of the Diss Wesleyan preaching circuit in 1810 (fig. 4.2) and in 1886 (fig. 4.3). The circuit’s diminishing size was due to the development of a new circuit based on Attleborough, depicted in outline on fig. 4.3.133

Hassingham, Cantley, Hardley, Loddon, Mundham, Seething, Kirstead, Brooke, Poringland, Framingham Ear, Framingham Pigot, Kirby Bedon.
133 N.R.O. FC 17/74 Diss Wesleyan Methodist Circuit preaching plan, 1810; N.R.O. FC 17/77 Diss Wesleyan Methodist Circuit preaching plan 1886-7; N.R.O. FC 17/36 Attleborough Wesleyan Methodist Circuit preaching plan 1878. Note that in 1810 and in 1886 the Diss circuit had a considerable hinterland in north Suffolk, not shown on the maps.

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Fig. 4.2: Diss Wesleyan Methodist preaching circuit and its south Norfolk hinterland, 1810, showing those parishes with chapels depicted in red


Fig. 4.3: Diss Wesleyan Methodist preaching circuit and its south Norfolk hinterland, 1886 – 7, showing those parishes with chapels depicted in red and the Attleborough Wesleyan Methodist Circuit in outline to the north

What, then, was the social significance of Nonconformist 'spheres of influence'? Most importantly, where Nonconformist teachers operated within, or attracted congregations from, more than one parish they immediately established a hinterland that was wider than many of those enjoyed by Anglican clergymen. Their work transcended traditional parish boundaries and penetrated the 'control provinces' of landowners, facilitating a spread of ideas and shared experience that would eventually develop into rural networks of political influence. At a time when conscious efforts were being made to re-formulate the Anglican parish as a unit of secular government, peripatetic dissent challenged secular as well as religious order by continually operating beyond the reach of individual parish authorities. As far as the issue of comparative denominational endogamy is concerned, perhaps it can be said that, to the nineteenth-century clergyman, high levels of exogamy and of marriage rites being conducted elsewhere were a sign that social and ritual authority was being challenged.

While the main threat posed by Nonconformist meeting-houses and congregations to Anglican hegemony was from 'below' it should not be forgotten that there existed in nineteenth-century Norfolk a powerful and influential band of Nonconformists who could face parochial authority on socially equal terms. In his visitation return of 1820 the Rev. Charles Campbell of Weasenham warned that Methodism was becoming 'truly dangerous to the Established Religion of the Realm', not because it was a front for working-class dissent but 'on account of the abundant Finances of that community'. Between 1784 and 1838 a number of visitation returns cited influential farmers as being the cause of dissent in their parish: Methodist employers who either insisted upon – or were charismatic enough to command automatically – Methodist church attendance among their workforces.

Present, too, was a tranche of businessmen, destined to become major employers in Norfolk in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, among them Fison, Jarrold,

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134 N.R.O. DN/VIS 52/7 Brisley Rural Deanery Visitation Returns, 1820.
135 Examples include N.R.O. DN/VIS 29/12 Walsoken 1784; N.R.O. DN/VIS 56/9 Ridlington 1820; N.R.O. DN/VIS 66/13 Clippesby 1838.
Gurney and Colman. At Stoke Holy Cross the Colman dynasty insisted that its workforce attended both church and chapel, but the Rev. John Bailey noted with concern that a numerically small group of dissenters ‘have great influence and employ all means to bring the people into membership with them’. These were businessmen who, in the mid-nineteenth century, still straddled two worlds: their names might appear on the cornerstones of rural chapels, as Jarrold’s did at Sloley; they might be mobilised at election time in support of the Liberal party, as the Gurneys repeatedly were; they might be afforded lengthy entries in Rye’s Norfolk Families (like Gurney and Colman); or be given none at all (like Fison). As Binfield has written of a similar family, the Cozens-Hardys, ‘their Nonconformity distinguished them from county society . . . They were not isolated from it in any superficial way, but they did not marry into it’. As a group they stood on the fringe of Norfolk’s Liberal establishment, which for the 1855-6 campaign could mobilise the support of 31 of the county’s wealthiest landowners, including the great magnates Coke, Suffield, Wodehouse, Astley, Gurdon and Keppel. They were a group, too, that the wider establishment would eventually embrace. Herbert Cozens-Hardy, Liberal M.P. for North Norfolk between 1885 and 1899 was made Baron Cozens-Hardy of Letheringsett in 1914. The idea of a peerage amused him: ‘It is a relic of the past,’ he said, ‘and I do not suppose it will continue for many more years’.

Conclusion

If ‘power networks’ present themselves as convincing explanations for patterns of dissenting and authoritarian behaviour in nineteenth-century society, what are the implications for traditional understandings of ‘open’ and ‘close’ parish structures? It cannot be denied that contemporary social commentators used and understood the model. Giving evidence to the 1847 Select Committee on Settlement and Poor Removal, the Rev. Octavius Matthias of Horsford argued that ‘close’ parishes were the product of

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136 N.R.O. DN/VIS 73/7 Brooke Rural Deanery Visitation Returns 1845.
137 Binfield, So Down to Prayers, p. 133.
139 Binfield, So Down to Prayers, p. 142.
social engineering generated by settlement legislation, a theme echoed twenty years later by the Rev. J. Fraser in his concluding summary to a parliamentary report on agricultural employment. 'Anything more selfish and . . . wicked,' Fraser wrote, 'than the motive that led to the creation of ['close'] parishes it is difficult to conceive.' But differentiation between the two parish types was neither clear cut nor permanent. Most parishes stood on an 'open-close' continuum along which they might move if landownership patterns changed or if circumstances altered in a neighbouring parish. A definition based purely on landownership is inadequate given that it fails to take into account the social, political and economic closeness (or distance) between landowners, just as it ignores the propensity for landowners to develop 'satellite close parishes' in which housing conditions were as bad as anything to be found in notorious 'open' parishes like Castle Acre. This was what Bulwer achieved at Corpusty, for example, turning it into a community where 'close parish' levels of control could be exercised without the need for any of the aesthetic considerations that were always a factor in 'park gate' estate villages like Bulwer's own at Heydon (Plate 9). Neither can the 'open' – 'close' model satisfactorily explain patterns of rural radicalism and dissent. The 'close' parishes of Titchwell and Hockham are illustrative examples of firmly-controlled communities where radicalism, Liberalism and strike action could, nevertheless, take hold.

In essence, as Howkins has argued, 'open' and 'close' parishes were an inexact fitting overlay to a class structure that held 'the permanent possibility of antagonism'. The means by which this 'permanent possibility' might become reality is partly explained by the notion of the 'enrolling actor': individuals or groups who 'were able to recognize what their interests [were] . . . and formulate strategies to pursue them'. Poll book evidence demonstrates the way in which 'spheres of influence' could transcend parish

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140 S.C. on Settlement and Poor Removal, 1847, pp. 44 - 51.
141 R. C. on Employment of Children, Young Persons and Women in Agriculture, 1867, p. 36.
142 The key role of Castle Acre in this debate is described by S. Banks, 'Nineteenth century scandal or twentieth-century model? A new look at "open" and "close" parishes', Economic History Review, 2nd series, XLI (1988), 51 – 73.
143 See, for example, Howkins, Poor Labouring Men, p. 31.
144 Howkins, Poor Labouring Men, p. 31.
145 Spencer, 'Reformulating', p. 91.
types and suggests, too, that elite strategies in ‘open’ and ‘close’ communities were often different means to the same end. The desire to establish a socially harmonious, aesthetically pleasing ‘close’ village at the park gates, for instance, involved a very different set of imperatives from the need to establish political influence among the handful of voters in an ‘open’ parish. Political authority was not so much exerted in the ‘open’ parish as delegated, and clergymen were often prominent among the delegates.

The rural parish was a battleground on which social, political and religious forces were locked in a permanent struggle to evangelise and counter-evangelise, to influence and counter-influence. These opposing forces might be characterised as enthusiasm for and resistance to modernisation, and by the century’s end the Anglican church had moved firmly into the ‘resistance’ camp. Henry Woods, for instance, was still writing enthusiastic references in 1886 for estate workers who seemed to fit the deferential ideal – ‘Bogis Hook of Tompson . . . is a Prince of a man . . . a good labourer, a churchman, a conservative, and loyal to his employer and all his family’ – but the world had moved on: the unions were producing rule books and pamphlets couched in the language of twentieth-century industrial relations, with references to Branch Committees, National Executives and binding arbitration, and the ‘Old Liberal’ candidacy of Sir Brampton Gurdon had been supplanted by the very ‘New Liberal’ figure of Joseph Arch.

The management of local society – at least in an administrative sense – fell increasingly to Parish, District and County Councils, and clergymen were faced with the unedifying task of campaigning for the votes of those whose opinions they had once taken for granted, or ignored. Many did not take up the challenge. By 1914 no clergymen sat on the Norfolk County Council, nor on any of the Urban District Councils for which records survive. On Rural District Councils their involvement ran closer to the levels they had

146 N.R.O. WLS LXVIII/26 479 × 1: Walsingham papers, Woods to Lady Walsingham (27 April 1886).
147 N.R.O. WLS LXVIII/40 479 × 3, Constitution and Rules of the National Agricultural Labourers’ Union (Leamington, 1872).
148 Joseph Arch became the M.P. for North-West Norfolk in 1885.
149 County councillors’ names are listed in contemporary trade directories. The extant Urban District Council records which cover the first meetings held in 1914 are: N.R.O. DC1/2/126 (Cromer); N.R.O. DC6/1/8 (Diss); N.R.O. DC12/1/10 (East Dereham); N.R.O. DT 14/1/7 (Swaffham); N.R.O. DC20/7/4 (Sheringham).
attained as magistrates, poor law guardians and school managers. Of the 158 Rural District Councillors identifiable as having attended the first meeting of 1914, 20 (12.7%) were clergymen. At Parish Council level the involvement of Anglican ministers was surprisingly low. Of 30 councils, their records selected at random, only 7 elected the local clergyman. If such a statistic means that the parish council should escape the charge of being merely a revamped parish vestry, it should be noted that some official sources within the Church of England generally encouraged its clergymen to stand for election. The fact that many may have stood and been defeated presents itself as an intriguing but ultimately unproveable possibility. In 1894 the rector of Howe was given this piece of official advice:

'It is desirable that the clergy shd. accept loyally the act, & take part in the council as being resident & constantly so among the people as Freeholders of Glebe Land - & being liable to all rates & taxes - as being well qualified by Education & position to help in the discharge of duties in Parish business & as having a deep interest in the general welfare & well being of all the Inhabitants'.

Where they were entered into whole-heartedly, parish councils could be dynamic bodies. At Briston, well-attended, well-documented meetings were chaired by the Rev. John Wooster, and he and the Rev. Henry Shellabeare (Congregational) and the Rev. James Prouton (Primitive Methodist) regularly voted and co-opted each other onto sub-committees. But Briston was an unusual parish – one that had long since had to reach

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150 Data quantifying clerical involvement in each of these fields can be found in the relevant chapters of this thesis.
151 The extant Rural District Council records which cover the first meeting held in 1914 are: N.R.O. DC23/9 (Depwade); N.R.O. DC31/6 (St. Faiths & Aylsham); N.R.O. DC4/1/4 (Loddon & Clavering); N.R.O. DC7/1/33 (Mitford & Launditch); N.R.O. DC8/1/4 (Thetford); N.R.O. DC10/1/5 (Swaffham); N.R.O. DC13/5/13 (Erpingham); N.R.O. DC22/2/6 (Smallburgh).
152 The randomly selected parish council records were: N.R.O. PC2/1 (Hardingham); N.R.O. PC3/1 (Stanthoe); N.R.O. PC7/1 (Burnham Sutton); N.R.O. PC11/1 (Bloomfield); N.R.O. PC12/1 (Earsham); N.R.O. PC14/1 (Burston); N.R.O. PC15/1 (Dickleburgh); N.R.O. PC20/1 (Brundall); N.R.O. PC21/1 (Ingham); N.R.O. PC23/1 (Brinton); N.R.O. PC27/1 (Billingford, East Dereham); N.R.O. PC28/2 (Holt); N.R.O. PC29/1 (North Elmham); N.R.O. PC33/1,2 (Cringleford); N.R.O. PC36/2 (Bawburgh); N.R.O. PC49/18 (Bradwell); N.R.O. PC59/1 (Fakenham); N.R.O. PC62/1 (Briston); N.R.O. PC68/1 (Hindolveston); N.R.O. PC73/1 (Little Cressingham); N.R.O. PC81/1 (Bly Norton); N.R.O. PC87/1 (Heydon); N.R.O. PC89/1 (Kirby Cane); N.R.O. PC92/1 (Foxley); N.R.O. PC98/5 (Deopham); N.R.O. PC37/1 (Beeston); N.R.O. PC48/1 (Barford); N.R.O. PC63/1 (Besthorpe); N.R.O. PC94/1 (Easton); N.R.O. PC96/1 (Colney).
153 N.R.O. PD588/38. This unaccredited note appears in the papers of the rector of Howe in 1894. It is printed and official-looking, but whether it originates from a pressure group, from the diocese or from the national Church authorities is not clear.
an accommodation with a vibrant Nonconformist community — and elsewhere the records seem only to suggest the extent to which clergymen had been left high and dry, politically-speaking, by late nineteenth-century democratisation. At Shouldham the Rev. William Allen produced a lacklustre parish council election address, the very antithesis of those clergy reports and recommendations that, earlier in the century, had once scorched a path to the desks of successive Home Secretaries:

'It is now open to us to get some improvements in our Parish. I can name several which could be undertaken in due time, if not at present. 1/ Street lamps for the dark evenings; 2/ Repairs to the footpaths; 3/ A swimming bath for our young people; 4/ A few pounds on a Parochial Library; 5/ The improvement of our water supply... If you think I can be of any service to you, vote for me. If not leave me out'.

It could be argued that widespread chapel building in Norfolk left visible evidence of this modernisation — and of faltering Anglican hegemony — in the landscape. But it could equally well be argued that the evidence presented here — of clergymen as 'colonial governors'; of wide-reaching tentacles of elite political power; of the ability of the establishment to tame and embrace the things that threatened it — proves something quite different. Reform of the House of Lords, for example, so confidently anticipated by Joseph Arch and Herbert Cozens-Hardy at the beginning of the twentieth century, was still a contentious and only partly-resolved issue at the century’s end. Disestablishment of the Church of England, keenly sought by radicals and Nonconformists throughout the nineteenth century, barely registers as an issue of concern in the opening years of the twenty-first century. One might choose to look at other, more subtle, landscape legacies of nineteenth-century power and authority systems and to re-evaluate their continuing influence upon twenty-first century society. Perhaps it should be asked, for example, before 'open' and 'close' parishes are finally consigned to the past — along with the associated images of men trudging for miles from their ramshackle villages to work on the estates of large local landowners — why there have never been any council houses built in Heydon, whereas a small estate of them grew up in Corpusty.

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155 N.R.O. PD356/129/28 Rev. W. M. Allen (Shouldham), election manifesto 28 November 1894. Allen was elected, seemingly due more to a deferential reflex among voters than to any deep commitment to the cause from the candidate.
Plate 10: Freethorpe Primitive Methodist chapel at an isolated crossroads location.

Plate 11: The isolated wayside bethel: Wood Dalling Primitive Methodist chapel.

Plate 12: Worstead Baptist Chapel, Meeting House Hill
Plate 13: Swanton Abbott Wesleyan Methodist chapel, in a village centre site.

Plate 14: Swanton Abbott rectory, remote from the village. The church is hidden in the trees on the left.

Plate 15: Knapton Primitive Methodist chapel, defiantly situated by the parish churchyard wall.
Chapter Five

Managing Poverty: Economic and Social Aspects of Poor Law and Charity Administration

Introduction

This chapter considers aspects of nineteenth-century Poor Law and charity administration and examines the ways in which they were dovetailed together – or deliberately kept apart – as a means of managing the poor. Four broad areas of social management are considered in this chapter. These are: (i) economic management, by which means parishes and Unions tackled the perennial tension between keeping the destitute alive and keeping poor rates down; (ii) labour management, and the balance between an agriculturally useful labour ‘pool’ and an economically damaging labour ‘surplus’; (iii) moral management, which targeted assistance at the ‘deserving poor’ and (iv) behavioural management, which used poor relief as a disciplinary measure aimed at curbing and punishing outbreaks of social unrest. Embraced within these broad categories are a number of insights into social and power relationships in the nineteenth-century countryside, for while it may be true that Poor Law and charity documents are largely silent ‘on the views and experiences of the paupers themselves’¹ these same records encompass all the issues that loomed large in the lives of agricultural labourers (‘settlement and removal, apprenticeship, illegitimacy, parochial rating and taxation . . . welfare and unemployment provision’²) and much can be inferred from them. For all the historiographical debate – including this contribution – about social fragmentation and developing class consciousness, it is worth remembering that to some contemporary observers the issue was very simple. In 1817 the Rev. Glover of Southrepps observed that society was now divided into two classes, ‘not of rich and poor . . . but into payers and

² K. Snell, ‘Settlement, Poor Law and the rural historian: new approaches and opportunities’, Rural History, 32 (1992), 145 - 172
receivers of parochial aid', and his analysis would have found acceptance among many, long after the introduction of the New Poor Law.

The Poor Law Amendment Act represented a significant shift in power from local into centralised hands. While many aspects of this power shift are discussed in this chapter, its central importance resided in the fact that a holistic system of relieving the poor — one that was prepared to embrace a range of parochial resources including poor rates, charities, freehold lands and commons, had given way to one that was designed to be fiscal and punitive. 'Pauper palaces' like that at Rollesby which, since its inception in 1775 had proudly proclaimed its aspirations towards 'the Instruction of Youth, the Encouragement of Industry, the Relief of Want, the Support of Old Age, and the Comfort and Infirmitry and Pain now became the places of less eligibility and of last, desperate resort.

How prominent were the clergy in this change and, in the eyes of the poor, how culpable? As early as 1775 the Rev. Potter of Scarning was lamenting the drift of Poor Law control away from the clergyman, 'the natural guardian of the poor'. Can this trend be said to have continued in the era of the New Poor Law? An analysis of clerical guardians attending meetings throughout the rural Unions of Norfolk, calculated at 30-year intervals, is summarised in Table 5.1. It suggests that Poor Law Unions were a long way from being theocracies, although an increasing trend in clerical guardianship can be observed which may be associated with the generally accepted trend for workhouses at the turn of the twentieth-century to become refuges for the sick and the elderly rather than detention centres for the unemployed.

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4 Old Poor Law structures in Norfolk presaged the New Poor Law in a number of ways. By 1803 the county had 131 workhouses serving 350 parishes, many of which had organised themselves into incorporations.


7 Anon., Considerations on the Poor Laws, on the Present State of the Poor, and on Houses of Industry (London, 1775)
Table 5.1: Percentage of guardians who were clergymen in rural Poor Law Unions, Norfolk 1850 – 1910

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Union</th>
<th>1850</th>
<th>1880</th>
<th>1910</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aylsham</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>12.2</td>
<td>15.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depwade</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>9.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Docking</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>12.7</td>
<td>11.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Downham Market</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>14.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Erpingham</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. &amp; W. Flegg</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>14.6</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forehoe</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>15.7</td>
<td>15.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freebridge Lynn</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>24.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guiltcross</td>
<td>18.2</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henstead</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loddon &amp; Clavering</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>11.11</td>
<td>25.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mitford &amp; Launditch</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>8.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Faiths</td>
<td>16.1</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>14.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swaffham</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>21.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thetford</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>26.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smallburgh</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>18.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walsingham</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>19.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wayland</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Overall Average:</strong></td>
<td><strong>8.3</strong></td>
<td><strong>11.4</strong></td>
<td><strong>16.7</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: N.R.O. Poor Law Union Guardians’ Minute Books

Farmer-guardians, who had dominated matters in the decades after 1834, began to withdraw from poor law management as workhouses declined in importance as factors in the local economy and labour market, and an increase in paternalistic forms of care, with clergymen at the forefront, may be inferred. Table 5.1 is based on the work of clergymen who were active guardians: men who actually attended meetings. Guardian attendance rates were an issue of central importance to the efficacy of Poor Law administration. The Rev. Charles Brereton, sceptical about Poor Law Unions, had asked how any committee ‘varying every month [could] be competent to transact the business of 50 parishes’, and the East and West Flegg Incorporation had imposed fines on guardians for non-attendance.

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*Rev. C. Brereton, The Subordinate Magistracy and Parish System Considered, in their Connexion with the Causes and Remedies of Modern Pauperism* (Norwich, 1827), p. 75
attendance from its inception in 1775.\textsuperscript{9} Table 5.2, summarising guardian attendance records in the Aylsham Union, 1840 – 1920, indicates that attendance rates were not high (though increasing), and that clergymen were generally neither more nor less diligent than lay guardians in this respect.

Table 5.2: Percentage Attendance Rates of Poor Law Guardians, Aylsham Union 1840 – 1920.\textsuperscript{10}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>% Attendance Rate Lay Guardians</th>
<th>% Attendance Rate Clerical Guardians</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1840</td>
<td>36.4</td>
<td>32.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1850</td>
<td>39.2</td>
<td>40.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1860</td>
<td>24.5</td>
<td>31.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1870</td>
<td>36.6</td>
<td>23.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1880</td>
<td>32.1</td>
<td>37.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1890</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1900</td>
<td>54.3</td>
<td>44.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1910</td>
<td>61.1</td>
<td>39.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920</td>
<td>54.6</td>
<td>44.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>42.4</td>
<td>36.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: N.R.O. Aylsham Poor Law Union Guardians’ Minute Books 1840 – 1920

These modest attendance rates suggest that one of Brereton’s fears was being realised. Of the six meetings at which it was decided to prosecute the Stokes brothers of Wood Dalling and James Hazelwood of Baconsthorpe for the non-maintenance of their parents, only three from the first board and two guardians from the second attended all six meetings, even though 42 and 40 guardians (respectively) had attended at least one meeting and had had, presumably, some input without hearing the full case.\textsuperscript{11}

Whatever the clerical input into Poor Law administration, however, it is fair to say that within their ranks the clergy had exponents of the full spread of opinion on the New Poor Law. These ranged from the enthusiastic endorsement of the Rev. William Clayton (‘now

\textsuperscript{9} Digby, \textit{Pauper Palaces}, p. 36
\textsuperscript{10} i.e. calculated as a percentage of all the meetings that guardians could potentially attend. A figure of 100% would indicate that all guardians were attending all meetings.
\textsuperscript{11} N.R.O. C/GP 1/23 Aylsham Poor Law Union Guardians’ Minutes 1885 – 7
N.R.O. C/GP 6/35 Erpingham Poor Law Union Guardians’ Minute Books 1891 – 2
Character to the poor man is essential, and he becomes sober and civil that he may please his Employer, and which, becoming habitual, renders him more moral')\(^2\) to a condemnation so severe that its author, the Rev. Ambrose Goode, faced prosecution for seditious libel ('a measure the more dastardly and mean, in as much as it is an act against that class of our fellow subjects who alone are without a voice . . . and who can only be driven for redress to . . . outrage and violence').\(^3\)

In terms of charity provision, Norfolk in 1835 had 1,303 charities in 483 parishes secured on 28,000 acres of land, 'the highest acreage of any county in England'.\(^4\) The distribution of these charities may be better understood within the narrower context of the Aylsham Poor Law Union. Here, at the start of the nineteenth century, 45 parishes were served by 68 charities.\(^5\) Seventeen parishes had no endowed charities. As all of these seventeen parishes were 'close' the possibility has to be considered that within their paternalistic boundaries there existed alternative, less formal measures for helping the poor. The range of charities included bequests of land, houses and money, all of which realised benefits or interest to be distributed to the poor in the form of doles (money, bread, clothing, fuel) or in practical provisions like almshouses and schools (Plate 16).

The context of charitable giving could be more or less formal. For Parson Woodforde in the late eighteenth century giving was often extempore, even impulsive. He records giving 6d. to a woman who collapsed outside his Rectory gates and a shirt to a man who was suffering from smallpox.\(^6\) One hundred years later charity had blurred with self help in the parish of Southery, and the wife of the new vicar found herself under pressure to organise and administer a clothing club within two days of her arrival.\(^7\) In both cases, however, a fine, almost invisible line divided poor relief and charitable giving. This was

\(^1\) N.R.O. DN/VIS 64/5 Toftrees R. D. Visitation Returns 1838 (Gt. Ryburgh)
\(^2\) P.R.O. MH 32/60 Rev. A. Goode, handbill (1835).
\(^4\) Z. Clark, An Account of the Different Charities Belonging to the Poor of the County of Norfolk (Bury St. Edmunds, 1811), pp. 8 - 288
\(^6\) N.R.O. MC 641/1, 785 x 2. Catherine Hall's diary (Southery) 1897 - 9

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especially the case after 1834 when, as Birtles has put it, 'charity might prevent the poor from requiring parish relief but it could not legally be distributed as parish relief.'

Managing the Economy

Economic management negotiated another thin divide: between poverty, which was regarded as essential to the process of wealth creation, and destitution – defined by the Rev. William Gunn in 1834 as being 'without the means of subsistence' – which was a threat to the individual and to society. Digby has calculated that around 10% of Norfolk’s population stood on the wrong side of this divide in 1840, but the shadow of pauperism fell across many more lives than these. Fear of the workhouse was a state of mind inculcated among the poor by the economic management of the New Poor Law by farmer-guardians, men who were intent on driving down wages and poor rates. In an analysis of guardians’ minute books, ten documents spanning the period 1850 – 1880 give sufficient data for an assessment of farmer-guardian influence to be attempted. Of 374 lay guardians these records identified 1 builder, 3 merchants, 1 hotelier, 1 miller, 1 manufacturer, 19 gentlemen, 1 barrister, 1 agent, 1 brewer, 26 guardians of unspecified occupation, and 319 farmers (85.3%).

Despite the best endeavours of these men, both before and after 1834 outdoor relief was the relief system that would not go away. It accounted for 83.9% of all relief given to the able-bodied poor in East Anglia in the 1850s, 86.9% in the 1860s, and 85.9% in the 1870s, statistics born of a failure on the part of the Poor Law Amendment Act to

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18 Birtles, ‘Common land’, p. 82
20 Digby, Pauper Palaces, p. 12
21 Thomas Campbell Foster was just one of many contemporary observers who commented on the baleful influence of farmer-guardians. See, for instance, The Times 1.7.1844
22 Compiled from N.R.O. Guardians’ Minute Books of the Docking (1880), Henstead (1850 & 1880), Loddon & Clavering (1850 & 1880), Swaffham (1880), Depwade (1850), Guiltcross (1850) and Mitford & Launditch (1850) Unions.

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recognise unemployment as a cause rather than a symptom of high levels of poor relief.\textsuperscript{23} The Rev. Pakenham Spencer of Starston may have written as a strong advocate of the Outdoor Relief Prohibitory Order in 1841, a measure he considered necessary to avoid a regression into some kind of Speenhamland System,\textsuperscript{24} but the die was already cast in a way that meant by 1909 ‘outdoor relief was given whenever possible. The workhouse was the almost exclusive preserve of the aged and infirm, . . . the feeble-minded, a few bad characters, and some unmarried mothers.’\textsuperscript{25}

The level of poor rates was the fundamental economic concern of the parish. The Rev. J. L. Brereton, a guardian in the Freebridge Lynn Union, advocated their abolition and the payment in their place of higher wages.\textsuperscript{26} Although this scheme may have had some superficial appeal, its fatal flaw had been identified fifty years earlier: increased wages could not help those wholly dependent upon relief as they were ‘wholly unemployed’ and unlikely to suddenly find work, especially at the new, high rates of pay. The fear was that they would turn to crime as a means of survival.\textsuperscript{27}

There was an ongoing debate, too, about the sources of poor rate revenue. Essentially the rate was levied on immoveable land and property, and any suggestion that it might be applied to goods or to stock in trade was widely deplored as a double taxation. The Rev. S. Hobson of Kirstead, however, advocated a move towards rating profits rather than property, on the grounds that clergymen were disadvantaged by their limited opportunities to make profit from rectory and glebe lands.\textsuperscript{28} Hobson’s proposal seems unlikely to have commended itself to any class of parishioner: he was at once advocating clergy exemption from their share of local taxation and denying their self-evident status as wealthy landowners who had profited greatly from enclosure.

\textsuperscript{24} Poor Law Commission, \textit{7th Annual Report} (1841).
\textsuperscript{25} A. Digby, \textit{Pauper Palaces}, p. 34
\textsuperscript{27} N.R.O. GN/12/1 Richard Morgan to Lord Suffield 25 May 1821
\textsuperscript{28} A Norfolk Clergyman, \textit{The Justice and Equity of Assessing the Net Profits of the Land for the Relief of the Poor} (London, 1838)
Also circulating in the economy were the proceeds of parochial charities. These could be considerable, and often demonstrated high levels of distributive efficiency. Between 1859 and 1883, for instance, Bulwer’s Charity in Buxton received £1727. 15. 9 in rent revenues, of which £1375. 4. 6 was immediately distributed to the poor. Given a credit balance of £142. 18. 9 in 1883, the charity had incurred administrative costs of just £209. 12. 6 in 24 years.29 Money doles like this were, however, relatively unusual. Private charities and post-enclosure ‘poor allotments’ often metamorphosed in one way or another into fuel allotments from which the poor could cut their own fuel or, more usually, a body of trustees would receive rent which would be distributed to the poor in the form of a ‘coal-dole’. Doles were a remarkably resilient way of distributing charity. ‘Even at the end of the nineteenth century,’ writes Digby, ‘the Charity Commissioners lamented that most charities were doles in rural Norfolk in spite of their attempts to have a more constructive use made of endowments.’30

‘Charity in the grip of serfdom’ was the Webbs’ verdict on the Old Poor Law31 and the interface between charity and poor relief before 1834 displayed significant differences from that in the New Poor Law era. Given, for instance, that 37% of the population of Ashill in 1788 and 43% of the population of Southrepps in 1801 were receiving charity it seems inevitable that there would have been a large overlap with the numbers claiming parochial relief.32 In late eighteenth-century Castle Rising charity and poor relief were deliberately dovetailed together to help the poor over bad winters: ‘Doles of food and reduced prices of necessities . . . were achieved by a combination of private charity and subsidy from the poor rates.’33 Snell has described how a whole range of items and services were made available to the poor under the Old Poor Law – shoes, boots, clothes,

29 N.R.O. PD 160/64 Bulwer’s Charity account books.
30 A. Digby, Pauper Palaces, p. 26
32 Ashill: A. Reid, ‘The process of parliamentary enclosure in Ashill’, Norfolk Archaeology, 37 (1979), 176
33 A. Digby, Pauper Palaces, p. 106
furniture, bedding, fuel, marriage and burial expenses, healthcare costs\(^\text{34}\) - all of which disappeared into the realms of private charity (or disappeared altogether) after 1834. In effect a holistic system of assistance was being sidelined by the financial aggression of the New Poor Law.

When Sir Richard Jodrell of Salle decreed that his charity – of clothing or blankets – should be distributed to those ‘most regular in their attendance at Church . . . and who have brought up and maintained . . . the largest families with the least parochial relief’\(^\text{35}\) he drew together those threads of charitable giving which discouraged poor relief claims and encouraged church attendance. Direct links between church attendance and qualification for charity were legion across nineteenth-century Norfolk. At Southrepps in 1801, for instance, the poor received ‘Sacrament Money’ collected from those taking communion, and at Boughton in the 1860s money for alms was collected at Harvest Festival.\(^\text{36}\) In this way the church brought together givers and receivers who knew each other, a profoundly local connection which Incorporation and Union workhouses were thought by many to have disrupted. Woodforde, for example, gave money to ‘poor old John Peachman’ who he knew was not being relieved by his parish,\(^\text{37}\) a situation that was the very obverse of the one facing post-1834 relieving officers who had to present the case of paupers to Union guardians who did not know them.\(^\text{38}\) Moreover, knowing charity recipients was economically essential if fraudulent claims were to be deterred. ‘The whole day spent in distributing the endowed charities,’ wrote Benjamin Armstrong in February 1858, ‘I now not only know the names and abodes but also the circumstances of all the 500 applicants’.\(^\text{39}\)

The conflict between local knowledge and remote authority was one that loomed large in Old and New Poor Law administration alike. Brereton railed against de-localisation in


\(^{35}\) N.R.O. PD 440/99 Jodrell’s charity, Reepham (1865)

\(^{36}\) Southrepps: Hood, *Sequestered Loyalists*, p. 134

\(^{37}\) Boughton: N.R.O. MC 577/33, 778 x 9 Mary Churchill’s notes, Boughton, 1860s

\(^{38}\) Woodforde, *Diary*, p. 395 (March 8, 1791)

\(^{39}\) Snell, *Annals*, p. 119

1827 when he argued that magisterial administration of the Poor Law was turning the petty sessions into ‘the common buttery for a whole neighbourhood, the begging hatch at which the justices cut and carve for the labouring population’. He was particularly indignant when local knowledge was overruled. Unemployed men at Snettisham had actually been supported by magistrates in their demand for relief within their home parish rather than being sent to work on a river-widening scheme twelve miles away. The magistrates ordered the Snettisham overseer to relieve the men, upon oath that each was ‘very poor and impotent and not able to work . . . when in fact the paupers are able-bodied men, in perfect health’. The arguments had not changed in 1840 when Depwade guardians petitioned parliament in protest at the whole notion of Unions being set up by the Poor Law Commission rather than by parishes. The arguments had not changed in 1840 when Depwade guardians petitioned parliament in protest at the whole notion of Unions being set up by the Poor Law Commission rather than by parishes. The Depwade minute books are, throughout, alive with the tensions between local government and central authority.

Elsewhere, a number of proprietors of ‘close’ parishes actively campaigned for their fiefdoms to be exempted from the New Poor Law Unions, among them the Revs. E. Blyth at Burnham Deepdale, H. Bathurst at North Creake, and J. Fellowes at Shotesham. Fellowes received the assurance of Assistant Commissioner Parry that good local management would continue to be a vital element of the new scheme, and in good paternalistic fashion Fellowes passed these reassurances on to his parishioners. His published ‘Address’, however, was heavy with Fellowes’ own thinly-disguised misgivings about the project. In a wide-ranging and essentially honest appraisal of the likely effects of the new law upon different classes and ages of the poor, Fellowes wrote, ‘all changes which appear to alter our mode of life will generally cause, at first, some unpleasant feelings . . . It is sufficient for my purpose to know that it is the Law of the Land, and as such it is the duty of all good and loyal subjects to pay implicit obedience to it.’

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60 Brereton, Subordinate Magistracy, pp. 6 & 52
42 P.R.O. MH 12/8249 Blyth et al to Poor Law Board 13.9.1834
    E. Chadwick to Bathurst 18.9.1834
    P.R.O. MH 12/8415 Sir W. E. Parry to Fellowes 23.10.1835
43 Rev. J. Fellowes, An Address to the Inhabitants of the Parishes of Shotesham in the Henstead Union (Norwich, 1836)
A departure from established ways of doing things was clearly being recognised. Traditional patterns of parochial paternalism and deference were giving way to something with a much harder economic edge; something that was to culminate in the coercive regime of the farmer-guardian. The responsibility for this cannot wholly be laid at the door of the Poor Law Amendment Act but can be traced to the growing acceptance during the post-war years of the socio-economic theories of Adam Smith and Thomas Malthus. This was the economic climate in which the gentry, 'the “old” administrators of the poor law began to fade from the scene . . . to concentrate on building model cottages on their estates for loyal local workers’.  

One loophole in the farmer-guardians’ attempt to combine low poor rates with low wages lay in the fact that living conditions and dietaries in the workhouse came under scrutiny and regulation in a way that they never did in the agricultural labourers’ home. Digby has described how ‘even in the 1860s the amount of money spent [on food] each week by an adult worker in rural Norfolk was estimated at only 2s. 0 ½ d.’ Even for those in the deeply paternalistic parish of Stratton Strawless staples might amount to little more than ‘dumplings, potatoes, occasionally a little salt pork; this frequently depends on their own management . . . a great deal of money is wasted in bad tea, brown sugar and salt butter’. If the poverty of the agricultural labourers’ diet was one reason why ‘less eligibility’ was always such a difficult concept to put into practice, another was the level of health care. Here, in the context of central regulation and public scrutiny, Depwade guardians could be called to account for their decision to appoint a medical officer who lived seven miles from the workhouse. It seems unlikely that the proximity of poor people to the nearest doctor would have attracted much interest or comment outside the regulatory framework of the New Poor Law. These administrative systems also threw up the occasional healthcare champion like the Rev. Benjamin Barker of Shipdham, whose work on the sanitary committees of the Mitford & Launditch Union brought him into

44 Digby, Pauper Palaces, p. 214  
45 Digby, Pauper Palaces, p. 23  
conflict with his fellow guardians and with the Poor Law Commission. Barker’s
determination to expose the dangers of bad sanitation and contaminated water supplies
was unstinting, and pre-dated the revolutionary link between the two that was made by
John Snow in Soho in 1854. Barker was vindicated when, in January 1849, cholera broke
out in Shipdham and Mileham.

Although the New Poor Law could produce the occasional champion who might not
otherwise have seen the light of day, the system itself often demonstrated institutional
complacency, its capacity to act atrophied by the constant vigilance over expenditure.
When the Poor Law Commission, at Barker’s prompting, wrote to the Mitford &
Launditch guardians asking them to explain their inactivity the response was that ‘from
the general very healthy state of the Inmates . . . [the guardians] do not deem it expedient
to incur the unnecessary expense of filling up the drain in question’. Six times between
December 1848 and April 1849 Barker and his ally the Rev. Louis Norgate were defeated
at guardians’ meetings as they campaigned for handbills and notices to be published
warning of the dangers and setting out the legal obligation for occupiers to ensure that
their premises did not pose a public health ‘nuisance’. As a result of this prevailing
attitude, Poor Law guardians continued to preside over health and sanitation scandals for
decades to come.

Penny-pinching shaded into something more sinister when it began to be applied in the
form of the ‘ticket system’ of labour, considered by Thomas Campbell Foster to be the
cause of much unrest in the 1840s. In the Blofield and Henstead Unions the guardians
admitted that tickets were used as an excuse for not relieving a man until a period of up to
a week had elapsed since his wages had last been paid. This was where meanness
began to cross over into maladministration and even into corruption, both of which were
being suspected by an increasingly vigilant poor in the later nineteenth century. In fact,
one feature of the ‘maladministration watch’ of the nineteenth century is the way in

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\[48\] Barker’s campaign can be reconstructed from:
- N.R.O. C/GP 14/8 Mitford & Launditch P.L.U. Guardians’ Minute Books 1847 – 9, and
- P.R.O MH 12/8478 Correspondence of the Mitford & Launditch Union

\[49\] N.R.O. C/GP 14/9 Mitford & Launditch P.L.U. Guardians’ Minutes, 1 Oct 1849

\[50\] Digby, ‘The Labour Market’, p. 77
which it moved from being a concern of the elite to being a concern of the labouring poor as the century progressed. This seems to have been another function of the increased articulacy and confidence afforded by the Nonconformist and trade union movements. A sense, semi-formed, that some kind of injustice was being done may well have informed earlier riots and outbreaks of unrest, but later in the century this had focused into an ability to ask the right questions, to suggest practical solutions, and to generally cast a critical eye over the local finances of charity and Poor Law provision.

The New Poor Law introduced new financial inefficiencies of its own. Between 1840 and 1847 the Poor Law Unions of Aylsham, St. Faiths and Erpingham collected £284,394 from the poor rate, but expended only £220,201 on relieving the poor. Somewhere £64,193, or 22.5%, had disappeared into administrative and ancillary costs, an amount that would have concerned paupers and ratepayers alike. The New Poor Law certainly brought with it spiralling administration costs, not least in the salaries of an ever-growing army of officials. Not all the costs were sinister – vaccination schemes accounted for some of them – but it seems fair to infer a growing contemporary sense that ‘things did not add up.’

In the case of charities, Thomas Gilbert’s Act of 1786 represented an attempt to tidy up their administration and make them properly accountable. One frequent and enduring problem, however, was the looseness of the wording of original bequests and the scope that it gave to Trustees – usually the clergyman and churchwardens – in deciding who the recipients should be. Sir Henry Bulwer’s bequest at Heydon, for example, ‘to the poor... or some of them in such manner as the rector and churchwardens shall think proper’ seems a recipe for disputation and ill-feeling. Sometimes problems with charities amounted to little more than administrative ‘drift’ - in 1881, for instance, the Rev. Humphrey at Belaugh was reminded by the Charity Commission that he had not

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51 R. Lee, ‘Midnight Crimes and Guilty Consciences: Rural war in N. E. Norfolk 1815 – 1875, the Search for a Radical Agenda’ (M.A. dissertation, unpub., University of Leicester, 1999), p. 25
52 Digby, Pauper Palaces, p. 80 & p. 86 for administration costs of the New Poor Law
53 Whitfield, ‘Change and continuity’, p. 105
54 N.R.O. PD 435/28 Bulwer’s Charity, Heydon (c. 1878)
submitted any accounts since 187455 - but many of the disputes had a much sharper edge than this and if, as will be discussed in Chapter 6, much of the clergy's motivation came from a desire 'to question the legal validity of charitable distributions for which no written record existed'56 it is arguable that they reaped the whirlwind they had sown: the recipients of charity began to seek legal and economic advice of their own. As a result letters, notices and petitions were raised arguing that the value of benefits was inexplicably falling (Little Walsingham, 1862); that trees were not the most cost-effective crop on the poor's land (St. Faith's, 1868); that rents from charity lands would be higher if lets were granted by auction (Shipdham, 1870); and that coal for the poor would be cheaper if the contract was put out to tender (Alburgh, 1915).57 At Shipdham particular bitterness was expressed that part of the charity land had been enclosed as an extension to the Rectory garden, and that the proceeds of the remaining land was 'spent by the churchwardens in defraying the expenses connected with the parish church and organ therein and the choir thereof to the extent of the whole of the Trust fund.'58

Other complaints bordered on accusations of outright corruption. At Shipdham the petitioners of 1870 demanded to know why the churchwardens paid themselves 'so much as two shillings per ton' for measuring out coal to the poor.59 And for over thirty years a charity school in Little Walsingham had been enjoyed as a sinecure by the clergyman, who customarily claimed the £120 p.a. salary even though the school had no pupils and had only ever received one application to attend, refused on the grounds that the child was the son of a Dissenting minister. Even when the matter came to the attention of the Charity Commission in 1860, the Rev. Septimus Lee Warner proposed a continuance at full salary until such time as a decision was made.60

55 N.R.O. PD 249/48 Charity Commission to Rev. Humphrey (Belaugh) 20 Aug. 1881
56 F. Knight, The Nineteenth Century Church and English Society (Cambridge, 1995), p. 69
58 N.R.O. PD 337/478 Shipdham petition to Charity Commission, c. 1870
59 N.R.O. PD 337/478 Shipdham petition to Charity Commission, c. 1870
60 N.R.O. Walsingham Trust Estates: Minute Book 1833 - 1878
It is no surprise to find the nascent agricultural trade union movement at the forefront of this challenge to the economic management of parishes. In its exposé of maladministration in Wood Norton, the *English Labourer* of 3 February 1877 contained a familiar litany of complaints centring mainly on the occupation and enclosure of large parts of charity land by the rector and other principal inhabitants. It was especially eloquent on the nature of social relations engendered by the very existence of parochial charity whether properly administered or not. Because of it the labourers of Wood Norton had been reduced to abject servility, 'reared and fed for many years on a pint of soup, a blanket, a Westminster creed, and a church catechism ... They are a sort of lickspittle, who will fawn, cringe, lick, flatter and bow, and sell their property and birthright for a mess of pottage'.

Interventions of this kind from the labourers' union indicate that custodianship of the local economy had taken the clergy into very deep and troubled political waters. These were scarcely uncharted: as early as 1775 the Rev. Potter of Scarning had expounded the proto-Malthusian view that children caused poverty, sending their parents — and society at large — into a downward spiral of marital breakdown, despair, drunkenness, immorality and idleness. For most Norfolk clergymen of Potter's generation, views on economics tended to be local in their focus. Farm tenancies let at the highest possible rent were the problem according to the Rev. William Gunn, for instance, stretching as they did the finances of the farm tenant until he was unable to meet his proper obligation to the poor. But a broader, more macro-economic understanding was gaining ground. In 1821 a correspondent wrote to Lord Suffield, placing poor relief within a holistic scheme of economic measures which embraced 'emigration, ... the cultivation of waste-land, [and] the abolition of restrictive laws regarding trade', and by 1851 an entire debate could be conducted in the local press in which protectionists and free-traders used (respectively) anti- and pro-New Poor Law arguments to express their own views on the contemporary

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63 Gunn, *Remedial Measures*.
64 N.R.O. GTN 12/1 Richard Morgan to Suffield, 25 May 1821
state of agriculture.\textsuperscript{65} If the Poor Law Amendment Act effectively prised apart the secular and ecclesiastical functions of the church,\textsuperscript{66} it also opened up an even greater distance from pre-1834 thinkers like the Rev. C. D. Brereton who had argued that 'political economists may commit as great an error in excluding moral, as moralists commit an error in excluding economical considerations. Policy, sound policy, is made up of both.'\textsuperscript{67} By mid-century Brereton’s view that ‘management should become parochial, friendly, and ecclesiastical’\textsuperscript{68} may still have attracted some nostalgist adherents, but it was sounding increasingly anachronistic.

\section*{Managing the Labour Market}

Unfashionable, too, but in retrospect an astute observation on the changing direction of Poor Law administration, was Brereton’s view that the Old Poor Law was being gerrymandered by magistrates into a system for regulating wages and employment rather than responding to the needs of the poor.\textsuperscript{69} It can be argued that the New Poor Law effectively formalised this trend, and hardened it into a coercive system for managing labour. The Labour Rate, an Old Poor Law measure which had always acted as a depressant on wages, resurfaced in the New Poor Law era in the guise of the ticket system, by which means poor relief was withheld until the claimant had gone cap in hand to every employer in the parish and had effectively been browbeaten into accepting very low rates of pay.\textsuperscript{70} Thomas Campbell Foster’s exposé of this pernicious scheme stirred the authorities into an investigation, but the Assistant Poor Law Commissioner concluded that the policy was not widespread, was not damaging, and was just another means of

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{65} N.R.O. KIM 6/51 Kimberley papers on Poor Law, c. 1850 - 51
\item \textsuperscript{66} Knight, Nineteenth Century Church, p. 69
\item \textsuperscript{67} Brereton, Subordinate Magistracy, p. 142
\item \textsuperscript{68} Rev. C. D. Brereton, Observations on the Administration of the Poor Laws in Agricultural Districts (Norwich, 1824), p. 118
\item \textsuperscript{69} Rev. C. D. Brereton, A Practical Inquiry into the Number, Means of Employment and Wages of Agricultural Labourers (Norwich, c.1826)
\item \textsuperscript{70} Digby, Pauper Palaces, pp. 116 – 117 for detailed discussion on the ticket system
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
identifying the deserving poor. The gang system of labour, a by-product of 'open' and 'close' parishes and apparently well established in the villages of West Norfolk, was seen in action and roundly condemned by some. For the Rev. Bloom of Castle Acre it was tantamount to slavery, and his neighbour the Rev. Fountaine at South Acre held it responsible for 'morally, physically and intellectually intense evil.' But even it had its apologists. At Booton the Rev. Whitwell Elwin declared it a useful 'sort of agricultural apprenticeship.'

The fact was that, for many Poor Law administrators, any work was better than none. 'You have had 4 very idle and worthless fellows applying to your Lordship for relief from the parish of Dunham,' wrote the Rev. Dixon Hoste to Lord Suffield in 1824, 'complaining of improper work being allocated to them . . . Had the overseer done his Duty & obey'd my instructions, if they did not go to their work on the Monday, instead of walking 30 miles to trouble your Lordship with false & frivolous complaints, they would at this time have been on the Tread Mill in the Prison at Swaffham.' Such attitudes prevailed both inside and outside the workhouse after 1834, for this was the era of the 'labour test' when paupers might be set to stone-breaking or oakum-picking in order to 'earn' their indoor relief and to understand, too, that such relief could never be considered an alternative to work.

Responsibility for these coercive systems of employment is often laid at the door of farmer-guardians. The numeric domination of Poor Law administration by this body has already been discussed, and their administrative approach can best be described as the 'confusion of public social policy with private economic interests.' In effect they established a system of cyclical repression, in which the same faces were continually being encountered in positions of authority by labourers as they passed through the

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71 Some Alleged Abuses of the Poor Law in Norfolk and Suffolk, P.P. XXXVI (1846). Report by Sir John Walsham.
73 R.C. on the Employment of Women and Children in Agriculture, VI (1843)
74 N.R.O. GTN 18/1, Rev. Dixon Hoste to Suffield 13 Nov. 1824
75 Digby, Pauper Palaces, p. 6
various hoops of poor relief and employment policy. Above all, the settled poor of a parish, whether they were inside or outside the workhouse, came to be seen as a permanent pool of labour, to be hired and fired as seasonality or circumstances demanded. In 1831 a Norfolk committee of magistrates actually offered a quantification of how large this labour pool should be. Calculating that about 12% of the workforce was under-employed, the committee concluded that this represented ‘no material surplus beyond what the cultivation of the soil might fairly be said to require’: farmers required a reserve labour force of underemployed men who could then be recruited during periods of peak labour demand, especially haysel and harvest.76

Labour pool management operated in a complex relationship with emigration. It is significant that the peak year for out-migration from Norfolk was 1836,77 the year that New Poor Law policies began to bite and the true cost of indoor relief was becoming apparent. Parochial settlement was a double-edged sword. Parishes could simply become overwhelmed by the needs of their static poor, as happened at Edgefield in 1836. ‘The parish was pent up, so to speak, in itself,’ wrote a later incumbent, and the situation became so serious that the local landowner feared ‘almost universal pauperism.’ Mass emigration was resorted to. 123 people, one-sixth of Edgefield’s entire population, set sail for a new life abroad in 1836.78

Over 3,000 people emigrated from Norfolk in 1836, a figure that eventually amounted to 10% of all poor law-assisted emigration in the years up to 1860.79 Section 62 of the Poor Law Amendment Act permitted and enabled parishes to establish their own emigration funds, and over the next few years a number of parishes were quick to avail themselves of the opportunity. The concept was not entirely new – Foulsham parish records contain

76 Cited in Digby, Pauper Palaces, pp. 100 - 101
79 Digby, Pauper Palaces, p. 51
correspondence conducted at a parochial level with emigration agents in 1830\textsuperscript{80} - but the 1834 Act represented organisation, authorisation and co-ordination on an unprecedented scale. In March 1836, for example, the churchwardens of Little Barningham received authorisation from the Poor Law Commission to borrow £200, repayable over five years at 5% interest. This they did, from the wealthy widow Frances Spurrell, and an indenture records their last repayment to her on 28 March 1841, the parish having repaid a total of £230. The money enabled 25 parishioners to emigrate.\textsuperscript{81}

Assisted emigration raised a number of questions, not least with regard to social relationships that could countenance wealthy ratepayers making modest profits from sending fellow parishioners overseas. Ultimately only one in seven Norfolk parishes adopted the scheme\textsuperscript{82} and it is worth considering whether any structural differences existed between those that did and those that did not participate. The question is a complex one and when considering it the potential significance of the ‘enrolling actor’ – the influential parishioner who was really keen on out-migration – should not be overlooked. In the Thetford area James Fison claimed to ‘have assisted upwards of 200 to remove from our own neighbourhood to Yorkshire’;\textsuperscript{83} the Rev. William Blackley of East Bradenham helped 130 migrants move to the north of England;\textsuperscript{84} and in a campaign lasting several years the Rev. Scott Surtees of Banham managed to encourage hundreds of his parishioners to leave, including 250 in the peak year of 1836 alone.\textsuperscript{85} Writing in 1852, and still campaigning, Surtees said to his parishioners: ‘I often recommend you to emigrate . . . It is because I have your well-being at heart. There is more labour in this parish than there is profitable employment for.’\textsuperscript{86}

Assessments of which parishes encouraged emigration – and why – can conveniently be made within the context of the Aylsham Poor Law Union. Between 1834 and 1870, 790

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\textsuperscript{80} N.R.O. PD 674/63 (Foulsham) Letter from Mr. Girling, emigration agent, 29 March 1830

\textsuperscript{81} N.R.O. PD 113/11 Lt. Barningham emigration fund, 1836

\textsuperscript{82} G. Howells, ‘Emigration’, p. 147


\textsuperscript{84} Digby, Pauper Palaces, p. 103

\textsuperscript{85} Poor Law Commission 3\textsuperscript{rd} Annual Report (1837)

\textsuperscript{86} Rev. S. Surtees, Emigrant’s Letters from settlers in Canada and South Australia . . . with a preface addressed to Labourers (Norwich, 1852)
people emigrated from this Union, more than from any other Union in Norfolk. The Aylsham Union also divides conveniently into those parishes which adopted the Poor Law assisted emigration scheme (22 ‘emigrating parishes’) and those that did not (21 ‘non-emigrating parishes’). There is some evidence, firstly, that emigration was taking place from parishes with higher populations. The median population of ‘emigrating parishes’ in 1851 was 421; that of ‘non-emigrating’ parishes, 302. Table 5.3, however, offers stronger evidence of one possible motive for encouraging emigration: the ‘emigrating parishes’ had a much higher relative poor rate expenditure. Although many other, unseen factors may have played a part, the striking thing about this strategy is that it seems to have worked: ‘emigrating parishes’ had achieved a massive reduction in their poor rate expenditure by 1852.

<table>
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<th>Average poor rate expenditure 1833 - 1835</th>
<th>Average poor rate expenditure 1850 - 1852</th>
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<tr>
<td>‘emigrating parishes’</td>
<td>32.4</td>
<td>18.1</td>
<td>44.1</td>
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<td>‘non-emigrating parishes’</td>
<td>22.7</td>
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<td>24.2</td>
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SOURCE: see footnote 88 for the full list of sources used in this table

87 R. Lee, ‘Midnight Crimes’, p. 32
88 The data used in this discussion of emigration has been compiled from the following sources:
B Populations: Trade Directories of the 1830s and 1850s
B Indoor Relief: N.R.O. C/GP 1/410,411 & 412 Aylsham Poor Law Union Indoor Relief Books 1850 – 52
B Poor Rates: (1833 – 35) Poor Law Commission 2nd Annual Report (1836)
B (1850 – 52) N.R.O. C/GP 1/9 Aylsham Poor Law Union Guardians’ Minutes 1850 – 52
B Emigration: Annual Reports to the Poor Law Commission 1st (1835) to 12th (1846)
(Note that Aylsham P.L.U. data excludes the tiny parishes of Mannington, Wolterton and Irmingland, with only a handful of parishioners in each. Note also that any emigration carried out independently of the Poor Law assisted scheme is not included in this discussion).
Emigration may nevertheless be said to have been an economic measure that had unforeseen social consequences. Most people at the sharp end of the policy - the farmers and the landowners - considered that it was the better type of labourers who were leaving. Introduced as a desperate remedy to conquer labour surpluses and high poor rates, emigration schemes were encouraging an exodus of the very people that the parish most wanted to keep. The Rev. Brereton had forecast this in 1827, warning that emigration would appeal most strongly to ‘people of ambition and enterprise’, and in 1834 a respondent to the 1st Annual Report of the Poor Law Commission observed that ‘it is a matter of complaint by the farmers that emigration only carries off the industrious and well-behaved, and leaves them encumbered with the idle and profligate.’ As a generalised policy emigration stopped almost as quickly as it started, and the broader socio-economic theory underpinning it – that it didn’t really matter who emigrated, as work opportunities would be created and would improve the moral character of those left behind – remained unexplored and unproven.

It is impossible, too, to ignore the influence of Malthusian doctrine on emigration policy. A high proportion of Norfolk emigrants (88%) were leaving as part of a family group, and something may be inferred from this statistic of contemporary concerns about family fertility and the rapidity of working-class procreation. To be fully effective, the argument went, the departure of families should be followed by the destruction of cottages, and – whether or not this happened – the minimal impact of emigration on parish population sizes rather endorses the Malthusian view that, without safeguards, the procreating poor would always fill the vacuum left by those who had departed. Other observers pointed out that visible evidence in the landscape disproved Malthusian doctrine at almost every turn. Writing to Coke at Holkham in 1817, the Rev. Glover of Southrepps commended him for having demonstrated that the capacity for agriculture to provide could be improved and extended almost indefinitely. Glover, too, described the contradiction that allowed swathes of uncultivated land to be kept off limits as game preserves, often by the

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89 Brereton, 'Subordinate Magistracy', p. 155
90 Poor Law Commission 1st Annual Report (1834)
92 Snell, Annals, p. 112
93 Howells, 'Emigration', p. 159
very people who were the most vocal supporters of Malthus. To Brereton the whole concept of 'surplus' population was anathema. Populations became 'corrupt', he argued, and then only because of a systemic failure to provide 'a corresponding increase in the accessible means of subsistence'.

The issue of emigration was not purely structural and economic, however. There was an emotional dimension, too, and a perception that the policy could verge on the punitive. A battle for hearts and minds ensued, with 'letters home' playing a key propaganda role. Collections of these were frequently published, and it may be inferred that the authenticity of some of them was called into question. 'People are very wrong running away with the idea of the letters being altered coming over there,' wrote Robert Davey from South Australia in a letter triumphantly published by the Rev. Surtees of Banham, and when a letter entered the public domain in Holt, describing the awfulness of the emigrants' experience – deaths on the voyage, hunger and unemployment after landing in Canada – it was immediately denounced as a fake and a counter-publication issued to refute its every allegation.

To some the issue of emigration centred on the abstract value of family and community ties, something that the economic balance sheet could not show. Writing retrospectively of the events in Edgefield, the Rev. Marcon said, 'to a parson with any love of his sheep emigration... meant a-tearing asunder of family ties by their very roots.' Occasionally groups would attempt to emigrate together, so that their community could be re-established in the new country. A body of the Attleborough poor petitioned to do this in 1836 and 1837, and 'several poor persons' from East Harling and Kenninghall asked 'how they can be assisted to Emigrate to the same Colony that their Neighbours and

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94 Glover, Observations, pp. 8 - 11
95 Brereton, A Practical Enquiry.
96 Surtees, Emigrants' Letters (1852)
97 N.C. 23.7.36. Letter denouncing the 'fake' comes from James Shalders of Holt
98 Marcon, Reminiscences, p. 20
99 Digby, Pauper Palaces, p. 102
Relations went to last year. The success or otherwise of these applications is open to question – the East Harling petitioners were advised that such matters were ‘in the hands of the Commissioners’ – but James Shalders’ refutation of the ‘fake’ emigrant’s letter from Canada cited the evidence of a woman from Briston who, in the quarantine ground below Quebec, met ‘her old neighbours from Holt, whom she describes as being in excellent spirits.’ More often emigration carried with it the whiff of coercion. Two hundred potential emigrants from Wood Dalling got away with a late decision to change their minds and were allowed to stay, but it is significant that after their names had been entered for emigration ‘the parish officers had acquired the power to compel it, or refuse relief.’

Connection with the penal policy of transportation was also being made. To the Norwich Chartist Jabez Hardiment ‘tens of thousands were transporting themselves to distant lands’, and the Rev. Brereton argued that the penalty of transportation was itself being devalued ‘if being sent out of the country should become the fashion’ for people of good and bad character alike. Brereton predicted, too, that recourse to compulsory emigration would inevitably follow and, sure enough, ‘compulsion used with Discretion’ was being forcefully argued for by the chairman of the Swaffham Union in 1835: ‘The alternative offered to him will be confinement in a Gaol, work at the treadmill & that with the addition of a silent system as a fit punishment for causing his family to be chargeable to his parish . . . I think not many would accept such an alternative.’

Emigration was a cog in the New Poor Law machine which helped transform labour from a social commodity, wedded to a household living-in system, into an economic

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100 P.R.O. MH 12/8394 Guiltcross Poor Law Union correspondence, Thomas Leath to Poor Law Commission, 2 Feb. 1837
101 N.C. 23.7.36
103 N.C. 23.7.36
104 N.S.L. N320.53 G. Chaney, Research notes on Norwich Radicalism. Hardiment was addressing a Chartist meeting in December 1847.
105 Brereton, Subordinate Magistracy, p. 157
106 Brereton, Subordinate Magistracy, p. 29
106 P.R.O. MH 12/8539, Henry Day to Poor Law Commission, 21 November 1835
commodity, in which it became just one factor in the means of production. Potential emigrants were queuing up to get to Canada, wrote John Parmeter of Reepham, 'so great is their dread of [the New Poor Law]." The process rode roughshod over those attachments to neighbourhood and community that the poor had established, for these were attachments, too, to customary systems of poor relief that could be claimed as of right. To the unsympathetic eye of the Rev. Henniker in Suffolk, the poor desired to remain 'attached to the soil in which chance of birth had given them a settlement... [there] to vegetate and be supported even if the whole produce of the land were not sufficient for the purpose." The pay-back was another step in the politicisation of the poor. 'Ship out the rich paupers' was the sentiment of one Norfolk handbill in 1836, 'ship out the Anglican clergy.'

Managing Morality

That there was a moral dimension to the implementation of the new Poor Law cannot be doubted. As Driver has written, 'the reformation of 'morals' was arguably the key problem for social policy and social science during this period. The aim was to re-form the undisciplined impulses of paupers, criminals and delinquents, cultivating within them a sense of moral agency.' Paupers were differentiated from criminals only by the narrowest of conceptual margins, a fact that may be deduced from the design of the buildings in which they were housed. Workhouses and prisons shared the same forbidding external aspect and much of the internal panoply of control, not least their walled and separated exercise yards. Like the restored and re-ordered churches discussed in Chapter 1, this was 'the architecture of moral purpose'. Pugin illustrated the concept in his Contrasts of 1836, depicting the modern workhouse as a prison-like building in which the pathetic pauper was stripped of all dignity and spirit while the 'antient poor

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Howells, 'Emigration', p. 157
Rev. Sir A. B. Henniker, evidence to S. C. on Administration of Relief to the Poor, XVIII pt. I (1837-8), p. 596
Digby, Pauper Palaces, p. 27
Driver, Power and Pauperism, p. 11
'House' was represented as a spiritual community, a place of sanctuary for the poor and the weak.¹¹²

While Pugin's depiction of the pre-1834 poor house was, no doubt, another example of the false memory syndrome that afflicted so much thought on all sides of nineteenth-century society, one area where Poor Law administration took a demonstrably harder line after 1834 was in the treatment of the elderly. Furniture, for example, went from being a commodity that could be supplied under the auspices of the Old Poor Law to something that the elderly were having to sell in order to keep themselves out of the workhouse.¹¹³ 'Pensions' to the elderly generally fell from between 2s. 6d. and 3s. to between 1s. and 2s. per week after 1834.¹¹⁴

The phenomena of seasonal admissions to the workhouse offers some pointers to the treatment of the elderly poor in the countryside. Fig. 5.1 graphically demonstrates the leveling-out of the seasonality curve of workhouse admissions between 1851 and 1902. This is reflective less of any putative 'triumph' over seasonal employment trends than a sign that temporarily unemployed labourers were less likely to spend time in the workhouse: indoor relief was increasingly the preserve of those — notably the elderly — who did not come and go. This was particularly true of 'open' parishes in the Aylsham Poor Law Union, whose proportion of over-60s in the workhouse increased from 16.1% to 42.5% of the total workhouse population between 1851 and 1891.¹¹⁵

¹¹² Cited in Driver, Power and Pauperism, p. 61
¹¹³ Snell, Annals, p. 133
¹¹⁴ Snell, Annals, p. 132
Even so, guardians under the New Poor Law were determined that the financial burden of the elderly should fall wherever possible on their children rather than on the ratepayer, and this held good even when the children themselves were approaching old age. George Edwards brought before the 1895 Royal Commission on the Aged Poor – on which Commission sat Joseph Arch – evidence from the Erpingham Union of William and Robert Stokes, aged 57 and 60, jailed for failing to maintain their mother. Edwards reported, too, the case of the Hazelwood brothers, aged 57 and 60, who were accused of failing to maintain their father. Proceedings against the Hazelwoods were briefly suspended by the Erpingham guardians on 8 February 1892 when Hazelwood senior was taken ill, but they resumed with maximum vigour and cynicism on 21 March when it was learnt that the old man had died and that his sons had benefited from a friendly society life insurance policy.

To an extent the Erpingham guardians were following a long tradition in which every last potential saving to the ratepayers was relentlessly pursued: ‘The Man Watson had in his

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116 R. C. on the Aged Poor XIV (1895)
117 N.R.O. C/GP 6/35 Erpingham Poor Law Union Guardians’ Minutes 1891 - 2
possession 5s/10 which he gave to his Daughter the day before he died,' reported the
Master of Aylsham Workhouse to his Board of Guardians in 1851, 'and the Master wish to
know how it should be appropriated.' But much more fundamentally than this, they
were responding with typical ambivalence to the independence that labourers achieved
through their membership of friendly societies. The contradiction ran like a fault-line
through all aspects of managing the poor in the nineteenth century: an absolute insistence
that labourers became more independent went hand-in-hand with a dread that loss of
dependency would inevitably be followed by loss of deference. In 1825 the Rev. Henry
Bathurst had proposed that friendly societies should completely replace the poor laws as
the means of dealing with poverty. By the 1840s, however, membership of friendly
societies was effectively being penalised as guardians began to deduct from relief any
amounts that claimants had previously received in benefits from their clubs.

The tension between independence and over-dependence was by no means an entirely
post-1834 phenomenon. Most observers of the Old Poor Law, too, implied that poor
relief inclined too much towards the ‘dependency culture’. It had ‘led the poor to look
upon the parish as a ready and always available substitute for their own exertions’ wrote
the Rev. Glover of Southrepps in 1817, while to the fury of the Rev. Thomas de Grey
‘the Paupers talk of their Rights and almost tell you that they expect to be maintained in
Idleness by the Parish and bully and extort by threats and importunities money from
the overseers’. Parliamentary committees were told by concerned farmers that the
labourers ‘seem to have lost that independent spirit they formerly had’ and that ‘a race
of people [has been] bred up with no other respect for subsistence than the parish
rates’.

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118. N.R.O. C/GP 1/462 Aylsham Poor Law Union Master’s Report and Journal (1851)
119. Rev. H. Bathurst, Practical Suggestions to Promote Clerical Residence and to Ameliorate the Habits and
Conditions of the Poor (Norwich, 1825)
121. Digby, Pauper Palaces, p. 25
122. Peacock, Bread or Blood, p. 35
1816)
51.
125. Mr. R. Wright (Norwich), evidence to S.C. on Agriculture vol. V (1833).
Throughout the nineteenth century charity provision was also held to be partly responsible for this culture of dependency. Giving a paper to the Pastoral Work Association in 1875 the Rev. Simpkinson of North Creake described how charity—fine in principle—created ‘a community demoralised and pauperised by the gifts they claim or reckon on’. For charity and poor law administrators alike the concern was that assistance, once given, could quickly assume the status of custom and entitlement. The immorality of a dependency culture and the idle arrogance of the poor that characterised their assertive demands for rights and entitlements shadowed and supported, in the minds of many, the wider immorality of their loose-living. The Rev. Peter Skrimshire Wood of Middleton did not pull his punches when it came to expressing his feelings about the morals of his parishioners. Time and again in the baptism registers between 1817 and 1823 the mothers of illegitimate children were described as ‘a whore and a mantrap’, with the unidentified fathers being entered as ‘Tom Town Bull’. To Wood’s church were brought the son of Susan Tanner, born while her husband had been serving abroad in the navy for over a year, and tiny John Sands whose father was his mother’s brother-in-law. Wood’s distaste for handling the offspring of these dubious liaisons is almost palpable, for here was a man who was Dean of the College of the Duke of Gloucester, chaplain to the Lord High Admiral, and egocentric enough to christen his own daughter Congress Vienna Amelia on 14 May 1815, in honour of events elsewhere in Europe.

Wood’s sense of superiority over the tawdriness of parish life must have been well developed, as is testified by his constant altercations with members of his flock—discussed elsewhere in this thesis. Equally contemptuous of the morals of the poor was the Rev. Potter of Scarning who wrote in 1775 that ‘the first thing that strikes us is their insolence and licentiousness, their indecent contempt of subordination, their dissipation and profligacy abroad, their ignorance, irreligion, insensibility and sordid misery in their houses.’ Having gathered into his argument every last Malthusian horror at the prospect of people such as these reproducing too freely, Potter ultimately proclaimed his

125 Rev. J. N. Simpkinson, ‘Parochial Endowed Charities’: paper given to the Pastoral Work Association, Norwich, 2 November 1875
126 N.R.O. MF 594/10 Middleton Baptism Registers 1813–42
127 See especially his legal disputes over tithe, discussed in chapter two.
128 Potter, Observations on the Poor Law.
solution: ‘The House of Industry was calculated for this purpose, and fully answers the design.’

Other observers noted similar symptoms of moral decline, but were prepared to look for broader social causes beyond the intrinsic failings of the poor themselves. These were variously argued to be women’s work, which left them too tired for their home-making duties or rendered them unfit for domestic service, and the moral climate in open parishes where the worst characters tended to gather, and where the laziest, largest families were encouraged to settle ahead of those who were the best workers.

The most acute observers of all noted that the very institutions of the Poor Law were laden with moral danger. If one of the motivations behind the New Poor Law had been a Malthusian quest to restrict early marriage and procreation, the Rev. Ambrose Goode argued that it had backfired badly. Marriage rates had slowed down – labourers were deterred by the awesome financial responsibility it now carried – but procreation had not, and all the law had achieved was an increase in illegitimacy. By the same token, boarding-out pauper children could be risky unless the Guardians were absolutely certain of the moral milieu into which they would be sent. In 1888 Mrs. Fuller, the wife of the rector of Great Ryburgh, wrote to the Guardians of Shoreditch Union to warn them that they were sending their children into a parish with high rates of ‘poaching and other misdemeanours’, and overcrowded cottages where both sexes slept together, and where adultery, fornication and illegitimacy were rife. Another risk was that, in their determination to make the workhouse less eligible, Poor Law administrators were simply

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131 Reports of the Special Assistant Poor Law Commissioners on the Employment of Women and Children in Agriculture (1843), pp. 221-2.
132 Rev. Octavius Mathias (Horsford & St. Faiths), evidence to S. C. on Settlement and Poor Removal (1847), pp. 41 – 2.
133 P.R.O. MH 32/60 Rev. Ambrose Goode (Terrington), handbill, 19 November 1835.

204
driving the poor into crime and other vices. Workhouse admissions were down in 1852, wrote Anthony Blyth of the Docking Union, not because the poor were becoming more prosperous but because they would resort to anything — idleness, beggary, living off friends and neighbours — rather than accept indoor relief.\textsuperscript{135} If he went into the workhouse ‘the virtuous labourer, broken down by some temporary misfortune’ could expect to be herded indiscriminately ‘with the idle and dissolute’.\textsuperscript{136}

The workhouse system, moreover, seemed to offer no vestige of moral reform. Assistant Commissioner Walsham found himself ambushed by a Parliamentary select committee on this very issue in 1862: ‘Are you aware that in the Union of Depwade, out of twenty two young females received into the workhouse during the last ten years, no less than ten have turned out badly; . . . and that in the Union of Forehoe, five out of twenty-two have turned out badly?’\textsuperscript{137} That the workhouse could become a school for scandal was a lesson that had not been learned from the Old Poor Law era. Forty years before Walsham’s grilling in committee, the Rev. Brereton had drawn attention to a sobering statistic: of 313 births in the Mitford and Launditch house between 1795 and 1824, 195 had been illegitimate.\textsuperscript{138}

Official concern about illegitimacy, however, was somewhat undermined by the minimal respect shown to the institution of marriage by those who ran the workhouse. Married couples were frequently separated on arrival, a policy that sparked riots at Rollesby workhouse in 1837 and at St. Faiths in 1846.\textsuperscript{139} It was a policy, moreover, that could have a knock-on effect outside the workhouse. Hester Ferm told the Bawdeswell curate in 1842 that she ascribed ‘her husband’s infidelity to the circumstance of their being kept separate when they were in the workhouse.’\textsuperscript{140} Hester’s husband had fled to a new life and a new marriage in America, one of a number of suggestions in the historical record that

\textsuperscript{135} N.C. 5.6.52.
\textsuperscript{136} Gunn, Remedial Measures, p. 11
\textsuperscript{137} 2\textsuperscript{nd} Report of the S. C. on Poor Relief X (1862), p. 191.
\textsuperscript{138} Brereton, An Inquiry, p. 91
\textsuperscript{139} B.P. 29.3.37; N.R.O. C/GP 15/7 St. Faiths Poor Law Union Guardians’ Minutes, 4 Feb. 1846
\textsuperscript{140} N.R.O. PD 155/35 Bawdeswell curate’s list of parishioners (1842)
emigration was being used as a cover by those who were anxious to escape family commitments at home.

There were sexual scandals, too, of a kind that reveal the workhouse to have been a place far removed from the haven of moral rectitude that wider Victorian society may have expected. Mr. King, for instance, the governor of Gingham workhouse, was dismissed without a reference in 1843 for allowing the house to become a place of ‘pimping’ and ‘adultery’.  

At Depwade in 1840 allegations of sexual misconduct were made by Sarah Sadd against Hardy, the workhouse master. Sadd gave explicit details at the Guardians’ inquiry of sexual assault, attempted intercourse, and physical violence, all taking place at times when the governor’s wife was away from the workhouse. The conduct and outcome of inquiries into poor law scandals demonstrated — if proof were needed — the extent to which paupers were at a disadvantage in any dispute with their ‘managers’. Complaints, like those of the Guiltcross paupers who claimed that the quality of workhouse food was deteriorating, might simply be dismissed as ‘unsubstantiated’. Alternatively, where there was cumulative evidence of mismanagement any investigation could be kept in-house, as was decided by the Mitford and Launditch Guardians when complaints about the workhouse master began to mount up. Even Sir John Walsham’s investigation into abuses of the ticket system had the taint of cover-up, Walsham warning of ‘the political disadvantages which might follow from a vigorous exposure of the system, since some members of the boards of guardians which practiced it had social and political standing.’ And if all these precautions failed and the evidence still leaked out into the public domain, some Poor Law administrators were not above some old-fashioned defamation of character. John Riches, who investigated the alleged death from neglect of an epileptic, Jemima Livock, in the Depwade Union house in 1839, reported that not only had the investigation been conducted in camera and inconvenient witnesses excluded, an unnamed clergyman had accused Riches of bribing the dead woman’s husband in order that his evidence should be as damaging as possible. ‘I am sorry that in this inquiry the

141 Digby, Pauper Palaces, p. 80; N.R.O. C/GP 6/4 Erpingham Poor Law Guardians’ Minutes 9 & 16 Jan. 1843
142 N.R.O. C/GP 10/11 Guiltcross Poor Law Union Guardians’ Minutes, 22 April 1850
143 N.R.O. C/GP 14/25 Mitford & Launditch Poor Law Union Guardians’ Minutes, 6 March 1875
144 Digby, ‘The Labour Market’, p. 75
character of the poor old man should have been attacked,' wrote Riches, ‘... and I pity those who... can neither believe that compassion can exist for a poor man, or that a poor man can attempt to redress [a] wrong without being paid for it.'145

To many in authority most paupers’ very presence in the workhouse was a simple measure of their moral degeneracy. When, in 1897, an inmate of the Gressenhall house made a complaint over comments made to him by a porter he received short shrift from the chairman of the Guardians. The porter, responding to the pauper’s grievance about food quality, had allegedly said, ‘Don’t you feel ashamed of yourself. I should think anything is good enough for you. I should like to give you a good sticking.’ Confronted by the porter’s comments the chairman of Guardians was unequivocal: ‘I quite agree with what has been said. It is a disgrace for you to be an inmate of the House at your age and with your strength. You ought to be earning your own living.’146

Part of the quest of poor law – and, to an extent, charity – administration was to challenge and change the moral code of paupers like these. ‘Moral management’ of the poor could either be ‘inclusive’ in nature – by rewarding good behaviour – or ‘exclusive’, by punishing behaviour that was inappropriate. Picto’s Charity at Buxton, for instance, specifically excluded ‘notorious ill-livers... women with bastard children, Drunkards’,147 and some charities became increasingly targeted towards Anglican recipients as Nonconformity took hold.148 The account books of Thomas Bulwer’s Charity at Hackford, which survive from 1845 to 1908, give clear indications of the ways in which this type of social management was continuous, with the behaviour of recipients falling under constant scrutiny: ‘The name of Jno. English jnr. Was removed from the list [in 1865] on a/c of his disreputable conduct during the last year.’149 There was also widespread use of charity funding to reward those who were not claiming poor relief, an

146 Reid, The Union Workhouse, p. 80
147 N.R.O. PD 160/66 Picto’s Charity, Buxton (1878)
148 Knight, Nineteenth Century Church, p. 202
149 N.R.O. PD 441/28 Thomas Bulwer’s Charity, Hackford (Reepham), 1865
application of funds that always ran the risk of becoming the augmentation of poor relief from charitable trusts.

Many of the ‘exclusive’ or punitive methods of moral management were targeted at the perennial betes-noir of the parish ratepayer, the unmarried mother and her child, born or unborn. Some of the sanctions against unmarried mothers seem, at first sight, to be petty in the extreme. The Swaffham Guardians, for instance, laid plans for the inmates’ Coronation Dinner in June 1838 and decreed that ‘the women with illegitimate children do have their dinner in their own room and that the other Inmates do have their dinner on the Workhouse Green’. The social significance of these communal gatherings is considered in Chapter One. Exclusion from them was not, in fact, trivial, but made a loud statement about who ‘belonged’ to the community and who was beyond its pale.

Commentators like Rider Haggard described the gulf in understanding that had developed between the ‘managed poor’ and their managers. Guardians, he thought, were becoming immune to the plight of the people in their care, inured by listening ‘fortnight by fortnight to the tales of utter poverty and woe poured out [to them].’ Consequently there was a diminished sense of engagement and empathy. When the Poor Law Inspector criticised the Mitford and Launditch Guardians for not issuing their paupers with pocket-handkerchiefs, the response of one of them, the Rev. H. Collison, was, ‘What’s the use of that if they don’t know what to do with them?’

As early as 1827 Brereton had recognised that the workhouse system was part of a poor law edifice that criminalised the poor and made them, moreover, moral criminals. This was despite the fact that whenever trouble was taken to consider the poor as individuals rather than as a class – as the Bawdeswell curate did in 1842 – they stood up to scrutiny as, for the most part, honest, decent and hard-working. The moral hazards faced by many of them were those imposed by authority, especially the dismantling of families as a

150 N.R.O. C/GP 16/2 Swaffham Poor Law Union Guardians’ Minutes, 18 June 1838
151 Rider Haggard, Farmer’s Year (1899), cited in Reid, The Union Workhouse, p. 78
152 Reid, The Union Workhouse, p. 80
153 Brereton, Subordinate Magistracy, p. 75
result of separation in the workhouse or penal transportation. The Poor Law obsession with classifying paupers – the means by which their individual identities might most readily be obscured - reached such levels of refinement that, in 1861, 63 women in the Gressenhall workhouse could be categorised into 20 ‘types’. Whatever the administrative benefits of this regime, its physical application, in keeping pauper classes and types apart, did untold damage to family life. Parents, for example, were restricted to one weekly meeting once their children reached the age of seven, and wider implications in terms of marital desertion have been noted elsewhere in this chapter. Snell has described how a number of ‘insane’ paupers were actually raving about the spouses and children they could no longer see. What makes the policy especially difficult to comprehend is that it existed in a climate where, generally, family life was considered an icon of the Victorian ideal.

Respect should be earned by the clergy, not expected as of right, was one theme of Brereton’s *Subordinate Magistracy* in 1827. One hundred years later the theme was taken up by the Rev. Marcon: ‘We parsons have no right to expect our people to be moral, unless we see, as far as we can see, that their conditions conduce to that end in the same way as our own do’. These were materialist readings of the situation, broad-minded as far as they went but ultimately failing to appreciate how it was moral and cultural imperialism that was souring the atmosphere between the givers and receivers of aid. The workhouse timetable, rigidly compartmentalising the pauper’s day, and the workhouse building itself, often rising on the common land that the poor had regarded as their own, were the visible symbols of a changed and deteriorating relationship. Without an understanding of this the management of the poor often remained a mystery to those doing the managing. Some simply marvelled at the fact that things were not much worse. ‘It is astonishing how the poor continue to live’, wrote Armstrong in

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154 N.R.O. PD 155/35 Curate’s list, Bawdeswell (1842)
155 Reid, *The Union Workhouse*, p. 65
156 Digby, *Pauper Palaces*, p. 156
157 Snell, *Annals*, p. 134
158 Brereton, ‘*Subordinate Magistracy*’, p. 138
159 Marcon, ‘*Reminiscences*’, p. 20
160 Reid, *The Union Workhouse*, p. 49
161 Birtles, ‘*Common Land*’, p. 87
As another clergyman put it, 'I only wonder that our agricultural poor are as moral as they are.'

Managing Behaviour

If poor law and charity administration was, in part, to do with the ‘moral management’ of the poor, its role as an instrument of social discipline and, consequently, in the development of class as opposed to local consciousness should not be overlooked. The threads of this can be traced firstly by an appraisal of the socially manipulative and disciplinary measures that were being deployed; secondly by considering the impact that this had on senses of identity and belonging among the poor; and thirdly by studying the reactions of those being managed. It is as well to remember that in the years immediately preceding 1834 Norfolk administrators were actually reverting to a parochial system of poor relief, having become disillusioned with an eighteenth-century system that was felt to have leant too heavily in favour of the poor and to have done nothing to reduce poor rates. With this context in mind it is reasonable to suppose that the administrators of the New Poor Law sought to ensure that the same mistakes were not repeated. Particularly concerned were those proprietors of ‘close’ parishes who had achieved efficient and cheap methods of poor relief within their own confined boundaries.

Table 5.4: Parish-type incumbencies of clergy-guardians, Norfolk 1834 – 1900, based on a sample of 255 clergy names

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No. of clergy-guardians</th>
<th>From ‘close’ parishes</th>
<th>From ‘semi-close’ parishes</th>
<th>From ‘semi-open parishes’</th>
<th>From ‘open’ parishes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>% of clergy-guardians</td>
<td>61.3</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>14.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of clergy-guardians</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SOURCE: Poor Law Union Guardians’ Minute Books, all Unions, Norfolk 1834 – 1900

162 Armstrong, Norfolk Diary, p. 26 (26 Nov., 1854)
164 Digby, Pauper Palaces, pp. 47 - 8
Here, as Table 5.4 suggests, the local clergyman came into his own. Working from a list of 255 clergy-guardians, taken from guardians’ minute books spanning the post-1834 period, the parishes they served can be identified in 80 cases. Of these no fewer than 64 (80.1%) were parishes of the ‘close’ or ‘semi-close’ type. Again the notion of the clergyman as ‘colonial governor’ suggests itself: men who acted as the agents of a landowning gentry who chose not to involve themselves too visibly in the management of the poor.

Underpinning the various techniques of managing the poor was a belief that they were an essential economic lubricant and that the only real issue facing managers was that poverty should not be allowed to become destitution. ‘Our domestic safety and comfort, our private wealth and prosperity, our national riches, strength and glory, are greatly dependent upon an industrious and well order’d Poor’, wrote the Rev. Potter in 1775, expressing a view that, even sixty years later, was fully endorsed by some of his fellow clergy: ‘Poverty is indispensable in society’, wrote the Rev. William Gunn in 1834, for example, ‘... it is the lot of man, it is the source of wealth, since without poverty there could be no labour, and without labour there could be no national prosperity’. It was opinions such as these – complacent, unchanging, atrophied – that so inflamed activists like the Chartists and entrenched them ever more firmly in their anti-clericalism. ‘Do not tell us that Divine Providence has placed us in this wretched situation,’ said one pamphlet in 1838, ‘while we know that it is the base and wicked laws made by base and wicked men. Do not show us the rough and thorny way to Heaven, while you yourself the primrose path of dalliance tread’. The Chartists understood that the views expressed by Potter, Gunn and many others were antithetical to any notion of betterment among the poor, and were being used both as justification and explanation for the plight of the labouring classes.

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165 Potter, Observations on the Poor Laws, p. 1
166 Gunn, Remedial Measures, p. 8
167 N.S.L. N320.53 G. Chaney, Research notes on Norwich Radicalism
As his pamphlet went on to make clear, it was Gunn’s contention that good treatment served to strengthen the ties of subordination. Benjamin Armstrong was still being accused of this in 1878: ‘Mr. Potter said that the object of the vicar in opposing the almshouses was a love of power on his part in keeping the poor under his thumb by continuing the money payment which would have ceased had the almshouses been erected.’ Instances of charity being dispensed as a reward for good behaviour are legion throughout the period – the Rev. Frere’s blanket dole at Ilketshall, for instance, was a direct acknowledgement of his parishioners’ non-involvement in the ‘Swing’ riots – and charity could be as readily withdrawn in places where behaviour did not meet expectations. Just as a Gimingham choirboy had his Christmas box withheld because his father was a trade unionist, and a woman was removed from a clothing club because her husband was a Primitive Methodist, so the ‘Ryston choir dress dispute’ of 1876 revealed itself to be a farrago of conflicting motives, in which the interests of the choirgirls’ parents centred on the acquisition of a free dress that their daughters could keep, and the interests of the vicar’s wife centred on the imposition of standards of behaviour in church. The actual business of providing church music in Ryston was relegated to secondary and even tertiary importance.

Behavioural management of the poor brought into question, too, old senses of identity and belonging. Awareness of this was expressed in a pamphlet of 1775, whose anonymous author observed that the House of Industry separated the poor man ‘from his home, his family, his children, from every connection that helps to cheer or soften life’. Indeed it might be said that many of the tensions associated with managing the poor in the nineteenth century stemmed from attempts by officialdom to break down popular notions of identity and belonging, even when – as in the case of settlement legislation – these notions owed their origins to legal and ‘official’ constructs.

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168 Armstrong, Norfolk Diary, p. 216 (Apr. 24, 1878)
169 N.C. 1.1.31
171 N.Y. 1.1.31
172 N.R.O. PRA 449, 380 x 2 Ryston choir dress dispute (1876)
173 N.R.O. FEL 813, 555 x 8: Anon, Considerations on the Poor Laws, on the Present State of the Poor and on Houses of Industry (London, 1775)
In itself parochial settlement was increasingly being seen as an anachronism by some nineteenth-century observers, but in a way that revealed an ambiguity at the heart of this method of dealing with the poor: an impatience with the static labourer, ‘attached to the soil’ of his home parish and showing no inclination to move with the work, that co-existed with a paranoia about vagrancy and uncontrolled movement. Voices were raised against the law of settlement throughout the nineteenth century: by the Rev. Glover of Southrepps in 1817; by the Rev. Wood of Middleton in 1828; by the Rev. Mathias in 1847; by the Thetford and the Loddon & Clavering Guardians in 1850; and by the Wayland Guardians in 1851. All called for some form of Union or national settlement, although it was only the Docking Union, in 1847, that took advantage of a permissive clause in the Poor Law Amendment Act and moved to a system of Union rating and settlement that presaged the Union Chargeability Act of 1865. In the meantime the 1846 Poor Removal Act was held by many to have exacerbated the problem: ‘irremoveability’ was technically distinct from ‘settlement’ but, as the Rev. Edward Postle of the Loddon and Clavering Union put it, ‘an absolute premium is offered to individuals to rid their parishes of burdens then and thereafter by pulling down cottages.

Evidence suggests that charity was another means by which conservative working-class notions of ‘belonging’ and identity were bolstered. Paradoxically, causes that might otherwise be thought of as radical worked hard to maintain them. By 1870 the administrators of Bulwer’s Charity in Hackford, for instance, were taking steps to mirror changes in settlement legislation and ‘not [to] limit the benefits of this Charity to persons

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Wood: Rev. P. S. Wood, Outline of a Plan for the Melioration of the Lower Orders By a Measure for Putting an End to the Law of Settlement (Downham Market, 1828)
Mathias: evidence to S.C. on Settlement and Poor Removal, XI (1847)
Thetford: Report of the Poor Law Board on the Laws of Settlement and Removal of the Poor XXXVII (1850)
Loddon & Clavering: same source as Thetford
175 Digby, Pauper Palaces, p. 7
176 Digby, Pauper Palaces, p. 91
who belong to this parish'. Among recipients, however, this was a recipe for resentment. One of the specific complaints voiced by the trade union newspaper *The English Labourer* against the maladministration of Wood Norton’s parish charity was that it was being given ‘indiscriminately to persons who have not been three years resident in the parish’. Charities were often thought to have a detrimental effect by those who looked for more dynamism in the workforce - coal doles, argued the Rev. Hastings Parker of Saham Toney, ‘operate in the way of making people cling to the parish’ – and at Wood Norton, it seems, charities served to reinforce parochial (rather than class) senses of identity.

Nineteenth-century notions of identity among rural communities fell on the cusp of change between the centuries old ‘mental maps’ that had been reinforced by generations of parish perambulations, and the post-enclosure, post-New Poor Law world where both visible and social landscapes had radically altered (Plate 17). On 6 June 1794 the Rev. Sutton and the parishioners of Alburgh set off on their perambulation, and recorded their progress along the ‘procession way’ from ‘great oak’ to ‘pollard elm’ in a way that had probably changed little in the preceding 800 years. Seven years later, however, Alburgh was enclosed and an ancient tradition became redundant. What often happened in cases like this was that the ‘mental map’ lingered on as a folk-memory of belonging. This was an awareness of identity that not even death could conquer, but one that was nevertheless under constant threat from the machinations of the state: the Anatomy Act of 1832, for instance, or the practice of burying paupers in the parish churchyard local to the Union workhouse. The Rev. Pulleyne at Sheringham and the Rev. Kellett at Kenninghall both had cause to complain about the use of their churchyards for this purpose, although in each case their particular irritation centred on the additional workload caused and the minimal fees received. The central sadness underlying the

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177 N.R.O. PD 441/28 Thomas Bulwer’s Charity Trustees Book, Hackford (Reepham) 1845 - 1908
180 N.R.O. PD 196/82 Beating the bounds of Alburgh (1794)
182 P.R.O. MH 12/8394 Guiltcross P.L.U. Guardians to Poor Law Commission, 15 May 1837
policy was appreciated by Rider Haggard when he surveyed the rows of unmarked graves beside the Heckingham workhouse. They were a symbol of the way in which the New Poor Law removed paupers from their communities and all that they knew and understood, not just for a lifetime but in some cases for an eternity.

An Old Poor Law that had been generous to its settled population, offering levels of care that turned parishes into ‘miniature welfare states’, had left its labouring poor with a keen sense of ‘insiders’ and ‘outsiders’. This sense was prevalent in inter-parish rivalries, and found expression in sporting contests, mutual derision, physical violence, and entrenched endogamy. Such concentrated notions of identity might even become intra-parochial, as happened in Coltishall where ‘uptowners’ and ‘downtowners’ – their territories divided by the parish church – fought ‘pitched battles along Church Street, fighting with sticks, throwing stones, vandalising property and striking boys who did not belong to their number’. Senses of belonging like these allowed no room for the development of class consciousness. The major working-class movements that briefly threatened established authority during the nineteenth century were all ones that transcended the boundaries of the Anglican parish: religious Nonconformity; agricultural trade unionism; Captain Swing. More usual was a sense of identity that owed its origins to the gulf that had historically separated the settled core of a parish from its outsiders: more typical, therefore, were the actions of the men of Shimpling who attacked a threshing-machine when, and only when, it crossed their parish boundary, or the trade union members who fragmented the Norfolk Federal Union along localist lines in the 1890s.

Senses of parochial identity thus proved themselves to be more resilient in the minds of the managed poor than in those of their managers. The Rev. Brereton expressed despair that magisterial control of the Old Poor Law had broken the golden rule that no

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183 Rider Haggard, Farmer’s Year, p. 428
184 Snell, Annals, p. 107
188 Howkins, Poor Labouring Men, pp. 78 – 9.
clergyman should interfere 'beyond the boundary of his own perambulation'. And chief among the many irritations felt by the Rev. Dixon Hoste when three of his parishioners consulted the distant, liberal figure of Lord Suffield was that Suffield had breached the convention that 'no magistrate, let his station be ever so eminent, has any right to dictate or direct the proceedings of other magistrates out of his own district'. These were concerns that the New Poor Law eventually made redundant. The new system did away with some of the old hegemonies – of magistrates, of clergymen, of landowners – and replaced them with new authority networks predicated upon an ability to share power across old boundaries.

As Bushaway has argued, 'the discontinuance of the parish bounds walk was designed to wipe popular memory so that rights and customs associated with open fields and commons before enclosure would be forgotten or could only be recollected in a hazy and, therefore, legally indefensible way'. Sometimes quasi-perambulations took their place, as with the tour of inspection carried out by the Trustees of East Ruston Common on pre-specified dates to ensure that rights of peat-digging, gravel-extraction and rush-cutting were not being abused. But perhaps it was in the phenomenon of the 'march' that the age-old principle of perambulation lingered on: perhaps in the march of the unemployed men on the residence of the Rev. Hare at Docking; perhaps in the march to the church door of disgruntled charity recipients in Little Walsingham; perhaps in the march on the parish vestry at Shouldham; some ghostly echo remained of a time when collective 'marching' meant something and had been understood as an expression of identity and belonging.

189 Brereton, Subordinate Magistracy, p. 22(n.)
189 N.R.O. GTN/18/1 Rev. Dixon Hoste (Tittleshall) to Suffield, 13 Nov. 1824
194 N.C. 5.6.52
195 N.N. 4.1.68
196 N.R.O. PD 356/125 Shouldham churchwardens dispute (1872)
The New Poor Law might justifiably be described as ‘a disciplinary measure as much as an attempt to remedy poverty’, but it should be remembered that in this respect it did not differ so very greatly from its predecessor. In 1821 Lord Clermont wrote to his neighbour Lord Walsingham, pointing out that the best way to stamp out poaching on their respective estates would be for them to collaborate in building a workhouse. ‘The public peace can be assured only by the due subordination of the various classes of society’, wrote James Kay in 1836, and here the workhouse played its part – both before and after 1834 – by acting as an unofficial branch of the prison service. In this incestuous regime wrongdoers might bounce between workhouse disciplinary boards and magistrates who were themselves Poor Law guardians.

It was George Edwards who said ‘the working people as a rule look upon the workhouse as a prison’, an attitude that can be better understood by considering the descriptions of punishment wards and humiliating body-searches for incomers. Discipline often followed military principles. This was partly because New Poor Law relieving officers were frequently ex-military men, hand-picked for their unflinching determination under ‘fire’ and their willingness to be, as Edwards put it, complete bullies. In other circumstances, however, the military connotation was much more serious. This was an atmosphere in which the Depwade Union house at Pulham had to be built with loopholes for musketry. Opposition to methods of managing the poor was regarded, not as social comment or political opinion, but as outright sedition, a lesson brought sharply home to the Rev. Ambrose Goode of Terrington when he published an anti-Poor Law handbill in 1835. ‘Men must live’, he wrote, ‘ - they have a right to live by labour at home and if the legislature will not find the means the little strife now begun, no bigger than a man’s

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197 Snell, Annals, p. 121
199 Poor Law Commission, 2nd Annual Report (1836)
200 For instance, Poor Law rioters at Kirby Bedon in 1837 and Pulham in 1847 appeared respectively before John Gordon and the Rev. John Fellowes and William Gwynn and the Rev. Thomas Howes, all of whom were Poor Law guardians. N.C. 25.2.37; N.C. 2.1.47
201 cited in Digby, Pauper Palaces, p. 143
202 N.R.O. C/GP 1/462 Aylsham P.L.U. Master’s Report and Journal (1851), especially weeks 8 and 44
203 Edwards’ epithet was aimed specifically at Wright, a relieving officer of the Aylsham Union, made during evidence to the R.C. on the Aged Poor X (1895), p. 348.
204 Rider Haggard, Farmer’s Year, p. 432
hand, will become a torrent, which neither art nor force can control. The voice of the people is sometimes an angry surge. Unheeded it becomes a record of blood. Goode's words provoked fury in government and a prosecution for seditious libel was threatened. The threat was clearly taken seriously by Goode. Thoroughly alarmed he stopped publication of the handbill and over tea at the Rectory expressed his contrition to the Poor Law commissioner Sir Edward Parry. 'If we have not made a friend', reported Parry with some satisfaction, 'we have, I feel confident, disarmed an enemy.'

Less open to this form of conflict resolution were, of course, the labouring poor themselves. 'We [have not met] with one labourer that is content with the administration of the new poor law', said the *Norfolk Chronicle* in 1844, highlighting the perceptual gulf that was opening between the poor and those of their employers and managers who were celebrating the New Poor Law as an economic and moral breakthrough. It has been argued that dissatisfaction with the New Poor Law was the running theme that differentiated nineteenth-century unrest from the bread riots of preceding decades, and there can be no doubt about the willingness of its 'victims' to take direct action. Archer lists 38 major Poor Law disturbances in Norfolk between 1830 and 1858, a tally which must barely skim the surface of this boiling tide of resentment. Contemporary opinion was divided on the linkage between Poor Law administration and social unrest. One of the most controversial exponents of a connection was the *Times* journalist Thomas Campbell Foster who, in a series of articles in 1844, not only claimed to have found an explicit link, but identified, too, the targets of unrest and arson as Poor Law guardians. Foster's thesis can be tested in a Norfolk context by checking the names of 'targets' in 1843—4 against the names of guardians in Union Minute Books. Although it should be borne in mind that only the names of current (and not past) guardians are revealed in this way, the result - 24 out of 67 targets were serving guardians - seems low given the

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206 P.R.O. MH 32/60 Sir Edward Parry to Poor Law Commission, 12 Dec. 1835.
207 N.C. 12.10.44
208 Digby, *Pauper Palaces*, p. 217
209 J. Archer, 'Rural Protest in Norfolk and Suffolk 1830 – 1870' (unpub. PhD, University of East Anglia, 1982)
210 *The Times* 7.6.44 to 10.7.44. See especially 28.6.44
axiomatic linkages between arson and farms and between farmers and guardianships. Nevertheless, Foster's essential point - that the law was being targeted rather than any individual - is unaffected by this analysis.

This was a period when any visible symbol of poor law management was liable to be attacked. Most visible of all were the buildings themselves, and instances in the workhouse of arson and riot were legion, but relieving officers, too, were especially vulnerable. Timothy Morrell, a relieving officer attacked in Cromer, was by no means uniquely unlucky. In October 1835 William Holt at Saham Toney and in June 1836 John Cunningham at Flordon were seriously assaulted and almost killed as they went about their business. The assault on Timothy Morrell occurred a week after Erpingham Guardians had discussed increased expenditure on police to support the introduction of New Poor Law measures, and the attempted murder of John Cunningham at Flordon occurred one week before Henstead guardians finalised their plans to build a workhouse. Here, and elsewhere, New Poor Law implementation was the direct cause of heightened tension. Labourers 'armed with sticks, bludgeons &c.' surrounded the magistrates' meeting at Hillington where a discussion on the New Poor Law was taking place, and the guardians of Guiltcross Union found themselves besieged in the White Horse at Kenninghall when they met to discuss the same thing.

A fuller understanding of the context of these disturbances may be gained by studying the timetable of events at Grimston (Fig. 5.2), where guardians had been similarly besieged by an angry mob when they met in the village schoolroom in February 1836.

211 Examples include: Tivetshall 1831 (N.C. 15.1.31); Heckingham 1833 (N.C. 18.1.33); Walsingham 1835 (Digby, 'The Operation of the Poor Law' p. 172); Heckingham 1836 (B.P. 27.2.36); Rollesby 1837 (B.P. 29.3.37); Swainsthorpe 1847 (N.M. 9.1.47); Norwich 1848 (N.S.L. N320.53); Depwade 1851 (N.R.O. CGP 3/7); Depwade 1853 (N.C. 15.1.53);
212 N.C. 27.36.
213 Holt: N.R.O. C/GP 6/1 Swaffham P.L.U. Guardians' Minutes 10 October 1835; Cunningham: N.C. 18.6.36
214 N.R.O. C/GP 6/1 Erpingham P.L.U. Guardians' Minutes 31 May 1836 & 7 June 1836
215 N.R.O. C/GP 11/1 Henstead P.L.U. Guardians' Minutes 15 June 1836 & 22 June 1836
216 N.C. 11.10.34
217 N.C. 12.3.36
### Fig. 5.2: Timetable of events associated with Grimston Poor Law riot, 5 February 1836

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8 January 1836</td>
<td>Relieving officer Burrell given his parish visiting schedule.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 January 1836</td>
<td>No relief to be paid for surplus labourers beyond 22 January. Committee formed to decide on alternative action.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19 January 1836</td>
<td>Committee recommend superintendent to be appointed to find work for surplus labourers. Farmers to be obliged to accept quotas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22 January 1836</td>
<td>Relieving officer Burrell reprimanded for helping a pauper with 6d. out of his own pocket. Offer of land received for new workhouse.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29 January 1836</td>
<td>Relieving officer Burrell resigns 'on account of a nervous disability which renders him unable to attend to his duty'.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 February 1836</td>
<td>Workhouse plans accepted. Burrell's post offered to Mr. Platt. He rejects it. Mr. Pickerell eventually appointed. Riot takes place while meeting in progress. Police officers requested from Home Secretary.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 February 1836</td>
<td>Request for police officers to stay, financed out of parish rates. Prosecution of rioters takes place at Walsingham. Police officers to accompany relieving officers on their rounds. Local police also drafted in; their expenses to be paid by Union.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 February 1836</td>
<td>Costs of prosecuting rioters paid by Union.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26 February 1836</td>
<td>London police expenses paid by Union.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**SOURCE:** N.R.O. C/GP 9/1 Grimston P.L.U. Guardians’ Minutes 1835 – 37
The timetable reveals how the new regime may have begun to make its presence felt in the local community: a gradual tightening of out-relief; the ‘constructive dismissal’ of a sympathetic relieving officer; plans to build a new workhouse; police officers brought into the area to apprehend troublemakers and to protect the relieving officers on their rounds.218

Disturbances were also experienced throughout the nineteenth-century in relation to ongoing enclosure, particularly where commons were being replaced with inadequate poor’s allotments. Thompson has described enclosure as ‘a plain enough case of class robbery’,219 and once again the clerical interest assumed a prominent and apparently antagonistic role. When, for instance, the Rev. Richard Phayre sat on the bench that convicted protestors for tearing down fences erected on Fakenham Heath by the Rev. James Lee-Warner he was all too evidently a clerical magistrate working in support of a clerical encloser.220

A central problem with the enclosure of commons was that compensation, where given, frequently recognised only the poor’s need for fuel. This was a wanton denial of the fact that commons had a cultural and amenity value that extended way beyond their purely functional and economic utility. It could be argued that in many cases the poor themselves did not realise this until it was too late. The Ashill enclosure letter received by the Rev. Bartholomew Edwards, for instance, was written thirty years after Ashill’s Enclosure Award,221 and it is notable that many of the high-profile nineteenth-century enclosure protests took place in the 1870s and later, when the damage done in other places could clearly be seen and when the labouring poor – through Methodism and Trade Unionism – had established some of the mechanisms of organised protest. Earlier than this, however, in 1844, the villagers of Snettisham marched onto the common and

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218 The Fig. 5.2 ‘Timetable’ has been compiled from detailed study of N.R.O. C/GP 9/1 Freebridge Lynn P.L.U. Guardians’ Minutes 24 December 1835 to 26 February 1836. The riot took place on 5 February 1836.
220 N.C. 16.7.70
221 P.R.O. HO 42/150 Rev. B. Edwards to Viscount Sidmouth (Home Secretary), 22 May 1816.
chopped down trees planted in 1800, and the long-running Holt Lows dispute originated in 1856 when the poor attempted to re-assert their traditional rights over lands that had been enclosed in 1810.

Hard to escape is the sense that disputes over commons enclosure were occurring at the very interface between written, legalistic definitions of land-ownership and customary, traditional understandings of land-use. This idea is explored more fully in Chapter Six, but in the context of ‘managing the poor’ it is worth noting how often protests were being made in traditional, even ritualistic ways. At Syderstone the villagers followed the plough ‘in a body’ across former waste and ‘quietly turned the sod back again’; at Marham the meeting of Commissioners discussing the drainage of the fen was disturbed by ‘as many as between 100 and 200 females, armed with frying pans and tin-boilers’; the unemployed march at Docking was accompanied by ‘a body of twelve or fourteen labourers who were parading the parish . . . [with] instruments of music’; and even the assault on the relieving officer at Cromer took place amid ‘considerable shouting and hallooing and a little dancing on the part of the women’. In these cases, at least, attempts to manage behaviour by economic means can be said to have backfired.

Conclusion

Thomas Campbell Foster’s conclusion that the terms of the New Poor Law were so iniquitous and harsh that many were choosing to take their chance with a life of crime had been anticipated by the Rev. Brereton who, in an Old Poor Law context, traced ‘our

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222 N.M. 25.5.44
223 The Holt Lows dispute was covered predominantly in the following editions of the Norfolk News: N.N. 8.3.56; N.N. 29.3.56; N.N. 29.11.56; N.N. 6.12.56; N.N. 13.12.56; N.N. 16.12.57; N.N. 7.2.57; N.N. 7.3.57; N.N. 27.1.66; N.N. 11.8.66. It is discussed further in Chapter Six.
224 N.N. 15.2.51
225 N.N. 6.3.69
226 N.C. 5.6.52
227 N.C. 2.7.36
228 D. Jones, ‘Thomas Campbell Foster and the rural labourer: Incendiaryism in East Anglia in the 1840s’, Social History, 1 (1976), pp. 33 - 4
national calamities. . . pauperism and crime to their springhead, the poisonous . . .
execution of the poor laws. 229 Foster actually identified a mere 12 clergymen among the
250 targets of incendiarism in Norfolk and Suffolk in 1843/4,230 but the culpability of the
clergy in the popular imagination was proportionately much greater. They were central to
a process that had unravelled an unspoken social compact: one that accepted the poor’s
customary rights in relation to charity, poor relief and common land ‘in return for their
compliance with the social order’.231 The destruction of this compact cannot be laid
entirely at the door of the Poor Law Amendment Act, for although it was clearly an Act
of seminal importance to social relations in the countryside, the process of change was an
organic one, set in train long before and continuing long after 1834.

Growing antagonism associated with management of the poor was strikingly present in
the era of agricultural trade unionism. Not only were the times of vestry meetings
challenged so that working people might attend,232 it became apparent that the challenge
itself was often based on a demand to scrutinise and influence the administration of local
charities. Most of these challenges were defeated, seen off with a shameless invocation of
‘custom’ on the part of the clergyman (vestry meetings had always finished at 7 p.m. and
would continue to do so ‘according to practice’233) but, as was the case at Shouldham,
they could become conflated and confused with other outstanding local grievances until,
ultimately, the whole issue descended into low farce.234 In Shouldham, where the parish
poor had had to contribute towards the costs of enclosure and fen drainage,235 and where
the labourers had demonstrated sufficient organisation and militancy to strike in 1853,236
a dispute about management of the poor’s land led many to question whether the Rev.

229 Brereton, Subordinate Magistracy, p. 26
230 Jones, ‘Thomas Campbell Foster’, p. 15
231 A. Howkins, ‘Politics or Quietism: The Social History of Nonconformity’ in N. Virgoe & T. Williamson
(eds.), Religious Dissent in East Anglia (Norwich, 1993), p. 77
232 e.g. N.R.O. PD 100/89 (Diss 1877). Howkins, Poor Labouring Men, p. 50 (East Dereham 1875 & 1877)
and N. Scotland, Methodism and the Revolt of the Field: A Study of the Methodist Contribution to Trade
Unionism in East Anglia 1872 – 1896 (Stroud, 1981), passim, provide many more examples of vestry
challenges in the 1870s.
233 Howkins, Poor Labouring Men, p. 51
234 The summary of the Shouldham vestry dispute (1869 – 72) has been compiled from the following
356/136; N.R.O. PD356/147; N.R.O. PD 356/148
235 Whitfield, ‘Change and Continuity’, p. 111
236 N.N. 2.4.53
William Allen – as perpetual curate rather than incumbent – had any right to elect a churchwarden at all. Allen kept a diary of the whole saga, and chronicled a tale of a congregation divided against itself: of two rival sextons competing with each other to dig graves and to lead the singing in church; and of a clergyman, locked out of his church by the 'unofficial' sexton, having to get ladders and climb through the belfry window in order to ring the church bells on Christmas Eve. It was obvious to Allen that the 'unofficial' sexton, Mr. Malby, was no more than a stooge. When he passed Malby in the village one day, Allen ‘called him back and said that I hoped he would not regard it as a personal matter between us, that I knew he was only doing as he was told. He then shook hands with me and went home’.

This perception that the labouring class could not muster the necessary anger, wit and intelligence to mount a campaign against their social superiors without some kind of outside help was a running theme of nineteenth-century perceptions of unrest in the countryside. The Marham fen enclosure dispute, it was felt by some, ‘was attributable in some measure to parties having no connection with Marham, but who had . . . an interest in keeping up the agitation’; and when a Mr. Woodget wrote to the local press in 1912, complaining about the misdirection of charity-land funds towards repairing Burnham Overy church, the response of the Rev. Kynaston was to ask ‘who is writing these letters? Some educated person is, in my opinion doing so. But it might be well to try and find out who it is. Woodget could not write such a letter himself, I am sure’.

A single line from Scotland’s essay on agricultural trade unionism in Norfolk demonstrates how attitudes to poor management were beginning to fracture along political and religious faultlines. Discussing the Diss vestry dispute of 1877, Scotland writes: ‘John Wingfield, a local Primitive Methodist preacher and the district secretary of

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237 The parishioners were flexing their muscles for the first time under the provisions of the Poor Rate Assessment & Collection Act (1869) which gave every occupier a right to vote in the election of parish officers.
238 N.R.O. PD 356/148
239 N.R.O. PD 356/148
240 N.R.O. PD 572/54 Burnham Overy charity lands dispute. Rev. E. Kynaston (former incumbent) to Rev. Briscoe (curate), 14 May 1912

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the union, together with others, started to question the rector, the Rev. C. R. Manning, and the wardens [about] their handling of the charities. This political division is seen clearly, too, in the implementation of a stringent workhouse test in the Downham and Wayland Unions against anybody who paid subscriptions to a Trade Union. ‘Here the Guardians relieve no man who belongs to the Union – but order them into the house’, wrote Sir William Bagge of Stradsett Hall to Lord Walsingham. Four days previously Lord Walsingham, putting in a rare appearance at an unusually packed meeting of the Wayland guardians, had proposed ‘That this Board desiring to express their disapproval of a system which interferes with the proper relations between employer and employed are of opinion that the workhouse test should first be used in all cases of application for Relief from members of an Agricultural Union . . . as those who subscribe to its funds cannot be considered destitute’. The fact that Walsingham’s motion was opposed by two clergymen, the Rev. Bird and the Rev. Partridge, who put forward the counter-proposal (overwhelmingly defeated) that ‘it is not politic to use our position as guardians as a means of depriving [union members] of the usual relief’ would have counted for little among the labourers. In the first place the proceedings were never published, and, in any case, the die was cast: the clergy were so heavily implicated in generations of vindictive acts and laws that such incidental details would have meant nothing to those affected by the ruling.

Howkins rightly argues that a central figure in the popular culture of the poor was ‘the parson who cared more for his tithes and his port, who lived in an Oxbridge college while drawing the stipend from two or three parishes and who appeared to sit on the bench or the Board of Guardians to “oppress the poor and needy”’. But this was only half the story for if, as Edward Gibbon Wakefield claimed in 1831, ‘there is a way of relieving a man’s necessities which will make him hate you’, even the most diligent and hardworking resident clergyman could expect to feel the contempt of his parish at some time in his career. In fact it was this kind of high-profile interventionism that a Norfolk

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24 N. Scotland, ‘Rural war in later Victorian Norfolk’, Norfolk Archaeology, 38 (1981), 82 - 7
27 Howkins, ‘Politics or Quietism’, p. 77
28 Wakefield, Swing Unmasked, pp. 13 - 14
pamphleteer had warned about in 1775: involvement in every local branch of law-making, law-enforcement and public administration, he argued, would inevitably give rise to suspicions that the clergyman was working in his own naked self-interest. Clerics should remember the maxim ‘He is a meek and humble man who meddleth not himself in temporal concerns’. This was very much the experience of the Rev. Benjamin Barker at Shipdham, whose unstinting work in the cause of drainage and public hygiene seemed to earn him the opprobrium of all around. Sir John Walsham described his campaign as ‘interminable’ and noted that Barker was ‘substantially . . . in the right but has so antagonised the other guardians that they oppose him on principle’. It is not without irony that the 1775 pamphlet should turn up in the collected papers of the Fellowes family, for in the Rev. John Fellowes the parishioners had the very model of a hands-on clergyman: the proprietor of a ‘close’ parish who, as conscientious ‘colonial governor’, devoted much time and energy to selling the New Poor Law to his flock, even though it was a law that he had fought tooth and nail to keep Shotesham out of, and one about which he had grave reservations.

By the century’s end the Rev. Jessopp’s ‘happy valley’ in which ‘a simple people are living sweetly under the paternal care of a generous landowner . . . parson and squire working together in perfect harmony’ was as remote as ever – as he himself recognised – as so much of the preceding hundred years had seen a slow and agonising change from social interdependence to division and class antagonism. Ambrose Goode’s ‘record of blood’ seemed much closer to the truth.

As a crucial interface between the clergyman and his parishioners, charity administration was becoming increasingly anachronistic and arcane. Among the trustees of Marham’s charity, for example, were the lords of the medieval manors of Newhall, Oldhall and

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246 N.R.O. FEL 813, 555 x 8 Considerations on the Poor Laws (1775)
247 P.R.O. MH 12/8478 Sir John Walsham (report) 8 Sept. 1849
248 Rev. J. Fellowes, An address (1836)
250 P.R.O. MH 32/60 Rev. A. Goode, handbill, 19 Nov. 1835

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Westacre, at Walsingham the diminishing band of trustees who had not yet died were faced with the onerous responsibility of finding eight worthy citizens to replenish their numbers (a task which, they anticipated, would cause 'considerable difficulty'); and in places like South Lopham and Shotesham the incumbents were faced with a labyrinthine system of bequests and land-holdings which they themselves could not properly understand and which presented a recipe for accusations of mismanagement. Never far from elite consciousness in cases like these was the awareness that long-standing charities, their original structure and purpose long forgotten, had a tendency to become 'customs', accepted and expected simply because they had always been there in the past.

Where post-1834 management of the poor stood on the continuum of care between neo-Malthusianism and the welfare state is a matter for historical debate. The essential flaws of the workhouse system had been identified by the Rev. Brereton in 1827. Here was a system, he argued, that made moral rather than legal criminals of the poor, which introduced a regime of 'terror', 'degradation' and 'bondage' yet still encouraged the idle to manipulate its rules to their own advantage. The New Poor Law attempted to shift the balance between outdoor and indoor relief, but Brereton's central accusation – that workhouses operated on a psychology of cruelty and displacement – remained intact. It could be argued, of course, that the New Poor Law made a virtue of this very fact. Certain clues present themselves from the historical record, however: that contended stretches of poor's land could – as was the case with Holt Lows – be let by the rector and trustees for shooting rights in a way that ran counter to all vestige of utility for the poor, and that the New Poor Law was no place for a relieving officer prepared to show sufficient humanity to give a pauper 6d. out of his own pocket. These negations of the charitable spirit offer some clues to the ways in which charity and the Poor Law were...

251 N.N. 3.4.69
252 N.R.O. PD 582/250 Walsingham Trust Estates: Feoffees' Minute Book 1833 - 1878
255 Brereton, Subordinate Magistracy, p. 75
256 Henriques, ‘How cruel was the Victorian Poor Law?’, Historical Journal, XI (1968), 365 – 71 is in part a discussion of the psychological (as opposed to physical) cruelty of the New Poor Law.
257 Holt Lows dispute 1853 – 1866. See footnote 223 for full source details.
258 N.R.O. C/GP 9/1 Grimston P.I.U. Guardians’ Minutes 23 Jan. 1836. Reprimand for Henry Burrell; Burrell resigned a week later (see Fig. 5.2).
being dove-tailed as complementary – but not interchangeable – methods of managing
the poor. Charity was something to be structured, targeted, organised and regulated so
that it found its way only into the hands of those people already identified by the Poor
Law as ‘deserving poor’.

Of all the measures visited upon the poor during this era, emigration remains one of the
most contentious. Whether it was an act of altruism, removing the poor from an unending
struggle into an environment where they could flourish anew, or whether it was an act of
the utmost cynicism, designed to ship out unruly elements, reduce the numbers of poor
people, and make savings for the wealthy on poor rates, remains open to argument. What
can be stated, however, is that paupers were reported to be queueing to leave ‘so great is
their dread of [the New Poor Law]’, 258 and for all the emigrants’ jaunty ‘letters home’
mortality rates among their children were much higher than among those of the
neighbours they had left behind.259 The evidence of Table 5.4 also proves that emigration
had a substantial impact on Poor Rates, whether intentional or otherwise.

Enclosure was another measure with which the clergy were inextricably linked. Not only
did it destroy an entire culture of grazing and fuel-cutting on common-lands, it also
removed the principal means by which the poor might maintain some semblance of self-
sufficiency and independence, for the loss of which they were so keenly vilified
throughout the nineteenth century. Arguably, too, enclosure’s assault on the economic
independence of the poor eventually put the provisions of the Old Poor Law under so
much strain that the New Poor Law was an inevitable consequence.260 To the poor of
Ashill, whose letter of complaint was so pointedly tossed into the Rectory drive,
enclosure had simply brought them ‘under the heaviest yoke we ever knowed . . . You do
as you like, you rob the poor of their commons right, plough the grass up that God sent to
grow, that a Poor Man may feed a Cow, Pig, Horse nor Ass; lay muck & stones on the
road to stop the grass growing’.261 This ‘enclosure of the road’ – or at least its ‘verge

258 John Parmeter of Reepham, cited in Howells, ‘Emigration’, p. 157
259 Howells, ‘Emigration’, p. 154
260 Birtles, ‘Common-land’, p. 106
261 A. Reid, ‘The process of parliamentary enclosure in Ashill’, Norfolk Archaeology, 37 (1979) p. 176
commons’ - and the prevention of its use for common grazing, must have seemed to the poor to be taking agricultural improvement to new heights of vindictiveness. It was still happening in 1870 when, at Wighton, a strip of land ‘some thousand yards long and varying in width from six to twenty yards . . . known by the name of “the feeding-ground on the Cricket-road” . . . [and] used for this purpose by the poor . . . from time immemorial’ was suddenly embanked and enclosed by Coke of Holkham. Naturally, the protestations of the poor that the land had been ‘willed to them as a feeding ground forever’ carried no weight in the absence of any documentary evidence and, after a brief legal tussle and some ritualistic protests from the poor, the ‘feeding ground’ was subsumed into Coke’s fields.

It was natural that such iniquities should contribute to a folk-memory of the pre-enclosure parish as a kind of Eden, an attitude which, together with the notion of the ‘Norman yoke’ informed generations of working-class opinion that a Golden Age had been stolen from them. This concept was not peculiar to the labouring classes, of course – many among the elite looked back with nostalgia to a mythical era of gratitude and deference – and even Rider Haggard could be seen to tread this path when he advocated a return to the eighteenth-century system of parish workhouses, apparently in ignorance of the well-chronicled suffering and resentment that they had caused. Rider Haggard’s comments must, however, be seen within the context of his general description of workhouse life at the end of the nineteenth century: a passage of searing insight and sensitivity that is worth quoting from at some length.

“What do these old fellows think about, I wonder, as they hobble to and fro round those measureless precincts of bald brick? . . . Stern-faced with gazing down the dim vista of the past . . . It is not the place that is so melancholy, it is this poignant example of the sad end of life and all its toilings; it is the forlorn, half-dazed aspect of these battered human hulks who once were young, and strong, and comely . . . God! They know more of the devil and all his works; ill-paid labour, poverty, pain, and the infinite, unrecorded tragedies of humble lives. God? They have never found Him. He must live beyond the workhouse wall – out there in the graveyard – in the waterlogged holes which very shortly . . .

3N.N. 19.3.70
3N.N. 10.12.70
5Rider Haggard, Farmer’s Year, p. 432
6This quote represents a synthesis of the ideas contained in Rider Haggard’s description of Heckingham workhouse in 1899. Rider Haggard, Farmer’s Year, pp. 427 - 432
In the same chapter Rider Haggard reported with incredulity his discovery that the hot water system at Pulham workhouse had been designed with loopholes for muskets because the intense hostility to its construction had led to an armed guard being posted. The contrast could hardly be more telling. Rider Haggard was describing, at the end of the nineteenth century, a vanquished poor, the end-product of a system that – sixty years earlier – a more active and militant class had had the percipience to oppose. Whatever torch was being carried in the wayside bethels and trade union meeting halls of the outside world here, in the workhouse and in the rheumy-eyed gaze of lonely old men, was the end of the managed poor (Plate 18).
Plate 16: Parochial charities, Bintree parish church (1846).

Plate 17: Alterations in the visible and social landscape at enclosure, Holkham

Chapter Six

Customs in conflict: the management of law and order

Introduction

An understanding that crime and criminality were as much rural as urban phenomena was beginning to emerge from the studies of social observers and analysts like John Glyde during the middle decades of the nineteenth century. Glyde's own work on rural crime in Suffolk led him to conclude that 'the simplicity and innocence of peasant life exists only in the imagination'. Analyses of rural crime in the nineteenth century, however, quickly run into problems of definition. What was against the law? Who had defined it to be so and why? Interpretations in this area are never more complex and problematic than when one is dealing with the concepts of 'custom' and 'social crime'. At what point did orally-transmitted understandings of 'custom' begin to transgress new written versions of the law? Where, exactly, did 'crime' end and 'social crime' begin? Were arson, animal-maiming and social unrest the last after-shocks of the 'moral economy of the crowd', the faded remnants of a negotiating mechanism that no longer received any reply?

This chapter deals with the maintenance of law and order and the dispensation of justice, particularly by clerical magistrates, in the country parishes of nineteenth-century Norfolk. Mundane criminality, of a kind all too familiar in the twenty-first century, looms large - petty thefts, deceptions, minor assaults and ugly domestic violence - but a secondary theme seems constantly to be playing in the background. Petty Sessions, Quarter

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2 Glyde, Suffolk, p. 156, cited in Archer, By a Flash, p. 11.

3 Archer, By a Flash, pp. 2 - 9 includes a discussion on 'the categorisation of rural crime' and cites a number of further sources relevant to this debate. J. Rule, 'Social crime in the rural south in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century' in J. Rule & R. Wells, Crime, Protest and Popular Politics in Southern England, 1740 - 1850 (London, 1997), p. 153 says: 'The legal definition of what constitutes criminal action changes over time within any society, and can differ at the same moment from one society to another'. Problems of definition are particularly acute 'when a privileged minority had a near monopoly of law making and law enforcement'.
Sessions and Assize, for all the mundanity of their regular business, were the places where men and women who 'were informed by the belief that they were defending traditional rights or customs - and, in general, that they were supported by a wider consensus of the community'⁴ - met the law of a class-driven society, framed and enforced by its ruling and controlling group.

Magistrates sitting at Petty Sessions and Quarter Sessions had many powers and responsibilities beyond those specifically concerned with the criminal law. So wide-ranging were their powers, and so autonomous their authority, that magistrates constituted the effective 'county government' in the years preceding the County Councils Act of 1888.⁵ Whatever the social cachet attending the post however, it is important to note that, even among elites, respect for magistrates was by no means universal. Throughout the nineteenth century querulous voices were raised, questioning whether such enormous powers and responsibilities had really fallen into the best hands. Brereton wrote of the danger that some men might put the interests of their own 'close' parishes ahead of those of wider society;⁶ an observer of the 'Swing' riots implied that management of law and order had been placed in the hands of imbeciles;⁷ and Benjamin Armstrong wondered aloud whether 'such eccentric and ill-informed men . . . should have the power of sentencing prisoners to such an awful penalty as solitary confinement'.⁸

How prominent were clergymen in the magistracy of nineteenth-century Norfolk? Table 6.1 indicates that their numbers executed a steady decline during the century and that, even by the 1830s, the age of the clerical magistracy was substantially over.

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⁶ Rev. C. D. Brereton, The Subordinate Magistracy and Parish System Considered, in their Connexion with the Causes and Remedies of Modern Pauperism (Norwich, 1827), p. 21(n.).
⁷ P.R.O. HO 52/9. John Deynes (North Walsham) to Lord Melbourne, 11 December 1830. Deynes attributes the continuing troubles to the 'indecision amounting almost to imbecility' of clerical magistrates.
Nevertheless, the evidence also suggests that Norfolk tended to have a higher proportion of clerical magistrates than was usual in England as a whole. Zangerl points out that clerical magistrates were often appointed to areas without resident gentry. For the most part this was a seamless transition: 'very little differentiated the clerical magistrates from their lay colleagues . . . they shared the values and interests of the landed classes [and] they were not inclined to rock the established boat'.\(^9\) Even so, the appointment removed the clergyman – at least for a time – from his spiritual concerns and his elite social circle, and brought him into direct contact with the gritty secular world of the labouring poor. The supposed delinquency of the poor, their apparent immorality, infidelity, violence and stupidity, may well have earned the disdain of the clerical magistrate as they were paraded before him on the bench, but the cumulative impact seemed to awaken something that approximated to a social conscience in some of them, at least. The Rev. Henry Ffolkes' assize sermon of 1876 may still have propounded the conventional wisdom that wealth and poverty were divinely ordained, but – here in Norwich Cathedral,

\(^9\)Zangerl, 'County magistracy', 118 – 9.
before the assembled law enforcers of the county - Ffolkes was prepared to suggest that poverty and crime were linked and that conscience-soothing charity was no longer acceptable as a solution.¹⁰

Once poverty is accepted, however cautiously, as a possible cause of crime, the next conceptual leap - that crime itself may be a protest against social injustice - is not far away. Protest crime thus becomes a political act, a challenge to the status quo, and a whole host of crimes and misdemeanours, from arson and animal maiming to poaching and gleaning, suddenly acquire new significance as the voiceless cry of the disenfranchised poor.¹¹ In general terms, while poaching can readily be seen to operate in opposition to the laws and precepts of property, a range of other offences that came before rural magistrates might be read anew as protests against the mores of contemporary society: the men and women who threatened 'tumult' at the building of workhouses, for example, or those that obstructed police officers in the execution of their duty, or absconded from service, or inflicted 'malicious damage' on the property of others.¹² It is tempting to see nineteenth-century law enforcement as a battleground between those attempting to impose new, elite-driven versions of authority, and those that felt themselves answerable to time-honoured laws of custom, developed organically over the centuries to complement agrarian society and understood by generations of agricultural labourers through a process of osmosis. 'At the interface between law and agrarian practice we find custom,' wrote Thompson,¹³ and this chapter spends much time at that interface.

What, then, can be said about the clerical magistrates who sat in judgement on the crimes and misdemeanours of the labouring poor? Table 6.1 has already enumerated them, and

¹¹ Rev. H. Ffolkes, Some Dangers and Duties of the Higher Class (Norwich, August 1876) (Published assize sermon).
¹² The concepts of 'protest crime', 'social crime' and 'economic crime', all of which shade into each other in various and complex ways, have been the subject of much debate among historians over the last twenty years. At the core of this discussion lies the 'Wells-Charlesworth debate', rehearsed in a series of essays by Roger Wells, Andrew Charlesworth and a number of other contributors, in M. Reed & R. Charlesworth (eds.), Class, Conflict and Protest in the English Countryside, 1700—1880 (London, 1990).
¹³ 'Tumult' caused by the building of workhouses was a concern of those attempting to implement the New Poor Law in Norfolk. A. Digby, Pauper Palaces (London, 1978), p. 209 has more on this. The other offences mentioned all came regularly before the magistrates of the Blofield and Walsham Petty Sessions between 1839 and 1878 (N.R.O. PS 8/1/1,2,3,4, Divisional Court Register). In particular, unspecified 'malicious damage' was recorded no fewer than 346 times in this forty year period.
noted their declining numbers as the century wore on. In any discussion of their broader social impact, however, the backgrounds of clerical magistrates are as important as their pure numbers, in that they reveal the extent to which clergymen contributed to elite hegemony in local authority. Zangerl’s analysis of the 1842 ‘Return of Justices of the Peace’ points up this hegemony in the county districts: of 3,090 English County J.P.s, 77.1% were from the ‘squirearchy’, 8.4% were aristocrats, and 13.4% were Anglican clergymen, leaving room for only 1.2% of magistrates who were none of these things.

Table 6.2: Proportion of Norfolk clerical magistrates originating from a gentry background, 1834-1916

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of clerical magistrates</th>
<th>Number of clerical magistrates from gentry backgrounds</th>
<th>% of clerical magistrates with gentry backgrounds</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1834</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>61.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1841</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>65.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1854</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>64.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1868</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>61.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1883</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>51.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1908</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>41.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1916</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>40.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SOURCE: N.R.O. MC/120/113 Memorandum Book; Norfolk Trade Directories; Rye, Norfolk Families (Norwich, 1913)

By 1887, although squires and aristocrats had retained their prominence (at 68.1% and 6.2% respectively), the proportion of clerical J.P.s had fallen to 5.3% and had been overtaken by a new force on the bench, the middle-class magistrate (14.9%). This change reflected broader political movement: a growing awareness that the middle classes could no longer be excluded from public office on the grounds of ‘suspect character’, and the increasing influence of Nonconformists to whom the equation of law and order with Anglicanism was an affront. Of course, not all clergymen were from

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It is worth noting that Jacob found only 2 clergymen among 192 magistrates in Norfolk in 1762. The number of clergy appointed to the bench must have increased very rapidly between 1762 and 1831. W. M. Jacob, ‘Clergy and Society in Norfolk 1707 – 1806’ (unpub. PhD, University of Exeter, 1982), p. 489.

Zangerl, ‘County Magistracy’, p. 115.

Zangerl, ‘County Magistracy’, pp. 119 – 120 has more on this. Despite the declining numbers of clerical magistrates in Norfolk, the Earl of Albermarle (Keppel of Quidenham) was still complaining in Parliament...
gentry backgrounds and Table 6.2 suggests that the trend for greater social variety in the appointment of J.P.s extended into the ranks of Norfolk's clerical magistrates.  

With all of these factors considered, how likely was the nineteenth-century rural miscreant to come face-to-face with a clerical magistrate? Ultimately this depends less on the sheer numbers of clerical J.P.s than it does on their attendance records, and in this respect clerical influence on the magistrate's bench can be said to have remained high despite their declining numbers. Of the 2,403 sessions held in the Blofield and Walsham division between 1839 and 1878, 1,243 (48.3%) were attended by at least one clerical magistrate.  

There could be considerable fluctuations within this overall attendance rate. In 1862 only 3 of the 54 sessions were heard by clerical magistrates, whereas for a time in the late 1860s and early 1870s there was a clergyman on the bench for almost every session (176 out of 182). Unavoidable here is the random factor of the work-rate of individual magistrates. In the Eynsford division, for instance, the Revs. H. Lombe and J. Fenwick attended 711 cases between them. The Rev. A. E. L. Bulwer, by contrast, was present for just two.  

**Encounters with criminality: Attitudes to crime, criminals and punishment**

Edwin Chadwick's questionnaire for magistrates, used in the compilation of the *First Report of the Royal Commission on a Constabulary Force* (1839), was posited on the belief in the existence of a criminal class. 'Are there within your division,' Chadwick asked, 'any persons who have no visible or known means of obtaining their livelihood honestly, and who are believed to live by habitual depredation in illegal means?'  

The extent to which magistrates considered certain elements in society to have a
predisposition towards crime, and the linkage in the minds of those on the bench between criminality, public disorder and social unrest, is central to any understanding of the interactive exchange that took place between law-enforcers and law-breakers in the nineteenth century. We might attempt to summarise the situation by asking what types of crimes were being committed and why, and what corrective measures were being taken and against whom. This was, for the most part, an era of unsophisticated criminal record-keeping, and local reputations could still play a large part in the detection of crime and in the dissemination of punishment.

Table 6.3: Offences most frequently dealt with at the Blofield and Walsham Petty Sessions 1839 – 78, and those offences expressed as a percentage of all prosecutions in the division.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Offence</th>
<th>Number of prosecutions</th>
<th>As percentage of all prosecutions in the division</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assault</td>
<td>1425</td>
<td>31.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theft (various)</td>
<td>397</td>
<td>8.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bastardy orders/Affiliation suits</td>
<td>379</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Game Laws (all offences)</td>
<td>364</td>
<td>8.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malicious injury or damage</td>
<td>325</td>
<td>7.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drunkenness</td>
<td>206</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disobey bastardy order</td>
<td>179</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weights and Measures offences</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highways offences</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Begging and/or vagrancy</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leaving family chargeable</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonpayment of poor rates</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Failure to maintain relative</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Larceny</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breach of the peace</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Licensing offences</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misbehaviour on railways</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All other offences</td>
<td>361</td>
<td>7.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SOURCE: N.R.O. PS 8/1,2,3,4 Blofield & Walsham Petty Sessions Court Registers 1839 – 1878

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Table 6.3 represents an analysis of the offences that came most frequently before the magistrates of the Blofield and Walsham Petty Sessions between 1839 and 1878. Of these offences, six (affiliation suits, disobedience of bastardy orders, vagrancy, leaving a family chargeable, nonpayment of poor rates and failure to maintain an elderly relative) were directly associated with contemporary measures to manage the poor. A further three (general game offences, malicious injury, and breaches of the licensing laws) might arguably be described as secondary measures towards management of the poor. Between them these offences constituted 37.5% of all offences brought before the Petty Sessions magistrates in this division.

Of the other offences – ones that might most broadly be understood in twenty-first century terms as transgressions against the person, property or social order – by far the most prevalent, and grotesquely disproportionate to the other crimes on the list, was assault. Concealed within this very general term, and transcending cases of male-on-male violence, was an ugly seam of domestic brutality. On 19 June 1884, before the Revs. Richard Phayre and H. W. Jones at Gallow Petty Sessions, Sarah Ann Eggleton recounted an incident with her husband:

'He called me several filthy names & sd. he saw me & my sister come from Dereham & saw me get out of the cart with Fred. Phillipps & lie upon the green. After calling me filthy names he got up & struck me in the face with his fist.'

A number of assaults were committed by men – or groups of men – upon women. What proportion of these were sexual assaults is uncertain, although some clearly were: on 10 November 1847, for instance, William Mills appeared before the Rev. J. Burroughes at the Blofield and Walsham sessions, charged with having assaulted Hannah Hurn 'with

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21 Figures relate to the number of defendants and do not distinguish between those found guilty and those acquitted. The yardstick for inclusion in the table was that the offence should constitute at least 1% of all crime committed in the Division.
22 Malicious injury (and/or damage) was a frequently used catch-all term that embraced such offences as animal maiming and the destruction of enclosure gates and fences.
23 The farmer Randall Burroughes’ diary recounts one example of the kind of assault that must have been commonplace in an all-male working environment. Monday 20 August 1798, ‘Brooks and T. Kiddle having had a quarrel on Wednesday night the latter struck Brooks a blow on the back that prevented Brooks working the remainder of the week’. S. Wade Martins & T. Williamson (eds.), The Farming Journal of Randall Burroughes 1794 – 1799 Norfolk Record Society LVIII (1995), pp. 109 – 110.
At least some of these assaults, it seems, could have tended towards rape.

The cumulative effect of such cases must have done much to stir in the minds of clerical magistrates the fears that they often expressed about the brutalisation of the poor, visited upon them by the immoral nature of their living and working conditions. The indistinct border between criminality and immorality was, of course, constantly patrolled by the active nineteenth-century clergyman, whether acting in his capacity as magistrate or as parish priest. Some, like William Thomson at Bawdeswell, were prepared to embrace a number of social and economic factors in their attempts to understand the delinquency of the poor. ‘The peculiarities of Bawdeswell people,’ Thomson wrote, ‘arise from their poverty, their want of respectable, resident inhabitants & of a resident clergyman. Ignorance & rudeness arise from these causes.’

The nineteenth-century debate on the causes of crime threw up, as in any era, its ‘hawks’ and its ‘doves’. To many of the former it was the devotion of the rural poor to drink and the time and money consequently wasted in beershops that lay at the heart of the problem. As Judge Patterson candidly told the jury at the 1844 Norwich Assizes, ‘if it were not for this drinking you and I would have nothing to do.’ The evil effect of beershops was, moreover, often exacerbated by the absence of a strong local lead from the Church of England: turning a blind eye to the payment of agricultural wages on a Sunday, for example, or allowing beershops to proliferate in parishes where there was no resident clergyman. For some individuals, idleness and drunkenness stood at the top of a rapid downward spiral into much more serious crime. Condemned-cell confessions, like that of the arsonist William Pye of Coltishall, were published as moral exemplars of the dangers of drink and petty crime. Pye’s was the archetypal story of the ‘idle

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25N.R.O. PS 8/1/1 Blofield & Walsham Petty Sessions Court Register 1839 – 1847. Mills was subsequently re-examined by three other (non-clerical) magistrates and was ‘discharged, the offence not being proved to the satisfaction of the magistrates’.

26N.R.O. PD 155/35 Bawdeswell curate’s list of parishioners, 1842.

27Cited in Archer, By a Flash, p. 132.

28The practice was believed to produce ‘an indifference for religion; Habits of Idleness and Intemperance follow, Plans are laid in the alehouse kitchen on the Sunday for committing deprivations in the following week’. N.R.O. GTN/16/1, Suffield papers, James Sharpe J.P to Lord Suffield, 11 October 1821.

29N.R.O. GTN/42/1 Suffield papers, Robert Bird (Taplow, Bucks.) to Suffield, 19 April 1834. Bird described how his community had an absentee landlord and clergyman, and thus ‘little control’ over those regularly gathering in the beerhouses.
apprentice’, falling into the company of poachers and gamblers until general profligacy
dragged him into the crime of incendiariism. Shortly before his execution, Pye asked to
speak to the rector of Coltishall, James Ward. He urged him to use all his influence to
close down beershops, ‘for unless they are put down a wonderful deal more mischief will
be done’.30

Despite such reassurances that criminality and social disorder could be attributed to the
profligacy of the poor, however, nineteenth-century rural society was prepared to engage
in a wide-ranging and introspective debate that accepted the possibility that some of its
own tenets, mores and institutions might share some of the responsibility. While James
Ward, his interview with William Pye notwithstanding, attributed the ‘Swing’
disturbances to a ‘general spirit of insubordination’, his own churchwarden, Robert
Howes, was determined to draw attention to ‘the dreadfully depressed condition of many
of the Agricultural Labourers’.31 But Robert Howes was no ‘dove’ on social issues. He
went on to state his belief that indoor relief should be the only form of relief available to
the poor and that many social ills had their genesis in the fact that ‘the workhouse is no
longer considered either a punishment or a disgrace by the majority of those who are sent
there’. This view, that the laxity of poor law administration fuelled crime contrasted
directly with the Rev. Charles Brereton’s conclusion that its severity was to blame:

‘If the discipline [in workhouses] be severe,’ he wrote, ‘the people will still compromise with the parish
officers for a smaller sum than they would cost in a workhouse and the residue they will make up by pilfer,
plunder and artifice.’32

There were concerns, too, about the role of the family and the belief that child labour
broke the bonds of parental control and discipline. As the curate of Bawdeswell observed,
‘when a child is sent out to work at 7 or 8 years, he becomes too independent at 12 or 13,
and has generally by that time acquired habits which it is hard for a parent to check’.33
This was a belief that ran headlong into the counter-argument which held that taking the

30 Pye’s story, along with that of Gilpin Reynolds, the Corpusty arsonist who was executed alongside him,
was related in N.C. 19.4.34.
31 Ward and Howes were both responding to the questionnaire sent out during the compilation of the 1834
Poor Law Report, Appendix B.
32 Rev. C. D. Brereton, The Subordinate Magistracy and Parish System Considered in their Connexion with
the Causes and Remedies of Modern Pauperism (Norwich, 1827), p.75. It should be remembered, of
course, that both Brereton and Howes were commenting on the pre-1834 poor law regime.
33 N.R.O. PD155/35 Bawdeswell curate’s list of parishioners, 1842.
child away from the baleful influence of its parents – whether to work or, in a further facet of the debate, to school – was the only way to break cycles of poverty, ignorance and lack of respect for authority.

The vagaries of employment were also considered as a possible cause of crime. These might be primarily attributable to systemic problems, caused by the introduction of farm machinery, for instance,\(^34\) or the decline of small farms after enclosure,\(^35\) but there was, in some quarters at least, an acknowledgement that attitudes to unemployment and poverty could intensify the alienation of the poor.\(^36\) As the century entered its last quarter, those of Norfolk’s law enforcers gathered together in Norwich Cathedral to hear the Rev. Henry Ffolkes’ assize sermon were invited to consider for a moment that crime might not be merely the product of moral delinquency, nor simply one of poverty, but was, perhaps, the dark echo of the selfishness and over-indulgence of the elite ruling classes themselves. Ffolkes’s message, in essence, was that the avoidance of the taint of greed and corruption was vital if parochial elites were to maintain their moral and – by extension – their secular authority:

'It is our bounden duty to punish crime,' said Ffolkes, ‘... but meanwhile it were well to pass in review our own shortcomings, to ask of memory how often we have foregone the higher duty and preferred the lower pleasure, how often we have surrendered ourselves to self-indulgence.'\(^37\)

While parish elites and clerical magistrates operated at the heart of two of the century’s most fundamental measures of social discipline – enclosure and poor law administration\(^38\)

\(^{34}\) As one pamphlet put it, ‘unrestrained machinery demoralises society ... Unless [it is] restrained [it will, ere long, involve this county in every horror and calamity attending the bursting of all the bonds holding society together’. Wilkin & Fletcher, Letters to the Present Generation on the Unrestrained use of Modern Machinery (c. 1830), reproduced in Carpenter, The Aftermath, pp. 25 – 6.

\(^{35}\) The Parliamentary Select Committee on Criminal Commitments and Convictions VI (1826-7), p. 26 was told that there had been ‘very great revolutions in agricultural property ... so that many are reduced from the situation of yeomen to that of labourers, and that farmers were also unable to employ as many labourers as before’. Cited in Snell, Annals, p. 193.

\(^{36}\) To the Morning Chronicle of 29 December 1849, incendiariism was happening in a social climate where ‘calculations are made with the greatest possible nicety, not so much to ascertain how much he can live upon as how much he can live without’. Cited in Snell, Annals, p. 126.

\(^{37}\) Ffolkes, Dangers and Duties, p. 6.

\(^{38}\) The case for enclosure as a measure of social discipline is argued elsewhere in this thesis. Thompson’s comment may be considered at this point: ‘A new argument was added for general enclosure – that of social discipline. The commons were seen as a dangerous centre of indiscipline’. E. P. Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class (London, 1963, 1991 edn.), p. 242. The New Poor Law is perhaps more readily understood as such a measure. A. Digby, Pauper Palaces (London, 1978), p. 209 has more on this point, and the judge at the trial of those accused of assaulting a poor law relieving officer in Cromer was in no doubt. The Poor Law Amendment Act, he said, was designed ‘to check the many evils that had
at a secondary level their powers enabled them to fine-tune the detail of local, even domestic, morality and order. In the early nineteenth-century, at least, these powers were exercised within a firmly local context, the defining quality of which being the fact that law-breakers and law-enforcers were often known to each other. One of Charles Brereton’s principal objections to the notion of a county police force was that such an institution would pick at the seams of these vital local connections:

'We do not live under a Code Napoleon, and these respectable gentlemen must from the very rudiments of their profession know how much modes of prosecution, process and indictment, trial and conviction, depend in an English court, and before an English jury on the nature of the evidence.'

'Modes of prosecution’ and ‘nature of evidence’: Brereton’s case was that locally based authority could shape its processes to maximise the chances of a legal outcome that concurred with local knowledge and local reputations.

Complementing these local methods of law enforcement and social discipline was a tapestry of power-networking that, both formally and informally, linked the members of the magisterial elite. Formally, this would have been apparent at Quarter Sessions and Assize when magistrates stepped outside their local domains and came together to hear the more serious cases. Informally, the network operated at the level of an information exchange, enabling landowners to identify and weed-out troublemakers, real or imagined.

Although the power of local magistrates changed and declined over the course of the century, their continued ability to manipulate the legal process in a political way should not be underestimated. In 1785 Norfolk magistrates issued a general warrant for the arrest of ‘several disorderly persons who style themselves Methodist preachers [and] go about arisen through a long course of time in the administration of the poor laws, and to prevent the continued abuse of those laws by the strong and able-bodied paupers who were of idle and disorderly character’.

By this I mean such powers as the supervision of bastardy orders and the imposition of penalties for family desertion and for failing to maintain relatives.


N.R.O. WLS LXII/27/1, 430 x 9: Walsingham papers, Black to Walsingham (18 January 1811). As Lord Walsingham was advised by his agent, Black, on the Merton estate: ‘William Balls who rents the Green Man Public House at Tottington and some land of your lordship has been detected in robbing Mr. Turner’s Sturston Warren and some Traps both of his and Mr. Boby’s of Stanford have been found in Balls’s possession. As he has been found guilty of this he may also be of poaching therefore it may be necessary to give him Notice to quit your Lordship’s premises to prevent others from doing the same.’

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raising routs and riots to the great damage of his Majesty’s liege people’. This proclamation was widely held to have legitimised outbreaks of mob violence against itinerant Methodist preachers. In 1830 the Primitive Methodist evangelist Robert Key found himself the object of mob violence in the town of Reepham. Key brought the case before local clerical magistrates in the hope of encouraging a peaceful solution, but ‘the magistrates told me that I had no business to preach in the market place, for that I disturbed the peace of the town, and if I did so any more they would bring the water engine to play upon me’. And in 1900 another dissenter from the political norm, a social democrat opponent of the Boer War, Mr. J. J. Kidd, also received short shrift at the hands of magistrates. Having been chased by a mob from the meeting he had been trying to address, and besieged in a house while every one of its windows was broken, Kidd laid his case before the Kings Lynn magistrates. They told him that he was the primary cause of any wrong that had been done. A nominal fine was imposed upon one of the stone-throwers, which was immediately paid for him by a town councillor. Kidd, Key, and many other dissidents found themselves at the sharp end of an authoritarian response to political dissonance that betrayed a constant fear of the outsider, the stranger, the foreign agent, even the charismatic ‘enrolling actor’ who could tempt people away from the straight and narrow with his subversive pamphlets and persuasive oratory.

The ‘psychological profile’ of the arsonist was the subject of much contemporary (and subsequent historiographical) debate. Was he a dissolute loner, distrusted and unemployable in his own neighbourhood, who engaged in a wanton destruction motivated by personal malice? There is much to suggest that such characters existed, and the speed with which suspicion fell upon certain individuals is discussed later in this chapter as a pointer towards the role of the ‘internal outsider’. Was he a radical in domestic politics? Archer writes that ‘in 1830 some rectors and J.P.s thought him to be a reader of Cobbett’s Political Register’ and in 1840 many thought that ‘he was working for political reform or the charter’. Or was he inspired by a revolutionary zeal, working

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44 E.D.P. 19.10.1900.
45 Archer, By a Flash, p. 171. Archer goes on to point out that East Anglian Chartists were, in fact, critical of incendiariam.
to emulate the events in continental Europe that had flared so ominously close to home in 1783, 1830 and 1848.\(^{46}\)

Two summaries from contemporary observers indicate that these categorised ‘identities’ of the rural arsonist and activist need not be mutually exclusive. Their thinking reveals a sophisticated appreciation that criminality, unrest, rebellion, revolution and the social compact were inter-linked and inter-dependent within a complex relationship of cause and effect. Lady Catherine Boileau first, writing in December 1830:

‘This change in the French ministry must make an awful difference to France, & with the real grievances we know the lower classes of England have to bring forward, and the frightful carelessness there seems to be among clergymen and magistrates for in the interests of the poor . . . I do think there is much to dread from the example of France.’\(^{47}\)

Almost forty years earlier, Parson Woodforde had felt the same wind blowing after a conversation with a neighbouring clergyman, Philip Jeans of Great Witchingham:

‘Mr. Jeans informed us that he had heard it rumoured about, that there would be a great Mob collected at St. Faith’s Fair on Wednesday next, on Account of the dearness of Wheat and other Provisions, but I believe rather from the late long propensity of the discontented to a general Disturbance, so prevalent at present in France. The Norwich Mob to meet the Country Mob on the above day at St. Faith’s.’\(^{48}\)

From Woodforde’s account we might draw certain conclusions. Firstly, that the gathering of the ‘Mob’ was anticipated, and that it was to take place at a fair, dangerous and unruly places for representatives of authority.\(^{49}\) Secondly, that the Norwich ‘Mob’ and the country ‘Mob’ were planning to join in a potentially dangerous coalition, bringing together the grievances of the urban and rural poor in a way that suggested a nascent sense of class consciousness. Woodforde uses the term ‘Mob’ in a way that gives it a sense of permanence: an economic, social and political force that is in permanent existence but is only occasionally and selectively deployed. Thirdly, while Jeans understands the planned demonstration as a bread riot, perceived by him within the parameters of moral economy, Woodforde senses something new, something political,

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\(^{47}\) N.R.O. Boi 62/1, 117 x 4. Boileau correspondence, Lady Catherine Boileau (Thursford) to Lady Anna Maria Elliot (Brighton), December 1830.


\(^{49}\) See, for example, the assault on Poor Law relieving officer Timothy Morrell at Cromer Fair, described in chapter five.
and something much more threatening in the air: a revolutionary spirit inspired by events in France.

Generally it can be said that elite attitudes to law-breakers – both actual and potential – demonstrated as wide a range of political sophistication and sociological awareness as their attitudes to the causes of crime. At one end of the perceptual scale was the notion of the 'rabble of the country' who at best used the precepts of moral economy and protest as a disguise for their preoccupation with alcohol, and who at worst lurked at the edge of sight, waiting for any opportunity to spring their fellows from the legitimate hands of authority. Here, too, were the perpetual misfits of nineteenth-century rural society, its 'internal outsiders' who were often as reviled by the labouring poor as by the governing elite: men whose reputations preceded them and who the authorities regarded as a constant source of potential trouble. But in some quarters, at least, the recognition was dawning that nineteenth-century institutions of social management frequently militated against one of the most basic foundations of social stability: good parenting. In the course of his work, prison chaplain James Brown frequently came into contact with children whose criminal careers had been instilled, developed and encouraged at every turn by their parents:

'I have reason to believe,' he wrote of one ten-year old, '. . . that he has been trained to the commission of petty offences by his own father . . . [who] I am certain has been guilty of gross neglect towards his son. The boy seems destitute of all moral feeling, & such propensity has he to thieving that he was detected more than once in stealing his fellow-prisoners' provisions. It would be highly proper to remove him from the influence of his father, for I am morally certain that if he be suffered to remain with him he will again fall into crime."

The boy referred to by Brown was sent to a Refuge for the Destitute in London, but no mechanism existed for breaking the pernicious socio-economic cycle that underpinned poor parenting. The curate of Bawdeswell identified and described the cycle in 1842 – how low family incomes necessitated child labour and the working child fell under

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50 This phrase was used by Randall Burroughes to describe protesters in the country districts, N.R.O. MC 216/1, 668 x 3, Randall Burroughes' farming journal 1794 – 9, 2 February 1795.
51 The presence of a mob, ready at any moment to mount a Bastille-type raid and free the prisoners in Norwich Castle, was a constant preoccupation of the prison chaplain James Brown. See for example N.R.O. GTN/34/1, Suffield papers, Brown to Suffield 9 February 1830 and 12 February 1830.
52 N.R.O. GTN/20/1 Suffield papers, Rev. James Brown to Suffield 23 January 1826.
dubious influences beyond his parents’ control – but he could do no more than count himself a helpless observer of the effects.53

Demonstrating a considerable sociological awareness of what made the criminal classes criminal, the Rev. Ambrose Goode of Terrington voiced an argument that was to place him at the margins of criminality.54 The English labourer had been reduced to the status of a slave, said Goode, ‘driven for redress to ... outrage and violence’. The labourer was condemned – rhetorically and judicially – for his outward expressions of violence. But while the ‘social violence’ of low pay, inadequate diet, execrable housing conditions and high rates of child mortality might be engaged at a purely philosophical level, there is sufficient evidence to indicate that physical violence, of an overt and mutually brutalising kind, was all too often part of the labourer’s experience of employment. George Edwards, in the 1860s, was still encountering farmers who were prepared to enforce work discipline by administering regular thrashings,55 entering into a tradition of employer-violence that had apparently reached its nadir in 1844 with the death of a boy labourer after a beating inflicted by his master.56 The prevalence of employer-violence, and its typicality within labour relations, is a matter for studies other than this one. What can be remarked upon, however, is that when Lydia Page, an 18-year old maidservant, was horse-whipped by her employer, the Rev. Southam of Holt, the details of her treatment were entered, not in the records of a criminal court, but in the matter-of-fact exchanges of a settlement examination.57

Ambrose Goode’s problems with the law that originated from his political beliefs, and Southam’s freedom from prosecution despite the assault on his maidservant, might well stand as an allegory for the respective value placed by contemporary society on the property of the wealthy and the person of the poor. It also offers a clue as to why so few

54 Rev. Ambrose Goode’s ‘Substance of a Speech Prepared for the first meeting of His Majesty’s Commissioners under the New Poor Law Amendment Act’, 19 November 1835 (P.R.O. MH32/60) is discussed further in chapter five. The publication of this document almost cost Goode a spell of imprisonment on a charge of seditious libel.
56 The case of farmer King Viall of Middleton Hall, Sudbury, Suffolk, charged and acquitted over the death of a boy is related in Archer, By a Flash, pp. 27 – 8.
nineteenth-century clergymen in Norfolk faced any kind of criminal indictment. Mores, attitudes and the law coincided in such a way as to make it difficult for the clergyman to transgress. 58

The Rev. Homfray at Bintree was a rare exception: a clergyman who broke the law in his attempts to break local custom and who was tried, convicted and fined for the offence by a Petty Sessions bench that included at least one clerical magistrate. Homfray and his churchwarden William Joyce were charged with attempting the physical eviction of Thomas Cronshay – erstwhile leader of the parish singers – from his accustomed pew. The affray that ensued completely disrupted morning service and Cronshay brought a charge of assault against both men. The case was heard at the Reepham Petty Sessions on 27 August 1866 and despite bringing countercharges against Cronshay over a separate incident – a scuffle between Cronshay and Homfray in the churchyard – the vicar and churchwarden were each fined £5 including costs. 59

Fig. 6.1: Transportations from Norfolk Assize Courts 1790 - 1859

![Graph showing transportation sentences from Norfolk Assize Courts 1790-1859](image)

SOURCE: N.R.O. Summary of Transportation Sentences, Norfolk Assize Courts 1790 - 1859

58 The Rev. George John Aufrere of Ridlington was briefly held in Norwich gaol on suspicion of shooting his maidservant, but the case against him was ultimately dismissed; the Rev. Thomas Scott of Watton antagonized local landowners by exceeding his limited rights to kill game; and the Rev. James Woodforde held a famously relaxed attitude to the regulations of Customs and Excise. Otherwise, in the early nineteenth-century at least, the clergy were still emerging from the arcane shadows of ‘the benefit of the clergy’, and wherever possible clerical misdemeanours continued to be dealt with in church courts as internal disciplinary matters.

59 The fullest account of these proceedings is to be found in N.N. 1.9.66.
In his Assize Sermon of 1876, the Rev. Henry Ffolkes uttered what to most present would have been a self-evident truth: ‘It is our bounden duty to punish crime’.\(^6^0\) The nature of that punishment, however, and its severity were matters of debate throughout the nineteenth-century. On the scale of punitive severity somewhere between imprisonment and execution stood the punishment of transportation.

Fig. 6.1 illustrates the use of transportation sentences by Norfolk assize courts between 1790 and 1859. The sentence was not used by Norfolk courts after 1857 although it remained on the statute books until 1868. 2,559 individuals, originating from 208 Norfolk parishes, were transported during this period. The ‘parish-type’ of origin appears to be of no significance here: transportation occurred at the rate of 9.4 individuals per 10,000 head of population in close parishes, 10.8 in semi-close, 10.9 in semi-open, and 10.8 in open. The chart indicates that longer terms of imprisonment became more prevalent after 1820, but its most striking illustration is of the surge that took place in the 1830s, the decade of ‘Swing’, the Poor Law Amendment Act, and poor law assisted emigration schemes. Much of this surge is attributable to the single year 1836. 126 individuals were transported in that year, far more than in any other.\(^6^1\) The coincidence that this was also the peak year for poor law assisted emigration cannot be ignored.\(^6^2\) The inference is that in this year, a generalised policy flourished – no less valid for not being openly acknowledged – in which the aim was to rid neighbourhoods of their least desirable members. Charles Brereton had seen this coming, and had warned many years earlier of the disrepute that both law enforcement and poor law management would fall into ‘if being sent out of the country should become the fashion’.\(^6^3\)

\(^6^0\) Ffolkes, Dangers and Duties, p. 6.
\(^6^1\) Only one other year – 1839 – had more than 100 transportees. The average annual figure for the 68-year period was 38.
\(^6^2\) Poor law assisted emigration is discussed in detail in chapter 5.
\(^6^3\) Brereton, Subordinate Magistracy, p. 156.
Even among the elites from whom magistrates were predominantly drawn, doubts were expressed as to the suitability and competence of some of those charged with enforcing the law. Benjamin Armstrong thought it 'very incongruous that such eccentric and ill-informed men as some of the County Magistrates really are should have the power of sentencing prisoners to such an awful penalty as solitary confinement', and Lady Catherine Boileau's constant refrain as she watched the 'Swing' crisis develop was that careless, weak and inactive magistrates were allowing the unrest to build up a head of steam. Lord Suffield was convinced that the appeasement policy of magistrates in north-east Norfolk had actually caused the 'Swing' unrest. 'All the labourers near me were content,' he wrote, 'until they heard of the North Walsham resolution'.

Failings such as these – if failings they were – arose in the view of Charles Brereton from the fact that magistrates were over-reaching themselves. Their strength, he believed, lay as paternalists rather than as judges, and their authority derived solely from their status in their own neighbourhoods. For clerical magistrates that authority was coterminous with the parish, and by meeting in the quasi-judicial setting of the Petty Sessions and Quarter Sessions they effectively broke the bonds of paternalistic connection that entitled them to sit as magistrates in the first place. Brereton argued that they should instead be using their parochial authority to ensure that fair wages were paid, a policy that would tackle crime at its source. 'The Petty Sessions is a system of reprisals,' he wrote, '... wages are the basis of all morality among the labourers ... The political economy of the New Testament is as wise as it is benevolent – “the labourer is worthy of his hire”.'

Brereton foresaw one further danger inherent in an elite amateur magistracy: that the law-enforcers would appear to be applying the law selectively in their own interests, thereby

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64 Armstrong, Norfolk Diary, p. 185, 5 October 1874.
65 N.R.O. Boi 62/1, 117 x 4 Boileau correspondence. Letters written by Lady Catherine Boileau on 26 and 28 November 1830 make specific reference to the weakness of magistrates.
66 Archer, By a Flash, p. 91. The resolution to which Suffield alluded, recommending that farmers discontinue the use of threshing machines, was issued by the North Walsham magistrates on 24 November 1830.
67 Brereton, Subordinate Magistracy, pp. 22 & 140.
alienating the poor still further from legitimate solutions to their grievances. There are, of course, too many actual instances of this to enumerate, but one could cite the presence of the encloser of Fakenham common – Willoughby-Jones – on the bench that tried the protesters against the enclosure, or the make-up of the bench that sat in the case of the Marham enclosure protest, consisting of Sir William Bagge, an arch-opponent of collective action in all its forms; the Rev. E. J. Howman, an anti-liberal, anti-Methodist encloser of his own lands; and W. G. Winearls, the Marham encloser himself. The Liberal-inclined Norfolk News, commenting on the Holt Lowes shooting-rights case, summed up the way in which the legal cards had been stacked against the labouring poor: 'They have, it seems, a right to appeal . . . from landlords and game-preservers at petty sessions to landlords and game-preservers at quarter sessions'.

What, then, were the attitudes of the poor to the legal system that managed them? Thompson’s aphorism – that the poor, trapped by a repressive web of authority, had few outlets other than arson attacks and threatening letters – has an intuitive appeal but, of course, high profile acts of criminal protest were carried out by a tiny minority of individuals. The wider public’s attitude to authority must be inferred from the record of their myriad daily brushes with it. Their reaction to incendiary fires and to convicted arsonists provides one litmus-test, and there is evidence of considerable public sympathy: firemen attacked at Great Witchingham; a fire-engine sabotaged at Heydon; jeering drinkers at an inn in Saxthorpe refusing to help at the scene of a nearby blaze; the posthumous acquisition of folk-hero status by the executed arsonist Richard Nockolds; the liberation mob – constantly sensed if not seen by the prison chaplain – gathered outside the walls of Norwich Castle.

There was also a good deal of resistance to the police after the establishment of the county force in 1840. Petty Sessions records indicate that they were frequently obstructed

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68 N.N. 4.6.70.
69 N.N. 13.3.69.
70 N.N. 7.3.57. The details of the Holt Lows case are considered later in this chapter.
72 Archer, By a Flash, p. 96.
73 N.M. 23.4.31.
74 Archer, By a Flash, p. 159.
75 Archer, By a Flash, p. 174.
76 N.R.O. GTN/34/1 Suffield papers. Rev. James Brown to Suffield 9 and 12 February 1830.
in the course of their duty, sometimes assaulted, and, in one case, opposed by agricultural labourers from a group of parishes who combined in a campaign of civil disobedience and intimidation. 77 Less directly, there is evidence that the courts were facing difficulties in making their own judgements ‘stick’. For every two bastardy orders handed down by the Blofield and Walsham Petty Sessions magistrates between 1839 and 1878, one was disobeyed and came back to be re-heard. 78 In this twilit zone, where law-enforcement met poor law management, the spirit of insubordination and contempt for authority was seldom stilled: refusals to submit to settlement examinations, to body searches on entering the workhouse, and to oakum-picking were part of the regular workload of the Petty Sessions magistrate. 79 One might also consider such events as the periodic non-appearance in court of both defendant and complainant, 80 or the shooting of pheasants on the way home from being fined for poaching, 81 or the ‘flamboyant mock trials at Corpusty in December 1843 when a young labourer was released from the hands of his persistent accuser, 82 or even the concealment of the glebe terrier from the clergyman so that he could not challenge its customary provisions, 83 and find expressed there a general disdain for the many and varied forms of elite authority. 84

Encounters with criminality, the dispensation of justice, and the work of the clerical magistracy can generally be said to have taken place within an attitudinal framework that maximised the alienation of law-breakers from law-enforcers. Benjamin Armstrong was a regular, awe-struck observer of the way in which the full panoply of state and church ceremonial was deployed at the start of Assize week:

77 N.M. 16.6.49. An attempt by the parishioners of West Dereham, Hilgay and Wereham to establish a ‘no-go area’ for police and thereby protect their chosen lifestyle of ‘poaching and dishonest practices’.
78 N.R.O. PS 8/1/1, 2, 3, 4 Blofield & Walsham Petty Sessions Divisional Court Registers 1839 – 1878. Magistrates made 379 bastardy orders and re-heard 179 of them as ‘disobeyed bastardy orders’ during this period.
79 N.R.O. PS 8/1/1, 2, 3, 4 Blofield & Walsham Petty Sessions Divisional Court Registers 1839 – 1878. From a number of potential examples instances of these misdemeanours can be cited on 9 May 1842 (settlement exam.), October 1851 (body search), and 2 May 1849 (oakum picking).
80 N.R.O. PS 8/1/1, 2, 3, 4 Blofield & Walsham Petty Sessions Divisional Court Registers 1839 – 1878.
81 'The King of the Norfolk Poachers' (ed. L. Rider Haggard), I Walked by Night (Ipswich, 1975), p. 164: ‘Little I cared for them or there fines’.
82 Jones, ‘Thomas Campbell Foster’, p. 16.
84 Although it is important to acknowledge the fact that the proliferation of minor assault charges brought, many of them domestic in nature, demonstrates a faith in – and a willingness to use – the institutions of the law.

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‘A wonderful instance of State Ritual at the Cathedral!’ he wrote, in 1884, ‘The Bishop was at the west
door waiting for the judges. The procession reached from the west door to the organ loft. In it were the
Bishops, Canons, Mayor and Corporation (with regalia), City Sheriff, High Sheriff and Chaplain, Town
Councillors and others. The presence of a cavalry regiment added to what was really a grand scene.’

Few displays could have established a more complete contrast with the shambolic
specimens of the labouring poor that awaited the judgement of this elite circus. And, of
course, magistrates were also poor law guardians, occupying a position of omnipotence
that enabled them to manage local labour markets and prosecute those workers who
failed to comply.

The parishioner who transgressed the game laws could expect little sympathy or help
from his local clergyman. Even if he was resident in the parish and was not a game
preserver himself, the parson would possess too keen a sense that any erosion of the game
laws’ underlying principle could ultimately lead to the erosion of the church’s own
property and position. In this way, whatever their levels of individual culpability, clerical
magistrates operated at the heart of a system that divided, dissembled and discriminated.
It was a system, too, that could seem utterly devoid of internal logic: it set a premium on
the importance of the family, yet used penal transportation to tear families apart; it strove
to minimise expenditure on poor relief, yet could make entire families dependent upon it
while some trivial offence was pursued to its inflexible, grossly disproportionate
conclusion. One tract-seller, writing during the febrile months of ‘Swing’, used a Biblical
allusion to sum up the hypocrisy and injustice of the clerical magistrate’s position: ‘Oh ye
Church of England Parsins,’ he wrote, ‘Who strain at a knat and swallow a camell, woe
woe woe be unto you, ye shall one day have your reward’.86

Managing Criminality: Modes of Detection and Enforcement

‘A scroll of smoke blew aside and revealed . . . a wheat-rick in startling juxtaposition with the decaying
one, and behind this a series of others, composing the main produce of the farm . . . “Stop the draught under

85 Armstrong, Norfolk Diary, p. 263 (10 February 1884).
86 Hobsbawm & Rude, Captain Swing, p. 161.
"the wheat-rick!" cried Gabriel, "Get a tarpaulin, quick! . . . Stand here with a bucket and keep the cloth wet!" 87

If Thomas Hardy’s Gabriel Oak had tackled a rick blaze with the same energy in nineteenth-century Norfolk he would quickly have drawn suspicion upon himself as the likely incendiaryist, for such was the bewilderment in the outraged minds of the authorities that eager helpers and indolent bystanders alike frequently found themselves under arrest. Any labourer who had recently been in trouble with his employer – particularly if he had been sacked – was immediately the prime suspect in any arson attack, and the suspicion was compounded if there existed a ‘history’ between employer and employee. Robert Thorne did not have to think for long, for instance, when he was asked to come up with some names of those who could have started the fire on his property: William Medlar – whose son had recently been dismissed by Thorne as an incompetent crow-scarer – had already been charged with an assault on Thorne and had declared him ‘the biggest b[astard] alive . . . he would not give him work or allow others to give it to him; but never mind, he would mark him for it some time’. 88

The danger in having a semi-permanent cast-list of suspects was that the legal process could become a vindictive system, a theatre for score-settling with trumped-up charges being accepted on the flimsiest of evidence. It was generally accepted, for instance, that the case against Gilpin Reynolds was ‘purely circumstantial.’ A prosecution association of local farmers, led by the Heydon agent John Richardson, had persuaded themselves that Reynolds was their man, and he was sent to his death with, as the judge said, the purpose of making ‘a signal example of offenders’. 89 In some cases it is simply difficult to avoid the conclusion that, if the system was patient and determined enough, it would eventually get its man. Robert Hunt, cleared of involvement in Richard Nockolds’ incendiaryist and political activities in 1831 was, in 1844, transported for seven years for stealing three wheelspokes. 90 We are here confronted with the model of the ‘internal outsider’, the misfit whose reputation alone constituted ‘evidence’ and whose conviction represented ‘justice’ whatever the awkward details and facts of a particular incident may have suggested. Perhaps this was only sustainable in a society where deference was still

88 N.M. 20.12.44.
89 N.C. 29.3.34. Reynolds had been convicted of incendiarism.
90 N.C. 26.10.44.
the norm; where elites probably knew best and were too powerful to be challenged even when it seemed they did not; where defendants and their supporters were often too unsophisticated to recognize low standards of evidence and too inarticulate to draw attention to them when they did; and where all was underpinned by an understanding that justice ultimately rested with a much higher, spiritual and unanswerable authority.

Whatever the reason, suspicion fell so readily upon certain individuals that newspapers were often able to include news of an arrest in the same report that announced the crime.

The ‘usual suspects’ method of solving crime had its share of influential supporters, among them the Rev. Charles Brereton who argued that local knowledge was an essential element of law enforcement, and one that would be surrendered by any move to a professional, county-wide police force. Brereton listed the recent achievements of the parish constable of Great Massingham, made possible by his knowledge of ‘bad characters’, by his having the time to get his ear to the ground, and even by his having the uncanny knack of being able to recognize footprints.91 The old system, argued Brereton, worked because every district, parish and hamlet, had its own well-known and instantly accessible ‘guardian of the peace’, as opposed to the ‘movable, rambling [county] police which no one will ever know where to find’.92 More fundamentally the new system tinkered with those chains of landownership and established authority upon which social stability so depended: ‘You propose to remove the natural defences of society which spring out of and are parts of society itself, and which for many ages have guarded us like a solid shore from the waves of internal tumult’.93

Brereton understood, too, that while the old system was locally-based it was not parish-bound. Warrants to magistrates in other parts of the country could be raised when the need arose, and there is evidence of considerable co-operation and mobility of information between local jurisdictions.94 But legal systems that relied upon chains of landownership and established authority were a recipe for alienation. As with John

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94 Arrest warrants raised by the magistrates of Diss, for example, could rapidly be forwarded to the magistrates of Colchester when soldiers from the latter town had become the subjects of bastardy orders in the former. N.R.O. PD 100/258 Constables’ arrest warrants in bastardy orders, Diss 1762 – 1813.
Richardson’s association to prosecute Gilpin Reynolds, vested interests were able to use money and influence to secure the legal outcome that best suited them. More perversely still they recognised the divisive utility of the cash reward. Offers of rewards were everywhere, often established by subscription fund. They were used to apprehend poachers, cattle-maimers, despoilers of greenwood and underwood, and even the breakers of church windows.

A further flaw in Brereton’s obsession with ‘parish authorities’ was, straightforwardly, the other side of the ‘local enforcement’ coin: just as parish constables knew the bad characters so the bad characters knew the parish constables and could in some cases intimidate them away from fulfilling their duties. Less sinister was the notion that local constables might simply be reluctant to act against people who were, in all other respects, their neighbours. Giving evidence to a Parliamentary Select Committee on the Police in 1852, the Rev. John Holmes, who had been chairman of the Norfolk Police Committee since 1845, pointed out that, in his experience, under the old system the ‘parish constable has been actually afraid of going amongst the people to serve [a] warrant’. The problems associated with local constables were faced a number of times by the authorities in the years before 1839, and police officers from London were not infrequently visitors to Norfolk troublespots.

More seriously for Norfolk’s new police force, it soon acquired ‘an unenviable reputation for its brutal treatment of prisoners’ and a suspicious public began to close ranks around criminal suspects. At Swaffham the highly dubious tactics of the police, who entrapped two men into committing a burglary, caused outrage. Here the wheel turned full circle, and modern policing found itself subjected to a traditional form of censure: ‘a
large number of persons assembled in the street, with an effigy of the police, which they afterwards hung in the town and opposite the police superintendent’s house.  

Social Crime?

Howkins has described a series of tests that can be applied in order to detect ‘economic crime’, and together they make a compelling case for the inclusion of poaching in the category. The tests require, first, that the object stolen should be directly related to the means of subsistence; second, that the person involved is not otherwise regarded as a criminal; third, that patterns in the commission of the crime shadow fluctuations in the labour market; and, fourth, that the guilty party should be at the lower end of the social scale.

If poaching was a crime driven by economic imperatives, what case can be made for describing it as an act of social protest? The answer must lie in the way that elites had tied the game laws into notions of property ownership and gentry privilege. The entitlement to kill game existed only within strictly-defined and jealously-guarded social limits: possession of the entitlement by a tiny minority — estimated at only 0.24% of the population in 1840 — was an unquestionable mark of status, and the glacially slow surrendering of parts of it to the middle-classes mirrored the changing aspirations and political power-brokering that were becoming apparent elsewhere in society. No part of the entitlement ever extended to the working class — unless they happened to be employed as game-keepers — and this shining totem of class privilege was protected by the game-preservers themselves in their secondary role on the magistrates’ bench.

Enforcement of the game laws frequently revealed the elite at their unyielding and vindictive worst, with spring guns, man-traps and penal transportation in the first half of the nineteenth century, and confrontational deployment of the rural police in the

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103 N.M. 20.5.48.
The game laws also provided elites with the pretext for other arbitrary actions against the interests of the poor: the eviction of suspect tenants; the stopping up of footpaths; and the ending of traditionally enjoyed rights such as wood-gathering.

If these factors sometimes combined to cast the village poacher in the quasi-mythological role of ‘Robin Hood’ – heroically evading the cruel heel of authority – the fact of an association between poaching and political radicalism was sometimes plain to see. The ‘King of the Norfolk Poachers’ was offered money to emigrate by a local landowner after he had organized public protest meetings against enclosure and charity reform of the game laws became a cause adopted by the Anti-Corn Law League as part of their overall campaign against monopoly and protectionism; and Joseph Arch saw in the Prevention of Poaching Act (1862) an insidious attempt by the ruling elite to place the rural poor under permanent surveillance. In trade unionist and socialist mythology the poacher became a hero of the resistance, not only fighting for his family’s needs (and the strictly law-abiding Primitive Methodist Joseph Arch acknowledged that he would not blame a man who poached those rabbits and hares that ‘were the fair property of anybody who [could] take [them]’), but who also struck deeper, towards the structural core of rural society itself. Tom Higdon, prominent in the Burston School Strike, believed that poaching challenged the elite’s tithe-like ‘first fruits’ mentality towards game, the decadent ethos of the idle, sporting rich, and the whole feudal structure that bound farmers and labourers alike in an atmosphere of fear, appeasement and desperate self-interest.

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107 The exemplary eviction of William Balls from Lord Walsingham’s estate has already been mentioned (p. 264).
108 Antagonism between Lord Walsingham and his neighbour Lord Clermont was fuelled by Clermont’s suspicion that paths made by Walsingham’s tenants were being used by them as a springboard for poaching raids into Clermont’s woods. N.R.O. WLS LXII/41/67: Walsingham papers, Clermont to Walsingham (29 January 1821).
Stepping into this complex frame whenever he heard a poaching case was the clerical magistrate. Here he weighed much more than straightforward issues of rabbit-snaring and pheasant-taking: game law judgements placed him at the front-line between employers and the poorly paid; between landowning poor law guardians and the unemployed; between the ‘haves’ and the ‘have-nots’ of contemporary rural society. The Rev. Henry Worsley of Easton in Suffolk, writing in 1849, recognized in the breaking and enforcement of the game laws ‘a powerful ancillary factor, the antagonism of class against class in our rural districts’. Magistrates at the Petty Sessions had, like the Rev. J. D. Barton, the discretion to halt proceedings so that a quiet word might be had with the prosecuting landowner, but where enforced deference did not work, landowners could always resort to combining in ‘prosecution associations’, or they might even, as was the case with Lord Walsingham, employ a spy to go among the men, to infiltrate their social networks and to report back on their criminal and political activities.

Game laws even had the potential to cause divisions within the ruling elite, and a number of disputes flared up between landowning neighbours, among which the protracted and bitter exchanges between Lords Walsingham and Clermont – entailing boundary disputes, confrontations over rights of way, and accusations and counter-accusations about harbouring poachers as tenants – must stand as nineteenth-century Norfolk’s finest example. Occasionally clergymen strayed into this crossfire, as was the case with the Rev. Thomas Scott of Watton Green when he was accused of exceeding his shooting rights on the fringes of the Merton estate. During the course of their prickly relationship at Ketteringham, the Rev. William Wayte Andrew and Squire Boileau had to tread very carefully on the subject of game, eventually devising between themselves an

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115 N.R.O. PS8/1/1 Blofield & Walsham Petty Sessions Divisional Court Register 5 December, 1842.
116 e.g. N.R.O. B.R.A. 1118/128, 755 x 1. Legal expenses for prosecuting poachers (1851) and N.R.O. MC 3/589, 516 x 9 Association against night poaching (1788).
117 N.R.O. WLS/LXII/22/1: Walsingham papers, Campaign against poaching and political agitation, (1873). Walsingham’s sophisticated ‘sting’ operation involved the employment of a private investigator called Bucknole. His reports were passed to Walsingham via an intermediary in London, Edwin Levy. It seems highly significant that Bucknole’s reports on poaching and on trade union activity were given equal weighting and barely distinguished as examples of subversive working-class activity.
118 There are too many references to this dispute to list comprehensively, but the relevantly correspondence is framed between N.R.O. WLS/LXII/22/1: Walsingham papers, Clermont to Walsingham (28 January 1810) and N.R.O. WLS LXII/4/175 Swan Tabrum To Walsingham (2 May 1822).
ad hoc 'custom' of gifts of game so that potential misunderstandings and unpleasantness could be avoided.\textsuperscript{120}

Caught much more literally in the crossfire of poaching was the Rev. William Whitear of Starston, mistakenly shot and killed in the woods by a member of his own anti-poaching party.\textsuperscript{121} Whitear's death helped to crystallize the arguments about the ways in which the game laws were enforced 'in the field' rather than in the courts. These methods were at best incompetent, and Charles Brereton railed against 'irregular and blundering watches' during which 'many lives are continually lost'.\textsuperscript{122} At worst they were utterly corrupt, with the boundaries between poachers and enforcers frequently becoming blurred. As the Rev. James Brown observed:

'Next to the poachers themselves, those who are employed to watch them are the most liable to corruption from the present system. The habit of being abroad in the night & the knowledge they acquire of the haunts of game & of the practices of poachers, well qualify them in the end for becoming expert associates with them.'\textsuperscript{123}

The net of 'social crime' can nevertheless be cast much wider than poaching, and the term can be used more generally in the quest to understand the society in which Norfolk's nineteenth-century rural poor were living. There are, of course, dangers in using the term indiscriminately – as Archer has said, 'there was, and is, a world of difference between turnip-stealing and arson'\textsuperscript{124} - but it seems valid to think again about the motivation behind crimes which afforded the perpetrator no direct economic gain. To think again, for example, why anyone would trouble to send an anonymous letter to one of the slumbering prebendaries of Norwich Cathedral, threatening him with 'the old dance of Swing',\textsuperscript{125} or why the closure of a footpath in Earsham should attract a crowd of 400 demonstrators, waving banners that proclaimed 'We Demand Back our Public Rights'.\textsuperscript{126} A great many 'crimes' like these were clearly taking place along the fault-line that divided two mutually antagonistic and uncomprehending halves of rural society: the

\begin{footnotes}
\item \textsuperscript{120} N.R.O. Boi 65, 117 x 4 Boileau papers, correspondence between the Rev. W. W. Andrew and J. P. Boileau, 23 December 1845 and 5 January 1847.
\item \textsuperscript{121} Brereton, \textit{Subordinate Magistracy}, p. 8.
\item \textsuperscript{122} N.R.O. GTN/32/1 Suffield papers, Rev. James Brown to Suffield, 1 February 1830.
\item \textsuperscript{123} Archer, 'The Wells-Charlesworth Debate', p. 83.
\item \textsuperscript{124} N.R.O. DCN120/2D/1 Letter to the Rev Edward Bankes, 15 October 1831.
\item \textsuperscript{125} N.R.O. MEA 7/11,12,13 660 x 8. Meade papers, Earsham footpath dispute 1887 – 1890.
\end{footnotes}
gleaners who refused to recognise the technical illegality of their custom; the rough-musickers at Clippesby who burned in effigy a labourer who had transgressed their moral code; the parishioners of Wereham and West Dereham who attempted to establish no-go areas for the police; the five men of Halvergate who threw down a gate that was enclosing land. Fine distinctions may well be drawn between ‘social’, ‘protest’ and ‘economic’ crimes, but it seems justifiable to allow the boundaries to remain blurred. A substantial amount of nineteenth-century rural crime was either a result of or a reaction to the way in which society was organised. To this extent, at least, it may well be that, long after the apparent expiry date of the notion, we are looking at ‘crimes of the moral economy’.

The concept of ‘social crime’—law-breaking for socio-economic reasons—has its mirror image in the concept of ‘social law’—law-making for socio-economic reasons. Throughout the century, by no means only in its latter half, voices were increasingly to be heard arguing that the strategy of ‘social law-making’ was pernicious and unsustainable. The game laws were ‘exclusive and arbitrary in principle’ and ‘corruptive and demoralising in practice’ wrote Edward Harbord in 1825, and the corruption was exacerbated when ‘magistrates who know and feel that they have a strong bias towards a rigorous enforcement of the game laws should sit on the bench and pronounce judgments affecting the rights and liberties of almost friendless men’.

‘The question is, what can we do?’ asked Henry Ffollkes in his assize sermon of 1876. Dawning on men like Ffollkes was a realisation that the traditional nineteenth-century panacea—charity—simply would not do. ‘Charity creates much of the misery it relieves,’ Ffollkes argued, ‘but does not relieve all the misery it creates’. Four decades on from ‘Swing’ and elite voices were beginning, at last, to offer a tremulous echo of the

127 Bushaway, By Rite, pp. 145–6.
128 N.N. 29.2.68. The Rev. C. Lucas was the chairman of the bench that heard the case. John Mumford, the target of the ‘skimmington’, had given evidence against two of the defendants in a poaching case.
129 N.M. 16.6.49.
130 Similar low-profile protests against enclosure are probably concealed within the statistics of ‘malicious damage’.
131 E. Harbord, Considerations on the Game Laws (Norwich, 1825), preface.
132 Ffolkes, Dangers and Duties, p. 8.
conclusion reached by Edward Gibbon Wakefield in the 1830s: 'the first main cause of crime is misery'.

Folkes's sermon is unusual, however, insofar as it provides a clear statement of opinion from a clergyman on the subject of social crime. As with many aspects of criminal enforcement, clerical magistrates were no more and no less active than their colleagues when it came to prosecuting poachers, and, with the exception of the examples cited here, very few of them broke cover to make comment about what was, on the one hand, a routine matter of court business and, on the other, a cornerstone of the property principle and of gentry privilege. This relative silence is a significant measure of the complicity of the rural clergy in the administration of the game laws and is, by extension, indicative of the extent to which clergymen were woven into the warp and weft of all that the game laws stood for. On this issue, at least, the clerical magistracy was the dog that did not bark, and the significance of their silence was not lost on the rural poor.

From Custom to Crime

A recurring theme of this and other chapters has been the way in which popular collective activity was gradually turned aside during the nineteenth century and replaced with imposed, highly-regulated elite forms and procedures. This section explores the part played by the magistrate’s bench in this process, and, in particular, considers the legalistic framework within which the parish clergyman encountered and managed parochial custom.

Custom came to form the basis of much of the common law, and it was this quasi-legal status that attracted the concerned attention of those whose aim was to base the law more firmly on the certainties of statute. But beyond its legal utility, custom played a much more fundamental and wide-ranging role in parish life. It provided, as Bushaway has written, ‘the essential underpinning for a holistic structure of values, beliefs, mechanisms

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134 E. G. Wakefield, Swing Unmasked: Or the Causes of Rural Incendiaryism (1831), reproduced in K. E. Carpenter (ed.), The Aftermath of 'The Last Labourers' Revolt' (New York, 1972), p. 45
135 For more on the relationship between custom and the common law see E. P. Thompson, Customs in Common (London, 1993), passim but especially p. 4 and Bushaway, By Rite, p. 7.
and forms which both derived from and had implication for the rural labouring poor's view of relationships in the village." In other words, custom was the keystone of the 'social compact' element of the moral economy, by which the rights and responsibilities of the labouring poor were recognised by elites in return for acknowledgement of and deference to their status. Customary society also had a structural and cultural affinity with the 'living-in' system of farm service. For its proponents, living-in provided a structure of discipline and respect, founded on a commonality of interest and experience between farmer and labourer, and its demise was held responsible for many facets of social alienation including unemployment, poverty, immorality and criminality.

As well as social structures, custom underpinned a number of cultural concepts of community and belonging. Footpaths, for instance, helped shape the mental map of parochial identity: they might be the tried and trusted routes of generations of smugglers and poachers; or owe their origins to the age-old passage of the dead; or they might simply fizzle out at the parish boundary in an echo of the old access ways to the open-fields.

Custom was multi-layered and multi-faceted in a way that came to exemplify the infinite diversity of rural working-class life and experience. An inner core of 'macro-custom' that might be found fairly generally in working-class communities, was overlain by something more regional, something that owed its origins to locales and pays, and was overlain again by the 'micro-custom' of individual parishes, trades and crafts. The Rev. John Gunn may well have explored and come to celebrate the diversity of custom and culture in his parish of Irstead, but knowing everything that there was to know about the flora, fauna and topography of an area could be, in the wrong hands, dangerous and threatening knowledge. '[The Poacher] must study wether,' wrote the 'King of the

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139 N.R.O. BOL 4/154, 742 x 4 Bolingbroke papers. Notes on folklore include a discussion on the belief that ‘a corpse passing makes a right of way’ (1818).
141 Rev. J. Gunn, ‘Proverbs, adages and popular superstitions still present in the parish of Irstead’, Norfolk Archaeology 2 (1849) pp. 291 – 308. See Chapter 1 for a discussion of this work.
Norfolk poachers', 'and all the signs of woodcraft, the call of birds, and the flight of
Wood Pigeons in the wood at night and distinguish the different sounds... wen he enters
a wood he must get the wind in his face, and take pertucler notice which point it blows
from... the wind and the stars are his guide.'

Above all, custom could have a serious role to play in the local and domestic economy. Wood-gathering, for instance, 'was a systematic and regular method of acquiring fuel and should not be regarded as sporadic or casual', and gleaning represented a crucial element in female employment in areas like Norfolk where the textile industry had gone into sudden and terminal decline. Custom, then, was something that permeated almost every fibre of the fabric of rural life and, as such, it represented an ideological and political challenge to elites. With elites pursuing the new imperatives of social discipline and capital-intensive farming, the inevitable collision of interests was often ugly, sometimes violent, and always profound.

One area in which customary rights were being systematically suppressed was that of footpaths and traditional rights of way. Fig. 6.2 provides a graphic illustration of the number of footpath closure orders made between 1790 and 1919, showing a dramatic peak during the early decades of the nineteenth century that was undoubtedly associated with enclosure. Clergy landowners initiated just under one quarter of these closures (30 out of 131) but many more were associated with granting closure orders in their capacity as magistrates.

Beside the usual formulaic excuse — that the landowner was substituting a more direct and convenient route — a number of reasons for seeking closure orders were indicative of the suspicion with which customary rights-of-way had come to be regarded. At Caister it was claimed that footpaths were 'frequently made use of by evil disposed persons to commit depredations on the several lands and premises adjoining thereto'; at Burnham Norton a path running close to the church led to unruly and immoral behaviour in the churchyard; for Lord Clermont paths were a constant source of 'Day & night poaching

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142 ‘The King of the Norfolk Poachers’, I Walked by Night, p. 150.
145 N.R.O. C/Sce/1/9 Caister-next-Sea road closure order, 1900.
or stealing timber for trespassing'; and for the Rev. Philip Jeans and the farmers of Great Witchingham, rights of way were an ever-present weapon in their struggle over tithe-rights. In other cases, specifically ones involving clergymen, the implicit message seemed to be that the proximity of customary routes to rectory houses and gardens was no longer desirable: at Whissonsett Edward Kemp closed a path that crossed the parsonage house yard; at Walpole St. Peter the (unnamed) rector closed a path on land abutting the rectory; at Rollesby Thomas Baker closed a path that ran beside the rectory garden; at Earsham George Day closed a path beside his parsonage; and at Rackheath Henry Adams diverted a path that would otherwise have run close to his new rectory.

Fig. 6.2: Footpath Closure Orders made in Norfolk, 1790 - 1919

SOURCE: N.R.O. C/Sce/1/1 - 12, Road Closure Orders 1790 – 1919

Attitudes such as these could cause a considerable degree of antagonism, and one that sometimes spilled over into other issues of political, social and religious conflict. In 1848 a correspondent identifying himself only as ‘A Dissenter’ wrote to the Norfolk News:

‘I, in behalf of some friends who labour under the burden of clerical intolerance and sigh for a separation of Church and State, wish to be informed . . . if a path through a churchyard that has been used by the

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147 N.R.O. WLS LXII/41/67: Walsingham papers, Clermont to Walsingham (29 January 1821).
148 N.R.O. FEL 374, 552 x 4: Fellowes papers, Great Witchingham tithe dispute (c.1790).
149 Whissonsett: N.R.O. C/Sce/1/11 (1829); Walpole St. Peter: N.R.O. C/Sce/1/9 (1803); Rollesby: N.R.O. C/Sce/1/9 (1802); Earsham: N.R.O. C/Sce/1/10 (1814); Rackheath N.R.O. C/Sce/1/12 (1911).
inhabitants for at least 50 years, can be legally stopped for the purpose of making the Rector's and Churchwarden's property more private.

As late as 1890 footpaths and rights of way were still being seen as major issues of principle and of civil right. Capt. Meade's decision to close two lanes in Earsham which he claimed were used by poachers, attracted a crowd of 400 banner-waving, chanting demonstrators. The protesters had been summoned by an activist known as Edward 'Parson' James, who had circulated a handbill calling for action 'against the shameful public plunder by the closing of certain highways'. The crowd eventually rushed and broke down Meade's gates and fences, chanting 'We Demand Back our Public Rights'. At the subsequent hearing at Harleston Petty Sessions, six magistrates, including three clergymen, handed down exemplary fines to the nine ringleaders. Their chief offence had been a failure to adhere to the grievance procedure set out in the 1835 Highways Act but, as Edward James pointed out, working people were effectively excluded from a procedure which demanded written notice of a complaint to be submitted to the vestry meeting, to the Quarter Sessions or to the parish surveyor. Just as in the case of procedures for protest against enclosure, a written culture was used to dominate, intimidate, exclude and disenfranchise those who were ignorant of procedure, too poor to pursue it, or simply unable to write. For Capt. Meade, who had taken the extraordinary step of hiring Mr. George A. Vennall - a barrister of the Inner Temple - to represent him at petty sessions, the legal bill for establishing this matter of principle amounted to £187 - 18s. - 2d.

If, as Birtles has suggested, some writers have elevated custom to the status of 'peasant law', a clear conflict can immediately be seen with the precepts of 'elite law' which had, as its guiding principle, the ideology of private property and power. The custom of gleaning, for instance, represented a direct challenge to the 'property' of the harvest, and contention surrounding it essentially boiled down to whether the 'moral right' (of the poor) to harvest gleanings outweighed the 'legal right' (of the farmer) to every stage and

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150 N.N. 20.5.48.
151 N.R.O. MEA 7/11,12,12, 660 x 8: Earsham footpath dispute (1887 - 1890).
153 See Bushaway, By Rite, pp. 26 – 7 for more on this point.
aspect of the crop. The 'law of private property and power' asserted its ascendancy over
custom by placing new stress on the importance of documentary evidence. When the
Rev. Neville White of Stalham first found his rights to glebe land being challenged, the
solution seemed obvious to him:

'If all is well I shall be through Honing on Monday & will enquire of my present tenant whether any further
trespass has been committed by Mr. Brown since you wrote to him & since I saw him. I will also call on
Mr. Cubitt & ask him to lend me the award & tithe commutation map, for it is only by these documents that
I can prove my right as vicar of Stalham for the time being to the severals in dispute'.

Similarly, when Welsh Harper of Tatterford appeared once too often before Fakenham
magistrates, accused of cutting underwood that he claimed was growing on the poor's
land but which Capt. John Townshend claimed was enclosed within his own land,
Harper was eventually confronted with a map:

'A copy of the award, together with the Act of Parliament authorising the enclosure and a map of the
locality being produced it was clearly proved that the defendants were in error'.

Implicit here, alongside the issues of land ownership and land use, was a fundamental
disagreement over the provenance of charity land. At the same time as a number of
customary charities were being challenged by elites because of the absence of
documentary validation, the combination of charity rights and property rights within
poor's land disputes constituted a potent mix. One such dispute, over a patch of heathland
and rough, tussocky grass known as the Holt Lows raged for over ten years and became a
cause celebre for Liberal and nascent trade union interests. In essence, the dispute over
the Holt Lows centred on the right to shoot rabbits there. A number of labourers claimed
that the right had been vested in them when the Lows were designated poor's land at
enclosure, and a procession took place through the courts as various labourers were
apprehended in exercising their claim. Against them, the trustees of the Holt Lows
charity, led by the Rev. Edward Brumell, claimed that all rights had been vested in them;
that their responsibility was to maximise the income from the charity land; and that, to do
this, they had justifiably taken the commercial decision to sell exclusive shooting rights

154 N.R.O. PD 262/63, 64 Stalham glebe land litigation, Rev. Neville White to Henry Ling (solicitor), 23
November 1861.
155 N.N. 7.4.55.
156 The Chancery Scheme for the Regulation and Management of Walsingham Charities (1861) may be
cited as an example here (N.R.O. PD 582/289).
157 The relevant sources for the Holt Lows dispute (1855 – 66) are listed in footnote 223, chapter five.
over the property. In an impassioned speech at one of the many Holt Lows hearings, Mr. Tillett, defence counsel for the labourers, touched upon a host of contemporary grievances concerning the manipulation and extirpation of custom:

"[This prosecution] is breaking in upon a right which by custom has been ratified for many, very many years... [these poor people] see that custom is held continually to establish ownership in regard to the title of estates about them... [they might wonder], and not without reason, that if 50 or 60 years will give a right to an estate, it should not give them, the poor people, a right to the pitiful privileges of killing rabbits on a wild waste... It cannot be expected that these poor people, who have scarcely a particle of anything their own, should not be annoyed that those well to do in the world should envy them that right, and endeavour to deprive the poor of their heritage - a pitiful, wretched heritage it is'.

The transformation of custom into crime is clearly problematic. The fact that some customs, like gleaning, were never criminalised and that they consequently simmered on throughout much of the nineteenth century, offers a profound insight into the disturbed relationship between the ruling and the working classes in rural society. In those areas where the law could not, or would not, tread, the authority and influence of the parish clergyman came to the fore, cajoling and persuading, perhaps, or hedging a customary practice about with so many rules and regulations that it became - almost - a structured and respectable part of parish life:

'Take Notice that no Gleaning will be allowed before 8 o clock in the Morning nor later than six o clock in the Evening at which hours the Bell will Toll, nor will any Gleaners be allowed to enter any field till the field is cleared. No Donkeys or Carts will be allowed to enter any field. Gleaners are requested to conduct themselves orderly and abstain from the use of bad language. W. H. Andrews, rector; William Woodthorpe, Chas. Pearse, churchwardens; John Woodthorpe, William Brewster, H. K. Nurse, Sam. Smith.'

Customs operated and were principally understood within a highly local context. They formed the basis of local common law and - whatever the exact measure of their longevity - they constituted an essential element of working-class identity. Their gradual unravelling mirrored the disintegration of wider notions of belonging and, as ever, in the pulpit or on the bench, the Anglican clergyman was often ready to demonstrate his complicity in the process. Voices like those of Charles Brereton were seldom enough

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158 Tillett's speech was reported in *N.N.* 7.3.57. By 1857 the case had attracted so much attention that liberal-minded lawyers like Tillett were prepared to give their services free in defence of the labourers. A fighting fund to contribute towards other costs incurred by the labourers was also established, paid into by a number of workers' groups. Even so, it should be noted that one witness called in support of the labourers was the Rev. Benjamin Pulleyne. Pulleyne had been rector of Holt at the time of the enclosure of the Lows, and in 1857 he was called as one of the 'elderly witnesses' that testified to the land's customary use.

raised: he argued that local notions of the law were best served by local modes of enforcement and that their removal would represent a fundamental change in the structure of society. 'If you remove this strand along which every Briton has walked securely,' he wrote, 'even under a sense of wrong and injury . . . you will let in tides, and currents, and waves, to which your new embankment may not be able to [hold]'\textsuperscript{160}

One of the principal mechanisms by which customary understandings of land use and identity were transformed was the process of parliamentary enclosure. Among the catalogue of rights lost by the labouring poor were livestock-keeping, fuel-collecting, gleaning, wood-gathering, turbary, fishing and hay-making.\textsuperscript{161} At its core enclosure revolutionised the economic and physical scale of farming; at its margins – by affecting such peripheries as parish perambulations and verge commons - it stripped away layers of the economic and social independence hitherto enjoyed by the poor. Enclosure was also a profoundly visible event. Its new trackways, hedgerows and farm buildings amounted to a tangible re-ordering of the customary landscape (Plate 17).

Whatever the exact local circumstances, clergymen were generally held to have been disproportionately rewarded by the process of enclosure. Their agreement was usually essential before any enclosure could proceed, and the other principal enclosers often saw to it that 'sweeteners' for the clergy were built into the Award in the form of attractive land consolidations around the Rectory and generous parcellations in lieu of tithe. The clergyman was also usually protected from the cost of enclosure, and he was entitled to nominate one of the commissioners, often choosing a colleague from the Church.

By its intent, by its methodology and by its impact, enclosure represented the arrogation of the law by a tiny minority in pursuit of their own economic interests. As such it also represented the negation of the spirit of law and order - John Clare described its cynical artifice as the 'lawless law'\textsuperscript{162} – and it must have done much, if only in an impressionistic

\textsuperscript{160} Brereton, \textit{A Letter}, p. 14.
\textsuperscript{161} Snell, \textit{Annals}, pp. 179 – 180.
\textsuperscript{162} John Clare, \textit{The Mores}. The full stanza runs: 'Thus with the poor scared freedom bade goodbye/And much more they feel the smothered sigh/And buds and trees and flowers without a name/All sighed when lawless law's enclosure came'.
way, to shape attitudes on both sides of the social divide as to what was possible when law-makers exercised their full powers.

One clergyman who was single-minded in his determination to use enclosure to extinguish custom was George Day at Earsham. Day took over the living in 1812, and conflict over his rights to tithe and to portions of newly-enclosed land began almost immediately. Not only, in Day’s view, did the enclosure invalidate a pre-existing modus; he felt that the enhanced value of the land should be reflected in a new entitlement to agistment tithe. Day’s campaign to break custom led him to insist that signed individual tithe contracts were made with each farmer, and took him into some very murky areas indeed, including a demand made to the bafflement of all that corn should be tithed in ‘cocks’ rather than the customary ‘swathes’. The generally soured atmosphere extended even into the church building, where Day encouraged newcomers and visitors to sit in other people’s accustomed pews.

Day was demonstrating a holistic perception of custom, and was making it his mission to root it out from wherever it lurked: in tithe; in grazing rights; in the glebe terrier; in pew appropriation. For their part his parishioners feared a ‘domino effect’, and foresaw that if Day was allowed to overturn one custom a number of others would surely collapse in their turn:

‘In this parish there are several customs very beneficial to the owners of the property therein . . . and though the present question is of small importance yet it is feared if the Rector once makes an innovation upon any of the customs he may attempt something more’.

Day’s ‘holistic perception’ of the role of custom was not unlike that of James Woodforde at Weston Longville. What separated the two men was, of course, their attitude to

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163 N.R.O. MEA 7/8, 660 x 9: Earsham tithe dispute, Rev. George Day to Sir Windham Dalling (7 June 1818). Money was clearly changing hands for grazing rights over land that had previously been of little value. Day was seeking to tithe this new grazing income.
164 N.R.O. MEA 7/8, 660 x 9: Earsham tithe dispute, Tithe composition agreements (August and September 1819).
165 N.R.O. MEA 3/593, 659 x 3: Earsham tithe dispute, Kingsbury & Margetson (solicitors) to Sir Windham Dalling (11 August 1825). Day’s rationale was that it was easier to see what he was getting when tithe was rendered in ‘cocks’.
custom: Day hacked at its tendrils while Woodforde nurtured them and encouraged them to weave their way ever deeper into the life of his community.\textsuperscript{168} It is tempting to read into this division a notion of ‘old-style’ and ‘new-style’ Anglican clergymen, a notion given added weight by the respective stances taken during the Holt Lows dispute by the Revs. Edward Brumell and Benjamin Pulleyne. If this notion is tentatively accepted, and if enclosure is perceived to lie somewhere close to the heart of it, the fact that there was a very slow transition must also be acknowledged. George Day was an early exponent of ‘new-style’: contemporaries of his like Charles Brereton were still arguing passionately in favour of the centrality of local custom to local law enforcement,\textsuperscript{169} and Day had much more in common with Homfray at Bintree who, deep into the 1860s and 1870s, was still doing battle with the various sacred cows of parish life.\textsuperscript{170} Similarly, the Rev. Neville White’s travails over customary glebe land usage in Stalham and his eventual surrender to the authority of the oldest parishioners,\textsuperscript{171} demonstrate that custom was still a force to be reckoned with even in the later years of the nineteenth century.

That the revolution was not easily achieved must stem partly from the fact that the church had once played such an integral role in the ‘customary life’ of the parish. The church’s active and central role in Rogationtide perambulations, for instance,\textsuperscript{172} or its pronouncement of the scriptural authority for gleaning,\textsuperscript{173} or the fact that it validated gleaning by sounding the ‘gleaning bell’, were legacies that could not be easily swept aside when collective memories were long. There was also the vexed question of motive. At least part of Day’s motivation in quashing the customs of Earsham was to protect and maximise the income of the living for his successors.\textsuperscript{174} The elite’s preoccupation with systems of inheritance could, of course, be argued to have amounted to little more than the establishment of an alternative ‘custom’.

\textsuperscript{168} See, for example, Bushaway, \textit{By Rite}, pp. 39 – 40 for notes on Woodforde as a sponsor of local custom.
\textsuperscript{169} Brereton, \textit{A Letter}, pp. 8 – 9.
\textsuperscript{170} See, for instance, \textit{N.V.} 1.9.66 and Homfray’s court appearance over customary seat occupation in Bintree church.
\textsuperscript{171} \textit{N.R.O.} PD 262/63, 64 Stalham glebe land litigation, 1861 – 82.
\textsuperscript{172} Bushaway, \textit{By Rite}, pp. 84 – 5.
\textsuperscript{173} King, ‘Gleaners’, p. 142 quotes one Old Testament injunction: ‘Thou shalt not . . . gather any gleaning of thy harvest, thou shalt leave them unto the poor’.
\textsuperscript{174} \textit{N.R.O. MEA} 7/8, 660 x 9: Earsham tithe dispute. Day makes this motivation clear in a letter dated 7 December 1830 (recipient unknown), and the same motive is invoked even more explicitly by the Rev. Richard Baker of Cawston in his battle over land-use and footpaths in his parish (\textit{N.R.O. BUL4/118 Bulwer papers}, Baker to W. W. Bulwer, 26 July 1773).
A related problem, in the eyes of many, was that clergymen recognised the validity of custom only when it suited their interests to do so. In 1869 the Nonconformist minister of East Harling, Mr. Hammond, went into print with a parody of a debate between himself and the Rev. T. B. Wilkinson. Hammond and Wilkinson had fallen out over the provenance of some customary charity land, and Hammond noted with bitter irony how Wilkinson, losing the argument, would invoke the very custom that he was striving so hard to stamp out: ‘We have made use of the money,’ he would say, ‘and that use long continued establishes our claim’. A similar formula was used by the Rev. Augustus Mackie when a dispute blew up over charity lands at Burnham Overy: ‘The church has been in possession of the land in question for about a century,’ he wrote, ‘Twenty five years possession is sufficient to establish a legal right to property; thus from a legal point of view the church’s position is unassailable’. Wilkinson and Mackie may, in fact, have been modest in their ambitions, for the church had at its disposal a ‘custom’ with a Latin tag, and one that had the power to sweep all popular custom from its path. *Nullum tempus occurrit ecclesiae* allowed that no passage of time could bar the rights of the church and that ‘accordingly it is holden that Ecclesiastical persons are not bound by any of the Statute of Limitations’.

In these circumstances the church’s use of custom probably says less about clerical hypocrisy than it does about the extent to which custom had become ingrained into the workings of society. From Philip Jeans’ quest to re-open customary access ways to his land, through Thomas Scott’s assertion of his rights to shoot game, to the Rev. F. Watson’s insistence that he alone had the right to cut down trees in the churchyard, there are many examples of clergymen claiming for themselves the customary rights that were being withdrawn from the labouring poor. It could even be argued that the very

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175 N.R.O. PD 572/74: Burnham Overy charity lands dispute, Rev. A. C. Mackie to the Lynn Advertiser (14 May 1912).
176 N.R.O. BOL 3/14, 740 x 7 Bolingbroke papers. The clause was invoked in a right-of-way dispute over St. Julian’s churchyard, Norwich in 1826. Mr Chitty, Chancery Lane, London to Rev. George Webster, 23 May 1826.
177 N.R.O. FEL 374, 552 x 4: Fellowes papers, Great Witchingham tithe dispute, late eighteenth century.
179 N.R.O. PD 119/33 Rev. F. Watson (Starston) to Mr. A. Taylor, 7 April 1885.
legal mechanism by which elites set such store – the concept of legal precedent – was in itself little more than an alternative mode of establishing customary procedure.\(^{181}\)

What conclusions, then, might be reached regarding the overall role of rural custom in nineteenth-century criminality? Firstly, although many were venerable enough to have become interwoven with the life and landscape of the rural parish, customs were not necessarily ancient.\(^{182}\) The golden-age myth of the village community before enclosure, a contented idyll of customary and paternalistic reciprocity, is in many ways a political creation of the trade union and early socialist movements of the late nineteenth century. Nevertheless, the alienation of custom, whether this was achieved through criminalisation or through ‘subtle suppression’,\(^{183}\) was a key element in changing modes of managing the poor, and its demise had a profound impact on the living standards and life experiences of agricultural labourers.

Custom, moreover, was often a vestigial remnant of the dialogue of the moral economy, and its disappearance coincided to a great extent with changed ways of living and working. Some observers like Charles Brereton recognised the connection between local customs and local modes of law enforcement, and it may well be that the existence of ‘local common law’ was one of the reasons that national judgments – like that against gleaning in 1788 – were sometimes only patchily adhered to.\(^{184}\) The essential point is that the decline of custom equated to a disjunction in local social relations and mirrored the increasing centralisation of authority in other areas of nineteenth-century rural life.

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\(^{181}\) Legal precedent was much beloved by the Rev. George Day and other litigants in the Earsham tithe dispute. See especially N.R.O. MEA 7/9, 660 x 8, Kingsbury & Margetson (solicitors) to Gen. Robert Meade, 19 August 1824 and Day to Meade, 19 August 1824.

\(^{182}\) The fact that a ‘tradition’ existed that the fate of transportees could be divined by hanging up a bottle of their urine and periodically checking the condition of the contents is testimony to the rapidity with which ‘customs’ could take hold (‘The King of the Norfolk Poachers’, I Walked By Night, p. 8).

\(^{183}\) By the term ‘subtle suppression’ is meant all those methods by which elites made customs difficult to follow without ever actually outlawing them. Among many examples that could be listed, the Rev. George Day’s individual tithe agreements for farmers, drawn up to suppress a modus, (N.R.O. MEA 7/8 660 x 9, Earsham Tithe Dispute, tithe composition agreements, August and September 1819) and the East Barsham farm steward’s ‘sweeping’ of a gleaning field by tying a rope between two horses (N.N 22.8.68) stand out as particularly apposite.

\(^{184}\) In the case of Steel vs. Houghton & Uxor in 1788, the Court of Common Pleas ruled that ‘no person has, at common law, a right to glean in the harvest field’. King, ‘Gleaners’, p. 139 describes how this ruling was not always easy to apply.

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Anglican clergymen offered few crumbs of comfort to the would-be preservers of rural custom, presiding over its decline as enclosers and re-drawers of the landscape, enforcing its elimination as charity trustees and magistrates, and only occasionally raising a voice in defence of custom when tithe rights or glebe holdings were somehow bound into it. As the Rev. Augustus Jessopp tacitly acknowledged, memory had once been an integral part of local authority. In the absence of custom, memory had become a threat to social order, a festering sore of half-formed resentments, and would continue to be so, one might suppose, until custom itself had been absent from the landscape 'from time immemorial'.

'The agricultural labourer,' Jessopp wrote, 'is much less contented with his lot than he was. How should he be? The old men remember the roadsides, the wastes, and commons, and village greens, and patches of no-man's land, which have gone from them forever'.

Conclusion

Much of this chapter has been based on a pre-supposition that there is such a thing as 'social' and/or 'protest' crime and that a proportion of criminal behaviour stemmed from the ways in which rural society was organised. There is a danger inherent in this, namely that protest and poverty can become intertwined with mundane criminality to such an extent that every act of petty theft and violence can begin to radiate the rosy glow of principled political activism. This caveat should constantly be borne in mind and an accommodation reached with the fact that in the nineteenth century – as in any age – there were always those ready to take what did not belong to them or willing to indulge in some act of physical brutality for no higher motive than personal gratification.

The trap having been identified, however, it is valid to think again about the nature of rural crime and the identities and motivations of law-breakers and enforcers. In this respect some late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century crime might still be understood as the last, fading ripples of the 'moral economy', an appeal still being made even though the mechanisms for listening and reacting had been dismantled. Protest crime remained essentially conservative in its aspirations, but this did not prevent something radical, something subversive, being read into it by elites. The move to a more centrally

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controlled, professional police force was only part of the response: vast, creaking engines of social discipline like the New Poor Law were at the centre of the project to lead the labourer from 'idleness and imprudence to industry and forethought', to teach him 'the habits of order' and to change 'the voice of murmuring and complaint . . . for silent and contented industry'.

If, as some historians have argued, the tyranny of the New Poor Law and the consequent subjugation of the working class was something that the 'Last Labourers' Revolt' brought upon itself, one might look to the annals of criminal behaviour for evidence of the spark of protest and defiance. Arson presents itself as a prime candidate here: it occurred as an expression of rural protest throughout the nineteenth century and – given that it occurred independently of fluctuations in economic indicators like food prices – it represented a very different form of social dialogue to that of the eighteenth-century food riot. As a contemporary observer, Edward Gibbon Wakefield thought that the incendiary fires associated with 'Swing' realised three benefits for the labourer. Firstly, by inflicting fear and economic pain upon those who were the usual exponents of such techniques, fires made the rural poor feel better. Secondly, they afforded a subtle means of attacking the church, as losses incurred by farmers meant that they had to reduce their tithe payments, and as tithes rendered in kind were destroyed where they lay in field and barn: 'A very large proportion of “Swing” incendiarism has been directed against the property of beneficed clergymen,' Wakefield wrote. Thirdly, and here an echo of the moral economy could still be heard, in the aftermath of a fire the labourer found that 'he is anxiously noticed by well-dressed passers by, who, before, treated him as a beast of the field but who now make kind enquiries about his wants . . . what is yet more to the purpose, a new scale of wages becomes the topic of his parish, and . . . landlords, clergymen and tenants [agree] that rents and tithes shall be reduced.' Short-term gains like these, however, masked a social change that ran deeper and was much more long lasting. Paternalistic care became 'inward-looking', selectively applied to the conformist,

[186 Digby, Pauper Palaces, p. 209, quoting various Norfolk Boards of Guardians in their early responses to the effects of the New Poor Law.
187 The argument is described, though not necessarily endorsed, by Hobsbawm & Rudé, Captain Swing, p. 281.
188 Archer, By a Flash, p. 159.
189 Wakefield, Swing Unmasked, pp. 30 – 35.]

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deserving poor and concentrated wherever possible by clergymen and gentry within the confines of their own ‘close’ parishes.

Poaching and arson were very different offences and can sometimes make awkward bedfellows in a generalised discussion of social crime. Nevertheless, there is considerable evidence to support the notion of poaching as a paradigm for much wider social and political issues. The game laws protected the interests of a tiny minority and wove about them a mystical aura that went to the heart of notions of gentry privilege and property ownership. If, in moral terms, there was little discernible difference between the nocturnal crimes of the poor and the daylight robbery of the rich, it required only a short conceptual step to be taken for poaching to become politicised as a crime. Jones has identified a number of well-known poachers who were political activists, and on the Conservative estate of Merton Lord Walsingham found that infiltrating a gang of poachers also brought him close to the core of trade union activity in the area.

Certainly, the trade union position was that the game laws symbolised every last vestige of the injustices that corrupt modes of law enforcement visited upon the poor. The issue of game became a metaphor for the issue of freedom. Political expression began to articulate the absurdity of a ruling-class that tried to make ‘property’ out of something as self-evidently free as a wild bird and to convince the working-class that – if only they could see it – the fetters that bound them were as illusory and ineffective as those that bound pheasants and rabbits. In practice, widespread defiance of the game laws offers evidence that the social compact of moral economy was breaking down from two directions: just as the rights of the poor only had meaning when they were responded to by elites, so the laws of the ruling class – particularly when they were as ideological as the game laws – only had meaning when they were recognised by the poor.

What local law enforcement did have, however, - and this was what Charles Brereton regarded as its chief asset – was a keen sense of its own ‘internal outsiders’, delinquents who transgressed the moral as well as the legal code and who could be – in rapid

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190 Jones, 'The Poacher', p. 858.
191 N.R.O. WLS/LX/27, 429 x 8: Walsingham papers, campaign against poaching and political agitation (1873). The fact that Exning in Suffolk was a centre for disturbances over gleaning rights in 1796 (King, 'Gleaners', p. 134n.) and at the epicentre of trade unionism in the 1870s might also be indicative of the longevity of the links between popular practice and popular politics.
succession—suspected, arrested and convicted of a crime on the basis of the flimsiest evidence. The swiftness with which the law could move against its ‘usual suspects’ contrasted sharply with the interminable delays that characterised other aspects of law enforcement, and it was here, perhaps, that the true nature of the law as a politically-motivated measure of social discipline can be glimpsed. Transportation was a useful means of ridding society of its least compliant characters and the fact that the incidence of it peaks in exactly the same year as the incidence of poor law-assisted emigration (1836) indicates strongly that a short-lived experiment in social engineering was conducted in the years immediately associated with the introduction of the New Poor Law.

Authority’s assault on custom was ideologically based. As Bushaway has written, ‘attempts to suppress popular calendar customs and ceremonies, to undermine their validity, to question their morality, to challenge their sources of support, to deny access to customary venues and to break up their continuity were part of a coherent process’. Nevertheless, although activism in support of custom came to be broadly associated with the politics of subversion (in the first half of the nineteenth century) and with Liberalism and trade unionism (in the second), no argument that seeks to yoke custom to a radical political standpoint can be sustained for long. It could justifiably be argued, for instance, that the radical momentum lay with those landowners and clergymen in the parish who had opted for enclosure. Equally, as Thompson has pointed out, anti-enclosure protesters were by no means primitive communists. They saw ‘right’ as a form of ‘property’, and in this respect they had a good deal in common with the clergyman who was anxious to protect the property/right of tithe.

Custom stemmed from, and was sustained by, an essentially localist mentality, by which the customary calendar legitimated and explained almost every aspect of work, leisure and social relations. It was a towering edifice, but one that was vulnerable: as the

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192 For instance the Edingthorpe Enclosure Act of 1812 makes it clear that disputes and actions should continue even after the death of one party ‘as if no such Event had happened’ (N.R.O. PD 62/43 Edingthorpe Enclosure Act, 1812). The longeurs of law enforcement, and the self-interested determination of many of its agents that some cases should never come to fruition was famously satirised by Charles Dickens in the opening chapter of Bleak House (London, 1853, 1996 edn.) pp. 13—19.
193 Bushaway, ‘Rite, Legitimation’, p. 130.
194 Thompson, Customs in Common, p. 162.
parishioners of Earsham understood only too well, once the Rev. George Day was allowed to undermine one custom it would not take long for the whole structure to come crashing down around them. The profoundly local provenance of custom reinforced senses of belonging and identity. It provided the mental map of what might be termed the ‘moral community’ – the parish’s complex network of economic and social relationships – and the ‘physical community’, defined by landmarks, field-names and footpaths. Ultimately custom underpinned a local common law so powerful that – in the case of gleaning, for instance – national judgements like that in the case of Steel vs. Houghton had no force, other than as advisory models around which local communities could negotiate their own positions. Custom thus exercised a stranglehold on centralised and nationalised initiatives, one that had to be prised open if the new capital-based, time-oriented disciplines of living and working were to prevail.

The demise of custom mirrored the demise of the ‘moral economy’. Acts of ritualised protest continued – appearing increasingly anachronistic as the nineteenth century drew towards its close – but stripped of their power to draw a response from elites they took on the aspect of spirited but doomed acts of defiance. Ritualised protest against authority might irritate, but it could never achieve any long-term goal. By its very nature a display like that of ‘rough music’ could only work if its target was sufficiently of the community for collective disapproval and disdain to matter.

Clerical attitudes to the transition from custom to law – and to law enforcement generally – are often difficult to determine. As the nineteenth century wore on, so direct clergy involvement in the law – as magistrates on the bench – tended to decline. There were also remarkably few of them in rural Norfolk who regarded the law as a suitable subject for published thoughts and sermons, Charles Brereton being a notable exception from earlier in the century. Even so it is hardly to be expected that clergymen became indifferent, or that they lost their indirect influence over matters of law and order. Consequently the entrails of what clergymen did say and do must be picked over, and what they did not say must be accounted to indicate general complicity with the direction that law enforcement

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195 Its darker side, of course, was that it heightened senses of xenophobia and contributed greatly to the exclusion of outsiders, with all that this entailed for the formation of a class consciousness.
196 The ritualised protests against the Wighton enclosure offer a good example here. Archer has also noted ‘examples of singing, dancing, cheering, booing, card-playing [and] frolicking . . . too numerous to mention’ at the scene of incendiary fires. (J. Archer, ‘The Wells-Charlesworth Debate’, p. 87).
was taking. To the labouring poor that direction must have appeared to be working inexorably to their detriment. Clergymen who had understood the social value of customary land-use, like Benjamin Pulleyne at Holt, were giving way to men like Edward Brumell, who understood only its commercial price. Furthermore, administration of the law was laden with inconsistencies. What were the poor to make, for instance, of a regime that had transported and imprisoned generations of poachers and semi-criminals for minor crimes and yet loudly celebrated the Christian mercy and charity of a clergyman who pleaded for leniency on behalf of the young man who had shot and nearly killed him?

If the ‘King of the Norfolk Poachers’ is in any way to be accepted as an authentic voice of the poor, his experience of Anglican clergymen in relation to the law was almost entirely negative, from the pontificating prison chaplain he came ‘to hate the sight of’ to the parish priest who sneered at him because of his prison record. Certainly, there is sufficient evidence – from attacks on church buildings recorded at petty sessions to the verbal abuse and intimidation that finally provoked the Rev. David Jones into an assault on one of his tormentors - to suggest that respect for the clergy was becoming a commodity in short supply. In his various pamphlets Charles Brereton had warned that this would be a consequence of breaking the paternalistic ties between parson and parish. Clergy involvement at petty sessions was, Brereton thought, a principal way in which these ties were being severed, and he urged a return to local methods of law enforcement that were posited on a mutual and reciprocal understanding of the rights and responsibilities of all members of the community.

Informal modes of enforcement, based on a paternalistic relationship between incumbent and parishioners and, presumably, reflecting the Brereton model were, nevertheless, still to be found near the century’s end. Few were more unsettling in appearance than that practiced by the Rev. Charles Penrice at Little Plumstead, who extracted from a number

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197 Pulleyne and Brumell took diametrically opposed views on the fate of the Holt Lows charity lands.
198 N.C. 11.6.95. The Rev. Arthur Upcher spoke up for Frederic Butcher, a lad he had taken under his wing at Baconsthorpe Rectory. Butcher was sentenced to nine months in gaol for wounding Upcher with a gunshot to the thigh.
199 Brereton's theme is argued strongly in Subordinate Magistracy and in A Letter, passim.

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of parishioners written guarantees of their future good conduct. When, as was the case with Thomas Holden, the written guarantee was accompanied by a letter requesting a job reference from Penrice, the power held by the clergyman in such a relationship becomes apparent, as does the unhealthy potential for its misapplication.

Left open, for want of evidence, must be the vexed question of whether clergymen generally understood crime to be a consequence of poverty. Certainly Brereton traced a good deal of crime to iniquities in the workhouse system, and he argued that the clerical magistrate’s dual roles as administrator of the law and of poor relief should be separated forthwith. ‘Charity and punishment, hire and claim are now knit together,’ he wrote, ‘and this confusion sweeps away the distinctions between right and wrong, good and evil’. In all other respects, however - and considering together all those actions in word and deed of clergymen who managed both crime and poverty - there is little to suggest that the assize sermon of Henry Ffolkes would not have descended upon his complacent, dozing congregation like a bolt from the blue:

‘Oh! My brethren, shall those to whom God has entrusted a large share of this world’s goods, sit still, eating and drinking, and planting and building, lapped in indolence, or finding scope for energy merely in amusements and the sports of the field, without one effort to free themselves from the chains of self-indulgence, one effort to contract those parallel lines, which all too accurately represent the paths of the poor and rich through life? Can we suppose that those below us are never moved to make invidious comparisons between their lot and the lot of those above them?’

For Ffolkes the solution resided in the great totems of Victorian paternalistic care – housing, health, recreation, education – and, as a contemporary, Joseph Arch acknowledged that improved job prospects, better education and increased sobriety ‘all helped to make people less likely to commit crime and less tolerant of those who did so’. That there was an extraordinary imbalance of power in rural society can scarcely be denied, and elites were able to use their power to selectively criminalise certain activities. Throughout the nineteenth century, there were those who identified this manipulation of the law for social ends as a significant abuse by the ruling class. In the years of ‘Swing’, for instance, Edward Gibbon Wakefield noted how the ‘privileged classes . . . inclose commons. They stop footpaths. They wall in their parks. They set

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203 Brereton, Subordinate Magistracy, p. 156.
204 Ffolkes, Dangers and Duties, p. 7.
spring-guns and man-traps. They spend on the keep of high-bred dogs what would support half as many children . . . They make new crimes and new punishments for the poor . . . Even in church they sit on cushions, in pews, boarded, matted and sheltered by curtains from the mind and the vulgar gaze’. A quarter of a century later, it was the way in which the law discriminated between rich and poor that antagonised the Norfolk News:

‘This system of punishing by fine, and in default of payment by imprisonment, is manifestly unjust towards the poor. The rich man convicted of a violation of the law, takes out his purse, pays the penalty and walks off with an air of unconcern, if not of insolence. [The poor man is ordered to] prison and the treadmill, and his . . . weeping wife and children [consigned] to the workhouse. Money makes the only difference between the convict at large and the convict at the wheel.’

Enforcement of the law could be selective, capricious, vindictive, iniquitous and incompetent. Much of it was also highly political and designed to favour the interests of one class over another. Complicit when on the bench and largely silent on the issue when in the pulpit, Norfolk’s rural clergy effectively surrendered the opportunity to influence and reform the legal system as it applied at local level. More than this, they seemed happy to benefit materially from some of its most iniquitous measures. The implication of the church in the administration of the elite’s own ‘lawless law’ must be counted as a significant cause of nineteenth-century anti-clericalism.

207 N.N. 29.11.56.
Chapter Seven

Liberalisation or Indoctrination? The management of rural schools

Introduction

It seems counter-intuitive to challenge the vision and motives of the clergymen who managed education in the nineteenth-century countryside, but I think that the question posed by the title of this chapter has to be addressed. In a social climate where so many changes were working to the detriment of the poor, is it to be expected that education should stand as the single, shining example of uncomplicated altruism and benevolence? The alternative viewpoint – that education was a measure of social discipline by which means the interests of the elite might be advanced and the poor might be taught to understand and accept the social function of their station – is the principal consideration of this chapter. As counterweights to this notion, however, certain facts must not be allowed to slip from view. Firstly, as one parliamentary investigation acknowledged in 1867, 'the clergy are the only class at present really working in the cause of education'.

Secondly, before 1870 clergymen often funded parish education from their own pockets. This was certainly the experience of Charles Dashwood at Billingford, for instance, who spent £65 on converting part of his Rectory into a schoolroom, and of the Rev. R. Bacon at Fring who provided instruction 'solely at my expense which I can ill afford out of a perpetual curacy of £60 p.a.'.

Thirdly, clergymen were often opposed in their endeavours by local employers and by parents. If a case is to be argued that education was doctrinal and conservative, it has to be balanced by a consideration of whether it was more, less or just 'differently' conservative from the alternative: the non education of poor children because they were needed for labour in the fields.

The cumulative evidence hints at a decline in clerical influence post-1870. Clergymen were still prominent in whatever education was provided, but there was also much more

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2 N.R.O. PD210/45 Billingford (East Dereham) papers re. night school, 1859 – 70.
3 N.R.O. DN/NDS/275/2 Diocesan School Survey, 1814.
lay involvement. Ten years after the passage of Forster’s Elementary Education Act, the surviving minutes of 87 school management boards show that, of 330 school managers who gathered for the first meeting of 1880, 60 were clergymen. At a meeting of the Depwade Poor Law Union guardians on 3 June 1878, 120 school attendance committee members were appointed. 24 of these were clergymen. Clergymen now represented only about one in five of all administrators and managers.

This trend may have been expected to continue after the 1902 Education Act when the constitution of school management committees became more closely defined. The County Council appointed 631 managers to the 158 Norfolk schools funded by the local education authority in the years immediately after 1902, of whom 115 (18.2%) were clergymen. Parish councils appointed 303 managers to the boards of the same schools, of whom 34 (11.2%) were clergymen. Voluntarily funded schools had more freedom in the appointment of their managers, and the clergyman was often an automatic choice. At Alburgh school the committee decided that ‘the Rector of the Parish shall all ways be an ex officio member of the said committee without Elections’, and in other places, undoubtedly, the appointment of the clergyman was a matter of deference, of habit, or of straightforward lack of imagination.

How, then, did the influence of the clergy change, given that at least one historian has identified education as the only medium through which clerical influence was expanded during the nineteenth century? Certainly the early intention of the National Schools was that clergymen should have a direct role as teachers: ‘by teaching in his school the parish priest gives an importance and dignity to the subject [of religious education] in the eyes of the parishioners’.

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4 N.R.O. C/ED3 Education papers: based on an analysis of all documents in this class with a surviving management minute from January 1880.
5 N.R.O. C/ED6/1 Depwade Union school attendance committee, 3 June 1878.
6 Schools were to have 6 managers: 4 appointed by the county and 2 appointed by the parish in the case of local education authority funded schools; 4 ‘foundation managers’, 1 appointed by the county and 1 appointed by the parish in the case of voluntarily funded schools.
7 N.R.O. PD599/103. Norfolk Education Committee, managers of provided schools, June 1904.
8 N.R.O. PD196/73 Alburgh School management committee, 1895.
9 For instance: ‘It is almost impossible to get a Parish meeting now during the Harvest. I think there is no one so proper as you to be appointed Manager for the School’. N.R.O. PD363/33 Tatterford school managers’ papers, George Riches to the Rev. R. J. Jones, 24 August 1903.
of both teachers and scholars'. Even in the age of the certificated teacher, the teaching input of clergymen was still prized by those who, like the Rev. William Allen at Shouldham, believed that 'the best schools were those which were taught by uncertificated teachers, the reason probably being that in such schools the clergyman takes a more active part'.

At Honingham school in the 1880s the Rev. T. Fellowes and his curate W. Ward were regular visitors, checking on (and assisting with) the teaching of religion. Generally, the interchange between school and church in the parish was such that the one almost became an extension of the other. That this interchange had motives other than the purely educational may be inferred from a number of sources. In 1825 the Rev. Henry Bathurst acknowledged that 'the scheme for the social regeneration of the lower orders will not be complete . . . without some further provisions relating to the education of the labouring classes', a theme picked up almost fifty years later by the trade union newspaper the Labourers' Chronicle:

'[The clergy have not taken the lead in education] because they wished to give the very best teaching to those who required it; but because they wished to extend and maintain their particular view of that which is but one branch of education, viz. religion.'

Education was, by these lights, the means by which an elite cultural ascendancy might be established. Such ascendancy was not achieved without social cost, however. Anglican control of parish schools antagonised religious dissenters, and differences over school management often followed the Tory/Anglican – Liberal/Nonconformist fault-line that ran through much of rural society. The point was well illustrated at Swaffham, where

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11 National Society for Promoting the Education of the Poor in the Principles of the Established Church, 1817.
12 N.R.O. PD356/125, Newspaper cuttings on the opening of Shouldham National School, 1866.
13 This point is developed later in the chapter, but for now one might cite the appointment of the schoolteacher because of his expertise as an organist, and the absences from school of children invited to help with Christmas decorations at the Rectory.
14 Rev. H. Bathurst, Practical Suggestions to Promote Clerical Residence and to Ameliorate the Habits and Conduct of the Poor (Norwich, 1825), pp. 4 – 5.
opinion over the necessity to form a Board School in 1899 divided along familiar religious/political lines. As one campaign leaflet put it:

‘Liberals of Swaffham! . . . Be true to your principles! Remember the Tory party including the Bishops and Clergy have always opposed all Liberal measures of Reform. Vote against Intimidation and Tyranny! . . . Vote for your Independence! . . . Vote for Freedom! . . . Vote for Religious Liberty and Equality! . . . Vote for a School Board! . . . Vote against Clerical Control of the Schools!’

Political divisions, magnified and focused by a dispute that had school management at its core, surfaced again at Burston and acted as the catalyst for the long-running and celebrated school strike. Here the husband and wife teaching team, the Higdons (Plate 19), Nonconformists and Socialists, collided with a school management regime that the Rev. Charles Tucker Eland regarded as his own personal fiefdom. The shock waves from their collision reverberated into almost every corner of parish life and, in terms of social relations, rippled on as one of the twentieth-century’s seminal confrontations between democratic and paternalistic authority. Scenes from the Burston Rebellion constitute part of this and other chapters in the thesis, and demonstrate forcefully that the battle for control of the village school – so widely engaged in the parishes of the nineteenth-century countryside – was a crucial battle for the hearts and minds of the labouring poor.

**Educating the poor**

From his psychological bunker at the heart of the Burston rebellion, the Rev. Charles Tucker Eland issued a jaunty statement, designed to demonstrate his broad-minded engagement with the working class. ‘I have nothing against the working man,’ he said, ‘we cannot exist without him, we want our soldiers and our sailors, our industrial workers and our agricultural labourers. We must be fed and clothed and housed.’ This sense that poverty was essential to the well-being of wider society informed many elite attitudes to educating the poor, and at times stemmed from the very top of the church hierarchy. In 1857 Bishop Wilberforce had told a meeting of the Oxford Diocesan Association that

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16 N.R.O. PD52/386 Swaffham School Board dispute (1898-9), election leaflet of the ‘school board’ party.
17 N.R.O. MC31, 478 x 1 Burston School Strike documents, 1913 – c.1930.
18 N.R.O. MC31/3, 478 x 1. Eland was quoted in an article in *The Labour Leader*, January 1916.
they ‘did not want everybody to be learned men, or to make everybody unfit for following the plough, or else the rest of us would have nothing to eat’.  

A consequent concern, constantly expressed, was that any education given to the working man should not fuel his expectations beyond those commensurate with his ‘station’.  

To Norfolk’s farmers this generally meant that the labourer should be able to read, write and cast a simple account, and that girls should be taught a little knitting and needle-work in order to equip them for domestic service. To J. Wood, an external observer and critic of these attitudes, this amounted to the ‘chaining down’ of minds to ensure that they did not ‘wander to anything beyond their own agricultural district or [were] permitted to know that anything beyond its limits under heaven exists’.

Certainly there was little encouragement for the development of abstract thought, and the uselessness of young labourers that had been exposed to any shade of it was widely attested. The Rev. Kirby Trimmer of Stanhoe, the target of Wood’s chief criticisms, pulled no punches in this regard:

‘It is absurd,’ he wrote, ‘to teach pauper children in an agricultural district, and whose occupations are for the most part those of CROW-KEEPING, PIG-MINDING and TURNIP-PULLING; that minerals are, as the case may be, brilliant, opaque, malleable, ductile, or fusible; and because such a system is not suited to the station in which it has pleased Providence to place the agricultural poor.’

Any spare intellectual capacity to be found in the labourer, Trimmer thought, should be filled with scriptural doctrine rather than science. Trimmer’s attitude was unfathomable to Wood’s colleagues in Scotland. ‘Great has been my difficulty,’ Wood wrote, ‘to

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20 This was one of the defining principles of the National Society, as set out in its first annual report of 1812. Cited in Horn, *Life and Labour*, pp. 121–2.
21 R. C. on the Employment of Children, Young Persons and Women in Agriculture (1867)
24 See, for example, the evidence of Mr. Blake of Tuttington to the *Reports of the Special Assistant Poor Law Commissioners on the Employment of Women and Children in Agriculture* (1843), p. 247.
persuade persons of all classes in this place that all this could have been written ... in our times, by a clergyman of the Church of England'.

A later generation of clergymen allowed the theoretical boundaries of education to be set rather wider, but intense competition was still encountered from sections of the farming community. At Brandeston, for example, the Rev. John Wilder was attacked in print in the 1870s for 'indulging the labouring poor in their claim for mental culture [which is] moonshine'; while attempts to enforce school attendance at Coltishall foundered because of the number of farmer-governors who were employing school-aged children.

The hostility of farmers to educating labourers was both deep-seated and long-lived. Clerical respondents to a Diocesan Survey of education carried out in 1814 sounded the almost constant refrain that their attempts to establish National Schools were being opposed by local farmers. The farmers' concerns were primarily economic - 'their belief is that it will interfere with the supply of labour' wrote the Rev. William Castell of Brooke - but there was a sense, too, that the child kept away from agricultural labour for too long would become socialised out of the habit of work. 'If boys are kept at school beyond 8,' said Farmer Blades of Holt in 1843, 'they're no use at all on the land.'

Attempts were made to accommodate the farmers’ concerns and to establish an education system that did not damage their interests. At Kimberley the Rev. J. Browne ran a school 'for two hours every week day evening so that the children are not kept from their work', while a primary concern of the Norfolk Chamber of Agriculture was that ‘school holidays should be timed to coincide with the farmers’ busiest season'.

Farmers were by no means alone in their antipathy towards education, and the 1814 Diocesan Survey notes a number of instances where the building of a National School

27 N.M. 23.3.72. The attack was made by ‘A Tenant Farmer’ as part of a protracted newspaper debate with Wilder.
29 N.R.O. DN/275/1 Diocesan Survey of Schools, 1814.
30 Reports of the Special Assistant Poor Law Commissioners on the Employment of Women and Children in Agriculture (1843), p. 246
31 N.R.O. DN/275/2 Diocesan Survey of Schools, 1814.
32 Resolution of the Norfolk Chamber of Agriculture, 12 October 1867, presented as evidence to the R.C. on the Employment of Children, Young Persons and Women in Agriculture (1867).
had been vetoed by the local landowner. Their objections were more often political than economic, and were posited on the dangers of ‘teaching the head to reason when it would be better to teach the hands to work’. The ‘evil consequences’ that could arise from a partial education ranged from ‘impiety’ through laziness and ‘sauciness’ towards employers, to an awareness of their own debasement that Edward Gibbon Wakefield identified as one of the root causes of ‘Swing’. Most alarming for elites was the prospect that the ‘Swing’ unrest had itself been stirred and spread by ‘seditious publications, particularly a series of letters written against the clergy’ that had been circulated in beershops.

The threat of the erudite (rather than the merely literate) labourer may explain some of the more bizarre attempts to curtail his learning: the removal of maps from workhouse schoolrooms, for instance, or the suggestion that they should be taught to read the Bible in a foreign language so that their reading skills could not be applied to anything else. Later in the century this particular genie was out of the bottle. ‘The newspapers have got hold of the working man . . . and the working man has got hold of a newspaper’, complained one farmer in the 1870s, and the alacrity with which the Burston labourers were able to challenge every aspect of the Rev. Eland’s parochial power-base was attributed by one trade unionist to the fact that they were ‘an intelligent body of labouring people, not too old to have missed the advantages of education’.

Between those actively hostile and those actively positive towards educating the poor, there existed a vast body of opinion that was stoical about the labourers’ life-chances,
thereby contributing to a general atmosphere of stasis. Squire Boileau and the Rev. William Jex-Blake exemplified the attitude after their visit to Corpusty village school in 1843:

'It is a pity that more village children cannot come to school but as they are to live by the work of their hands and as they require to form a strong physical development it is perhaps wise not to urge it too much' 42

There was also a feeling that education could do nothing to combat ‘intellectual weakness’ 43 and this moral ‘hand-washing’ of the problem undoubtedly contributed to perceptions of the labourer as ‘Hodge’, ‘unimaginative, ill-clothed, ill-educated, ill-paid, ignorant of all that is taking place beyond his own village, dissatisfied with his position and yet without energy or effort to improve it’. 44 Consequently there was a deadness and an emptiness at the heart of rural life which culminated in the lifestyles of the young men that the Rev. Augustus Jessopp regularly encountered in Scarning, ‘sprawling in the ditch smoking their pipes or sunning themselves on their stomachs . . . doing the only thing they have the power of doing – nothing’. 45

Those arguing in favour of education held that the only way to break this vicious circle of ennui and idleness was to remove the child from the baleful influence of its parents. One writer noted, in 1812, that when Hodge became a father he was often unable to give his child moral instruction. If any correction was given ‘it is in harsh language – with passion, often with profane swearing’. 46 The fact that, four decades later, the Rev. William Allen was expressing very similar observations at the opening of the Shouldham National School demonstrates how little progress had been made in this respect:

‘One great reason why education after all fails in so many instances may be traced to home influence . . . If any of you know the way in which mothers speak to their children you can not wonder that all school teaching is rapidly worn away’ 47

Just as the home environment could be harsh and unforgiving, so too could the world of child labour. At Horsford, for instance, the Rev. J. D. Balance announced his commitment to break the seven-day-a-week cycle of unchanging toil for the child labourer, the effects of which he considered ‘emphatically brutalising’.\textsuperscript{48} The fact, then, should not be overlooked that – whatever its educational merits or demerits – a day in school represented a temporary respite from the difficulties and drudgery of daily life, during which the children of the labouring poor might have their eyes and their spirits briefly raised. The absolute determination of some clergymen to bring this about should be acknowledged. In the 1814 Diocesan Survey the Rev. G. Walker of Scole announced that he had ‘not allowed any impediment to prevail’ against his educational plans, while the Rev. T. Skrimshire of South Creake had persevered ‘without the least encouragement from [his] richer neighbours, so great was their aversion to the education of the poor’.\textsuperscript{49} William Allen’s proud speech at the opening of the Shouldham National School amounted to a stinging rebuke to those wealthy parishioners who had withheld their support. The building of the school was the culmination of a 16-year campaign and, said Allen:

‘You have seen how I have fought the battle of execution alone . . . I utterly and entirely deny, that, placed in the position in which I am in this parish, it ever was my duty to build this school. No, I speak with grief, but I feel compelled to say plainly that in this matter there must have been a neglect of duty somewhere. We have been left to struggle on, uncared for and unaided.’\textsuperscript{50}

\textbf{Encountering attitudes to education among the poor}

The view of the 1867 Royal Commission that ‘a lively, committed incumbent’ might break down the apathy of parents toward education probably underestimated the scale of the problem that faced him.\textsuperscript{51} In setting up parish schools clergymen faced, throughout the nineteenth century, an opposition from parents that was rooted in cultural and economic imperatives. The threads of parental antipathy can be picked up at almost any

\textsuperscript{48} Evidence to the R. C. on the Employment of Children, Young Persons and Women in Agriculture (1867), p. 141.
\textsuperscript{49} N.R.O. DN/ND/275/1 Diocesan Survey of Schools, 1814.
\textsuperscript{50} N.R.O. PD356/125: Shouldham parish papers, cutting from the Lynn News, 4.8.66.
\textsuperscript{51} R. C. on the Employment of Children, Young Persons and Women in Agriculture (1867), p. 22
point in the study period: from the pages of Randall Burroughes' farming diary, for instance, which demonstrate how heavily this eighteenth-century employer relied upon child labour;\(^52\) or from the Diocesan Schools Survey to which the Rev. Charles Dade of Denver complained of 'a criminal indifference' to education among parents;\(^53\) or from the notice posted by the Barningham School Board to announce the opening of the new school at Matlaske Gap in 1876 and setting out the table of fees and 'Bye-Laws for Compulsory Attendance'.\(^54\)

It was for economic reasons that a number of parents regarded the 1870 Education Act as a 'tyrannous law'.\(^55\) Under the combined provisions of this and the 1873 Agricultural Children's Act, children under the age of 8 were precluded from work in the fields while their parents – unless specifically exempted – faced fees of 1d. per day to send them to school. One problem was that the poor had no sense of deferred gratification, and little prospect of fulfilling it even if they had. The words of the Rev. James Cory at Kettlestone in 1814, that the poor 'will of course not readily give up [the income from child labour] in exchange for the advantages of even a gratis education'

\(^56\) received their direct echo in 1843 when it was reported that 'the poor are led to estimate the prospective gain from education far below the present gain from wages for labour'.\(^57\) Given that the vast majority of them, whatever the extent and quality of their education, would still be employed as agricultural labourers or domestic servants it is difficult to see what the 'prospective gain' might have been. Few mechanisms existed to promote advancement on merit: stripped of any vocational element education became abstract and theoretical, and lost all practical and economic appeal. In such a climate the assessment of the Norfolk


\(^{53}\) N.R.O. DN/NDS/275/2 Diocesan Schools Survey, 1814.

\(^{54}\) N.R.O. C/ED3/13 Barningham School Board Minute Books, 1874 – 79.


\(^{56}\) N.R.O. DN/NDS/275/2 Diocesan Schools Survey, 1814

\(^{57}\) Reports of the Special Assistant Poor Law Commissioners on the Employment of Women and Children in Agriculture (1843), p. 219.
Education Committee that ‘at the present time the recognition of the absolute necessity of a good education is not sufficiently general’ seems to be a masterly understatement.

Discipline was one of the first casualties of the attempt to educate children who wanted to be elsewhere. The ‘King of the Norfolk Poachers’ was eventually expelled from school for his part in a rebellion that had ejected the schoolmaster from his building and had then seen off a siege laid by the clergymen and other governors, while at Coltishall the schoolmaster William Harper found himself ‘the most hated man in [the village]’, regularly ‘kicked, insulted, threatened and assaulted’ by pupils and their parents. If Harper ‘suffered constant humiliation at the hands of parents’, he was by no means alone: at Flitcham the Rev. David Jones, in his role as school manager, was taunted and abused in front of a class of children by an angry parent. A struggle for the ‘hearts and minds’ of the labouring poor was – as far as the establishment was concerned – meeting with only limited success. This may, in part, have been due to the high-handed approach that was sometimes adopted. At West Bradenham, for instance, the Rev. G. Stone – already struggling to gain acceptance as an outsider from Ireland – earned the disdain of his parishioners when, in desperation at the poor standards of dress and behaviour, he seized a pair of scissors and hacked at the hair of children in the schoolroom.

Clearly there were many parents who wanted an education for their children, and Mr. Smith of Gunton reported in 1843 that parents would occasionally ‘replace their children when crow-keeping . . . to enable them to go to school or church’. For the most part, however, economic considerations prevailed and it is striking that, in an age when notions of self-improvement, self-respect and self-discipline were gaining ground in

58 N.R.O. PD 227/41 Circular from Norfolk Education Committee re. school attendance, 10 October 1903.
60 Bond, Coltishall, p. 15.
61 Bond, Coltishall, p. 16.
62 N.R.O. DN/ADR/16/1/21 Case against the Rev. David Jones, Flitcham 1904/5. This was one of series of incidents that eventually led to Jones’s suspension on a charge of assault.
64 Reports of the Special Assistant Poor Law Commissioners on the Employment of Women and Children in Agriculture (1843), p. 247.
working-class culture, educational regimes that had Anglican values at their core were frequently rejected by the families of the labouring poor.

Managing educational provision and standards

When the Rev. Edward Kemp of Whissonsett announced that 'until a school is established I intend during the summer months to resort for four nights in the week . . . to my custom of instructing the young by books and familiar conversation', he demonstrated just how heavily the burden of educational provision could fall upon the clergyman in parishes where no other formal arrangement existed. Table 7.1 suggests that Kemp's parish was the exception rather than the rule. Twenty-two years before Kemp's visitation return, parochial returns to the 1816 Select Committee enquiry into the education of the poor demonstrated that most Norfolk parishes offered some educational provision and those that did not tended to be parishes with smaller populations, often sending their children to the schools of larger neighbours. Roughly 19% of Norfolk's population lived in a parish with no school of any kind.

Table 7.1: Educational provision for the poor in Norfolk, 1816.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Educational Provision</th>
<th>Number of parishes</th>
<th>Total population served</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Day School provided (with or without additional Sunday School)</td>
<td>344</td>
<td>212,830</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunday School only provided</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>23,087</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No educational provision</td>
<td>284</td>
<td>56,030</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


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65 N.R.O. DN/VIS/64/1 Brisley Rural Deanery Visitation Returns (1838), Rev. E. C. Kemp, Whissonsett and Horningtoft.
66 The data for Table 7.1 and the associated discussion was taken from M. F. Lloyd Prichard, 'The education of the poor in Norfolk 1700 – 1850', Norfolk Archaeology 33 (1965), pp. 321 – 331.
67 The 284 parishes with no schools had an average population of 197 while the 344 parishes that made some provision other than Sunday schools had an average population of 619.
The education that was provided varied enormously in quality and quantity. At Coltishall in 1808 the Rev. C. Grapes recorded the existence of a charity school, providing free education for 58 children under the terms of a bequest of 1718; a school run by Mr. and Mrs. Coman teaching reading, writing, arithmetic, sewing and knitting to 45 girls and boys; a school where girls were taught writing, reading and sewing by Mrs. Lucy Neve; three boarders and nineteen day girls at a school run by Miss Lydia Boom; and instruction in reading, sewing and knitting for nine scholars provided by Mary Ebbage, the blacksmith’s wife.68 The offerings of schools like these may have been piecemeal but a number of clergymen expressed concern about their fate if National Schools were to be established.69 They were felt to be local schools, dedicated to the needs of local people and administered by them in their own interests. Some were maintained by endowments which were much larger than any contribution felt likely to be forthcoming from voluntary contributions,70 and the best of them offered an education that was academically wide-ranging and socially inclusive. At South Lopham, for instance, the school was open to:

'all the children of the inhabitants of South Lopham, of the age of five years and upwards, and who are not afflicted with any infectious disorder . . . [to be instructed] in the principles of the Christian religion; reading, writing, arithmetic, sacred and profane history, geography, astronomy, general English literature, and such other branches of education as to the trustees may seem expedient'.71

Charity schools could also fill the vacuum in parishes where an absentee or pluralist incumbent took little interest in education. Some clergy respondents to early nineteenth-century visitation returns became vague when questioned about educational provision: responses such as ‘I leave this to my curate who I daresay performs his duty’ and ‘there is no Sunday school nor Charity school that I know of’ were by no means untypical.72

69 N.R.O. DN/NDS/275/1. A number of clergymen expressed this reservation to the Diocesan Schools Survey, 1814.
71 Serpell, Lophams, pp. 133 – 4.
72 N.R.O. DN/VIS 5/2 Ingworth Rural Deanery Visitation Returns (1820). These responses were made by the Rev. John Crofts of Stratton Strawless. Crofts lived 22 miles away in Fakenham and performed his principal duties at Whissonsett, where, significantly, his successor Edward Kemp was still struggling to get education off the ground 18 years later.
In general, however, there grew a sense that charity schools were becoming an anachronism. Too often their curricula reflected the narrow, eccentric tastes of benefactors, or their management structures became corrupted into sinecures for local elites. The realisation that ‘the best chance the children have [for schooling] is in the workhouse’ served as a wake-up call for those members of society who considered education to be desirable and beneficial. National Schools were often the solution of first resort, and despite the logistical problems associated with building them, 230 had been established in Norfolk by 1836 and were providing an education for over 14,000 schoolchildren. National Schools brought with them their own set of problems, however. Their specifically Anglican remit alienated Nonconformists; they were too dependent on the enthusiasm of individual clergymen and the generosity of local subscribers; and they were failing to keep pace with population growth: country-wide, 50% of children in 1870 still did not have access to a day school.

The prospect and the aftermath of the 1870 Education Act created powerful political tensions as central authority attempted to eliminate the unevenness of educational provision. Anglican elites raced to consolidate their autonomy by building or improving National Schools before Board Schools could be imposed upon them. While recently-built National Schools occupied well-designed, spacious and comfortable buildings (Plate 20), many of the older ones required considerable and expensive upgrading if they were to meet the standards demanded by the Act. At Merton, for instance, the managers were faced with a new and imminent requirement to provide sufficient accommodation for all

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73 As with Bond’s Free School at Little Walsingham which, before a major overhaul by the Charity Commission, majored in teaching Greek and Latin to the children of the poor. (N.R.O. PD 582/250, Management Minutes of Bond’s Free School Charity, Little Walsingham 1859 – 60).
74 Bond’s Free School at Little Walsingham can again stand as an example here. See chapter five for a discussion of the (mis)management of this parochial charity.
75 Reports of the Special Assistant Poor Law Commissioners on the Employment of Women and Children in Agriculture (1843), evidence of Mr. Legge (Tuttington) p. 247.
76 Respondents to the Diocesan Schools Survey of 1814 reported difficulties in finding teachers and suitable premises (N.R.O. DN/NDS/275/1,2) and the cost of building the National School at Baconsthorpe (£366.4.8) left a lasting legacy of ill-feeling between subscribers, managers and building contractors (N.R.O. PD 334/28 Documents relating to building Baconsthorpe National School).
77 N.C. 26.3.36.
79 The National School at Shouldham, for instance, - opened in 1866 - had rescued the children from their previous accommodation in an old carpenter’s shop (N.R.O. PD 356/125 Newspaper cuttings on Shouldham National School, Lynn News 4 August 1866).
the children in their catchment area, to give them furniture to sit on and materials to work with, to appoint certificated teachers, and to submit to a regular system of government inspection. Over the next two or three decades a note of semi-desperation was sounded by some school managers as they strove to keep the despotism of the School Board at bay. At Catfield the Rev. Arthur Brown launched an emotive appeal after government inspectors threatened to withdraw his school’s grant because of its inadequate accommodation. Brown sought and received the advice of a number of neighbouring clergymen who had recently been through the same ordeal. At South Walsham in 1890 the Rev. G. Pollard pleaded with the Education Department to hold back with their inspectors’ costly demands. Local landowners had underwritten appeals from so many schools in the area that Pollard’s own request to them for money to finance a new school building had received little response. Pollard’s suggested solution – that overflow teaching should be carried out in the Rectory – seemed to come from an earlier age and received short shrift from Whitehall.

By acknowledging the fact that finance schemes based on voluntary subscriptions and donations were failing, men like Brown and Pollard unwittingly made unanswerable the case for a more structured approach to educational finance. It was becoming apparent that control of education was gradually being prised from their amateur grasp and being placed in the hands of centrally-appointed professionals.

One aspect of educational provision that intuitively seems likely to have been firmly in the control of religious interests was the Sunday School. In his work on the subject, Snell has described in some depth the role of Sunday Schools in promoting literacy and in inculcating the values of the middle class. In the earlier decades of their development they had the additional advantage of not interfering with demands for child labour during the working week. Snell describes the Sunday School movement as crucial to the work of

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80 N.R.O. WLS LX/7 429 x 7: Walsingham papers, Merton school managers’ correspondence. Letter from the Education Department, Whitehall (8 August 1870).
81 N.R.O. PD 531/65, 67 Catfield School papers, 1895.
82 N.R.O. C/ED 47/4 South Walsham school papers, April – June 1890.
strengthening and proselytising that was going on within the competing denominations: 'It was absolutely vital that [each denomination] teach its children the principles and tenets of its faith, and that it incline them towards denominational obedience. This was not so much a matter of “social control” but rather of denominational control at a time of openly competing religious rivalries and intolerances'.

Certainly some Anglican ministers encountered rapidly developing Nonconformist Sunday Schools in their parishes, and reacted to them in different ways. The Rev. Charles Carver of Winfarthing was simply resigned to the fact that local Methodists had stolen a march on him. They had already recruited most of the children of labourers and employers, he wrote, and had left little room for any initiative from the Church of England.

By contrast the Bawdeswell curate regarded the Sunday Schools established in his parish by Wesleyans and Ranters as a challenge. 'A Sunday School is essential to a church' he wrote, and with the help of two local women he was soon winning Sunday scholars back to his own fold. Ultimately, however, an understanding of Sunday Schools within the context of inter-denominational competition hinges on the extent to which the Church of England can be counted as 'just another denomination'. The alternative interpretation would take account of the Anglican church's established status: as an arm of the state the Church of England was uniquely placed to turn the Sunday School into a theatre of social and political management. At Cawston the Rev. Richard Baker had no doubt that this was the role he should be playing. His Sunday School was, he declared, a 'scheme of Reformation'.

Snell makes other important points about Sunday School provision: that the role of the Church of England was pre-eminent; that provision made by some Nonconformist churches was surprisingly modest; and that there was a strong element of paternalism.

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85 DN/NDS/275/1 Diocesan Schools Survey, 1814.
86 N.R.O. PD 155/35 Bawdeswell curate's list of parishioners, 1842.
88 Determined by calculating the maximum attendance figure of children at Church of England Sunday Schools on the day of the 1851 Census of Religious Worship and expressing it as a percentage of the maximum attendance figure of all children attending all denominational Sunday Schools (Snell, 'The Sunday School movement', p. 298). Excluding the data from Wales and working only from Snell’s results from eleven English counties, on average 53.1% of Sunday scholars were attending schools run by the Church of England.
with 'close' parishes usually having 'the highest indexes of attendance'. Contemporary opinion in Norfolk found much to be said in favour of a close paternalistic input into Sunday schools. 'The happiest effects,' wrote one observer, 'may be expected to result from the personal attendance of the clergyman of the parish, and the gentleman resident therein'. Schools at Trimingham, Overstrand and Sheringham were founded and run by (respectively) the Buxton family, the Gurney family and the Hon. Mrs. Upcher. But close paternalistic control could be a double-edged sword and could keep Sunday Schools out of parishes where the predominant landowner did not like them. This was the case at Intwood, for example, where Joseph Muskett vetoed the founding of any school, and at Kenninghall, where the Rev. Richard Procter thought that too much religious instruction was counter-productive and 'sickened' local youths.

Using the 1851 religious census as my source, and concentrating on returns from the parishes of the Aylsham Poor Law Union, I have looked again at these issues of attendance and paternalistic control. My own method has been to assess the performance of Sunday Schools with direct reference to the cohort of 'potential attenders', i.e. children in the parish aged between 3 and 15 years old. The detailed findings are presented parish-by-parish in Appendix E, but Table 7.2 offers a summary based on the performance of the Union as a whole.

Table 7.2 places Sunday School attendance rates within the context of the juvenile population. Only 28% of youngsters in the Aylsham Poor Law Union were attending Sunday School, and only 19% were to be found in Church of England establishments: a minority of the cohort, certainly, but given that few children can be expected to have attended for the full twelve years between ages 3 and 15, perhaps these attendance rates are not as low as they first appear.

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89 Snell, 'The Sunday School movement', p. 304.
92 Ede & Virgoe, Religious Worship, p. 159.
94 Sunday School attendances may have included an unknown number of adults.
Table 7.2: Summary of attendance rates at denominational Sunday Schools in the Aylsham Poor Law Union, based on returns from the 1851 Census of Religious Worship and considered in relation to the maximum potential attendance among 3-15 year-olds.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of parishes</th>
<th>42</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total population aged between 3 – 15 years ('potential attenders')</td>
<td>5992</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Sunday School attendances on census day</td>
<td>1645</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total attendance as % of 'potential attenders'</td>
<td>27.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total attendances at Church of England Sunday Schools on census day</td>
<td>1116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church of England Sunday School attendances as % of 'potential attenders'</td>
<td>18.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total attendances at Primitive Methodist Sunday Schools on census day</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primitive Methodist Sunday School attendances as % of 'potential attenders'</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total attendances at Wesleyan Methodist Sunday Schools on census day</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wesleyan Methodist Sunday School attendances as % of 'potential attenders'</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total attendances at Wesleyan Reform Sunday Schools on census day</td>
<td>215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wesleyan Reform Sunday School attendances as % of 'potential attenders'</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total attendances at all other Nonconformist Sunday Schools on census day</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Nonconformist Sunday School attendances as % of 'potential attenders'</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SOURCE: Ede & Virgoe, Religious Worship; 1851 census returns

*The problem of multiple attendance (i.e. the same children attending Sunday School twice in the same day) is ever-present with this documentary source. I have tried to minimise it by always taking the highest attendance figure recorded by each respondent – whether in the morning or afternoon. The actual number of children attending Sunday School can never be established from this source.

Furthermore, the Church of England did have a preponderance of those Sunday Schools that had been organised in the Union. Only 9 of the 42 parishes were not served by an Anglican Sunday School,95 set against which the Nonconformist performance seems distinctly patchy: only 1 of the 16 Primitive Methodist congregations had organised a Sunday School; 11 Wesleyan congregations had between them established 4 schools; and

95 This and other points made in the following discussion can be verified against the data presented in Appendix E.
6 schools had been started by the 10 Wesleyan Reform congregations in the Union.\textsuperscript{96} Nine parishes had a total Sunday School attendance in excess of 50% of their ‘potential attenders’ cohort. Of these, four ‘close’ parishes – Thurning, Saxthorpe, Thwaite and Great Hautbois – owed this high percentage entirely to attendance at the Church of England school. No Nonconformist Sunday Schools had been established in ‘fully closed’ or ‘estate’ parishes, whereas six ‘open’ parishes sent more children to Nonconformist than to Anglican Sunday Schools. Six parishes made no Sunday School provision of any kind.\textsuperscript{97} These were all parishes of the ‘semi-close’, ‘close’ or ‘estate’ type, each with fewer than 100 children, and many of them were no doubt following the example of ‘close’ parishes like Thruxton, where ‘all the children . . . are sent by the Rector at his own expense to the adjoining schools in the parishes of Reymerstone and Garvestone’.\textsuperscript{98}

From the detailed parochial evidence of the Aylsham Poor Law Union, the general hypothesis that the Church of England was the predominant provider of Sunday Schooling, with a tendency for this to be associated with degrees of paternalistic control, can be given qualified support. There is no doubt that the significance of Sunday Schools – in terms of their influence and the number of scholars that they attracted – increased considerably later in the nineteenth century, but in 1851, at least, their message had not yet reached the majority of children in rural districts. A certain ambivalence towards Sunday Schooling remained in some Anglican circles, and although Nonconformist organisation was not great in the Aylsham Poor Law Union in 1851, its mushrooming presence elsewhere meant that the influence and authority of the Church of England could be curtailed and frustrated. At Diss, for example, local Methodists had been quick, proactive and determined in their foundation of a Sunday School,\textsuperscript{99} with the result that when the Rev. William Manning began to think about sponsoring a National School he

\textsuperscript{96} This last statistic is quite impressive, given the short time that the Wesleyan Reform movement had been operational when the 1851 census was taken. Where they had been organised, Wesleyan Reform Sunday Schools were also very popular, attracting an average 36% of ‘potential attenders’ in the parish.

\textsuperscript{97} A seventh, Whitwell, was for administrative purposes always included with Hackford, where Sunday School provision had been made.

\textsuperscript{98} Ede & Virgoe, Religious Worship, p. 236.

found that he could not. ‘The Sunday School is partly funded by Nonconformists,’ he
wrote, ‘So any adoption of a National School scheme would be unacceptable’.°°

One aspect of education that should not be overlooked – although it is difficult to
quantify – is adult education. Often associated with the drive for self-improvement
among the urban working-class, adult education schemes among farm labourers were
nevertheless widespread and operated with or without the blessing of the local
clergyman. Clerical enthusiasm for the cause was uneven, and the neighbouring rectors of
Fritton and Morningthorpe fell out over the former’s plan to initiate a series of evening
lectures,°° but where it did exist a good deal of effort and commitment was applied. In a
published letter to the Bishop of Norwich, ‘A Country Curate’ argued that the belief that
only young people could be educated was a fallacy, and a socially dangerous one,°°
while at Great Witchingham the Rev. Howard offered encouragement ‘to those who wish
to improve themselves’ even though adult education could never fully compensate ‘for
the evil of too early a removal from school’.°° Other clerical initiatives fell foul of
familiar political and economic issues. At Billingford the Rev. Charles Dashwood
worked hard to establish an evening school – receiving no help from any of the wealthier
parishioners – with the intention that adults and children should be educated together.
The principle soon became corrupted, however, when local farmers identified the evening
school as a potential substitute for a day school for children. Gradually the adult
education element fell away as Dashwood’s school filled with exhausted children, tired
and inattentive after a working in the fields, until their attendance, too, declined and the
whole project became unviable.°°

Although the primary motivation of the Billingford farmers was undoubtedly economic, a
secondary consideration – that worker education savoured of independence, labour unrest

°° N.R.O. DN/NDS/275/1 Diocesan Schools Survey, 1814.
°° N.R.O. PD56/49 Trust Deeds of Fritton School, White, Borrett & Co. to Capt. Holmes 1 January 1903,
commenting on a correspondence between the two rectors conducted in around 1841.
°° ‘A Country Curate’, A Letter to the Lord Bishop of Norwich on the Establishment of Adult Schools in
Agricultural Districts (Norwich, 1850), pp. 9 – 10.
°° Evidence to the Norfolk Chamber of Agriculture, 1867, cited in R.C. on the Employment of Children,
Young Persons and Women in Agriculture (1867), p. 147.
°° N.R.O. PD 210/45 Billingford (East Dereham) papers re. night school, 1859 – 70.
and socialism – was probably also a factor in their thinking. No less a person than Joseph Arch, after all, explicitly made the same connection:

‘Organise yourselves, educate yourselves, don’t leave the work for other people to do it for you . . . If you expect Tory parsons and Tory squires or any of their agents to educate you, you will be deceived. You must read and think for yourselves.’

These same links between adult education and political activism may be seen in the career of Richard Nockolds – radical weaver, rural incendiary and urban terrorist – who founded a Reading Room with the intention that it should be open to coincide with the times of church services. Politically suspect initiatives like these were countered by the elite’s offerings of their own highly paternalistic methods of adult education. W. E. L. Bulwer proudly opened his Reading Room at Cawston in 1863, for instance, having stocked it with books personally vetted and chosen by his wife, and announced – probably to the surprise of no-one – that the Rector would be a permanent director of the scheme.

If there was sometimes an ideological struggle over control of education’s tiller, it must be considered how far these competing forces actually succeeded in delivering an education: what standards were being aimed at, and what standards were being achieved? By the middle of the nineteenth century approximately two-thirds of men and half of women were deemed ‘basically literate’, but definitions of literacy are, in themselves, problematic. One historiographical yardstick has traditionally been the ability to sign documents such as marriage registers, but this can only ever be the crudest baseline indicator of what it means to be ‘literate’, and the true number of people able to use the written word as a tool to get more out of life – whether in terms of education, instruction,  

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106 N. C. 2.4.31.
107 N.R.O. BUL 4/221, 614 x 1 ‘An address by W. E. L. Bulwer, esq., at the opening of A Reading Room at Cawston’, 28 April 1863.
entertainment or spirituality – must always have been considerably smaller than the number who could sign their names. ¹⁰⁹

Difficult to quantify, too, is the extent to which education conferred the benefits of abstract thought or encouraged an understanding of the wider world. One government inspector of a Norfolk school in 1841 noted with despair just how far these skills were lacking:

'They did not know what county joined their own, nor the Direction of London, nor in what Quarter the Sun was in the middle of the Day, nor the Direction of East, West, North and South. These were Boys just about to leave School, and who will be said to have 'received their Education' at a school supported at some Expense by a large resident Landowner'. ¹¹⁰

Problems inherent in schools in the early century, which made issues like these so difficult to deal with, included the absence of formal mechanisms in charity schools for checking and correcting the performance of teachers,¹¹¹ and a shortage of accommodation which meant, of necessity, that thrown together in the same room were 'some who can merely make out their ABC to the extreme annoyance and loss of time of the more advanced scholars'.¹¹² One of the few bodies concerned to check on teaching, accommodation and educational standards during the nineteenth century was the Norwich Diocesan Board of Education. This worked to principles laid down by the National Society, and very quickly established a set of ground rules relating to educational attainment. At the East Dereham National School in 1817, for instance, pupils in the first (highest) class were expected to be able to read the Old and New Testaments and answer questions on them both, know the common catechism, the 'broken' catechism, collects, prayers and graces, know their mathematical tables, understand 'the 4 First Rules of Arithmetic', and conduct compound addition and subtraction. Pupils in the eighth

¹⁰⁹ One discussion of this issue is in P. Laslett, The World We Have Lost, Further Explored (London 1965, 1994 edn.), pp. 229 – 245. (Chapter 10: 'The politics of exclusion and the rule of an elite: literacy and social mobility in the traditional social structure'.)
¹¹¹ N.R.O. PD 337/576 Shipdham Free School papers. The trustees of this endowed charity finally caught up with the schoolmaster in 1828 after a period of 'much neglect and misconduct'.
(lowest) class were expected only to know the Lord’s Prayer and the Creed. The Diocesan Inspectorate also laid down the qualification requirements for pupil-teachers, and aimed for a generous teacher-pupil ratio of 1:25 for its schools. Its work carried on well into the twentieth century.

For all its diligence, however, the Diocesan Inspectorate was primarily concerned with attainment in religious education, with specific reference to the teaching of the Church of England. This may have had some surprising side-effects: the extremely high level of scriptural knowledge found among boys in the Gressenhall workhouse, for instance, or even the regularity with which anonymous threatening letters were couched in a Biblical idiom with heavy-handed scriptural allusions. But it was also leaving its pupils ill-equipped for transferring whatever reading skills they possessed to new and secular subject material. When the master at Honingham School experimented by setting before the children of Standard I an unfamiliar but straightforward passage of dictation, ‘the result was as perhaps might have been anticipated, the most perfect failure imaginable & reduces the master to the extremity of begging to be excused from saying any more on the subject’. Even here we might read some of the ideological opposition that ran like a fault-line through so much of nineteenth-century rural society. Just as had been the case with the imposition of elite culture upon popular culture and the triumph of documentary law over custom – schools brought the demands of an alien, written culture squarely to the door of those whose learning and understanding had hitherto been firmly rooted in the oral tradition.

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113 N.R.O. DN/NDS/276 Diocesan records: East Dereham National School 1817, Pupils were classified according to ability rather than age. Consequently there were some 8 year-old pupils in the first grade and some 9 year-olds in the eighth.
114 See, for example, N.R.O. PD 196/70 Alburgh School: Reports of Diocesan Inspectors 1876 – 1914.
115 N.R.O. C/GP 14/8 Mitford & Launditch Poor Law Union Guardians’ Minute Book, 4 November 1847.
117 N.R.O. C/ED 67/1 Honingham School Log Book, 10 October 1874.
Managing the curriculum

A discussion of the ideological dimension of education and the extent to which it was intended to indoctrinate must address the question of what was taught and why. ‘Religion ought to be made the groundwork of all education,’ wrote John Wood, ‘its lessons should be interwoven with the whole tissue of instruction, and its principles should regulate the entire system of discipline in our national schools’. Wood was writing in 1838, but would have found much agreement among those administering education seventy years earlier and seventy years later. An education based on religious and moral instruction was thought to inculcate ‘habits of industry and order’ among the poor, as well as having the desirable side-effect of countering popular and superstitious belief systems. It would cleanse people’s minds of ‘depravity’ and help in the fight against crime; it would provide ‘a scheme for social regeneration’; and it would ‘draw out good principles which exist in the hearts of all’. This was possible, the argument ran, because ‘the minds of infants are like plastic wax and ready to take a first impression’.

A national, religious, moral education might be used to reinforce the social order in a number of ways. Christians, like wives, could be taught to ‘love, honour and obey’ their master, while the work of instruction could extend well beyond the classroom and into the domestic sphere: ‘children and servants’ were the principal targets for catechizing, according to the diocesan visitation returns of 1820. The declared object of the National School movement, as defined in its published ‘Principles’ of 1812, was ‘to

119 R. Walpole, Remarks on the Education of the Poor (Norwich, 1812), p.3.
119 N.R.O. GTN/7/1 Gunton papers. Address on the Formation of Schools on the Plan of Rev. Dr. Andrew Bell (1811).
121 Rev. H. Bathurst, Practical Suggestions to Promote Clerical Residence and to Ameliorate the Habits and Conduct of the Poor (Norwich, 1825), p. 44.
123 N.R.O. GTN/7/1 Gunton papers. Address on the Formation of Schools, p. 6.
communicate to the poor generally . . . such knowledge and habits as are sufficient to
guide them through life in their proper stations', and the notion of the ‘proper station’
as a cornerstone of the divinely-ordained social order was a theme picked up
enthusiastically by generations of catechisers and religious educationalists. Knight has
noted that ‘the clear assumption was that the working classes were being educated to
worship in the new and enlarged buildings’; and there seems a compelling symmetry to
the notion of the child moving from Gothic schoolroom to Gothic church and singing in
both about the social virtues of the ‘rich man in his castle / the poor man at his gate’.
Certainly a Ritualist and school-builder like William Allen at Shouldham had no
hesitation in declaring the connection:

‘Depend upon it God’s work can never be carried out in any parish without a well-ordered school, and
church building and church restoration, good as they are in themselves and necessary, are simply labour
and money thrown away if no provision be made for the education of the children of our parishes in the
way of godliness’.

And, as William Allen also argued, an educated appreciation of the divine order could
have profound implications for secular order:

‘Some of you here present may remember what took place in this immediate neighbourhood about 35 years
ago. Some of you may recollect the disturbances which broke out on the introduction of the horse threshing
machine. Some of you may remember the burning of the machines and the firing of the stacks. What was it
that led to this? Why the downright ignorance of the lower orders. Look at the altered state of things. Look
at the machines now in use and the intelligence of many of the workmen. Do you think that those machines
could ever have been made, and introduced, or their use acquiesced in, if there had not been a vast spread
of education? . . . And who have been the great promoters of education? I am proud to say – the clergy’.

Religious control of education was thought of as a keystone, holding in tension the
edifice of church and state. If teaching was allowed ‘to disclaim all creeds . . . the church,
and consequently the state, might ultimately be endangered’. It was therefore the duty
of teachers to manufacture ‘a steady, honest, God-fearing, church-going population’.

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126 Principles of the National Society (1812), cited in Horn, Life and Labour, pp. 121 – 2.
129 N.R.O. PD 356/125 Newspaper cuttings on the opening of Shouldham National School, Lynn News, 4
August 1866.
130 N.R.O. GTN/7/1 Gunton papers, Plan of Rev. Dr. Andrew Bell, p. 13.
Only when this had been achieved could they claim to have ‘done their duty as schoolmasters’.  

What, then, were the mechanisms by which the church sought to achieve its desired aims? There was, first of all, a constitutional relationship between education and the Church of England. No inspector of a Church of England school could be appointed without the approval of two archbishops, for instance.  

Schoolteachers were tested annually on their grasp of religious knowledge at the Diocesan Training College in Norwich, while in October 1874 teachers from the East Dereham area were brought together for a church service and an address from the Bishop, during which he reminded them of the central importance of their work in connection with the Church of England.  

There were also links that were drawn a good deal more subtly than this, based upon the dual premise that ‘the Church of England is of divine institution’ and that, having used its wealth to set up schools, it had an axiomatic right to control the doctrine preached therein. Certificated teachers were regarded with suspicion by some Anglicans as agents of the secular state, their presence threatening the ultimate exclusion of the clergyman from ‘his own school’. From the inception of the National Schools the Church of England devised its own certification scheme, known as the ‘Madras System’, by which means a teacher might be identified as ‘a member of the Church of England . . . regular in his attendance at church, and . . . a person of good character & reputation’.  

Doctrinal control also extended into the area of charity schools, many of which were

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132 From the address of the Tractarian Henry Newland to a Diocesan Education Conference in 1856, cited in Knight, Nineteenth-Century Church, p. 191.  
133 N.R.O. PD 136/103 Correspondence re. the building of a National School at Denton, circular from the National Society Office dated 12 August 1840.  
134 N.R.O. C/ED 67/1 Honingham School Log Book, 12 December 1874.  
136 Both these points were argued by the Rev. John Perowne of St. John Maddermarket, Norwich in his polemical leaflet about control of infant schools: Rev. J. Perowne, Observations on Mr. Alexander’s Letter to the Members of the Established Church (Norwich, 1836), pp. 15, 1.  
137 The Rev. William Allen was particularly vocal on this subject, quoted in N.R.O. PD 356/125 Lynn News 4 August 1866.  
firmly in Anglican hands, engaging only those teachers who could give ‘instruction in Religious Knowledge in accordance with the Doctrines of the Church of England’. 139

Occasionally, and sometimes dramatically, the Church’s doctrinal authority in schools faced a challenge from the ‘enemy within’, the independent, rebellious and determined schoolteacher. This was nowhere more strikingly the case than at Burston from 1914, where the Rev. Charles Tucker Eland’s travails with the husband and wife teaching team of Tom and Annie Higdon would eventually assume iconic status in the struggle between labour and established authority that raged in the decade after the First World War. 140 It is worth remembering that, at the outset, Eland appeared to hold all the cards. He headed a school management committee which consisted of his wife; the Rev. Charles Millard (rector of the neighbouring parish of Shimpling); Millard’s churchwarden, Mr. Stearne; one of Eland’s tenants, Mr. Fisher; and a Nonconformist who was widely held nevertheless to be in Eland’s pocket, Mr. H. Witherley. Eland’s complaints against the Higdons ranged from the trivial – that Mrs. Higdon lit a fire in the schoolroom without his permission – to the potentially career-ending – that Mrs. Higdon had thrashed and abused two Barnardo’s children – but at least part of the problem seems to have stemmed from the fact that the teachers were doing nothing to evangelise the doctrine of the Church of England in the schoolroom. As clergyman, school manager, employer and landlord, Eland was able to flex his muscles in almost every area of parochial life in support of his campaign. He threatened the Infant School teacher, the caretaker and even the school toilet cleaner with dismissal if they did not speak out against the Higdons, and he evicted a glebe tenant and withdrew Rectory business from a local shoemaker for the same reason. But despite his secular powers, and despite the fact that he was acting against the interests and authority of schoolteachers in a way that may have attracted considerable support in some working class communities, 141 Eland found that the tide had turned against him. In dismissing the Higdons, Eland dismissed an entire parish from their obligation to respond to his authority: the labourers, artisans and schoolchildren of

139 N.R.O. PD 337/601 The constitution of Tilney’s Charity, Shipdham 1875.
140 The discussion that follows has been synthesised from the many documents in the Burston Strike School archive, held in N.R.O. MC31.
141 See, for example, William Harper’s problems at Coltishall, described on p. 319.
Burston happily immersed themselves in a new and alternative community where the writ of the Church of England no longer ran (Plate 21).

The Church of England clearly made a concerted and sustained effort throughout the nineteenth century to ensure that, wherever possible, children were taught in an environment over which the church had ultimate control. Of equal importance to school management in this respect, however, was the issue of what the children learned in school while they were there. A central feature of the curriculum in church schools was the catechism, usually taught and tested by the incumbent or his curate who would regularly visit the school for the purpose. Teaching the catechism satisfied one of the rules of the National School movement, which ‘required that schools give instruction on the Prayer Book and the Catechism, that pupils attend the Parish Church on Sunday and read only those books that had been published by the S.P.C.K.’. Its quality was tested annually at the Diocesan Inspection, a time of stress and tension for teachers, who provided intensive last-minute coaching and brow-beat the competent children to ensure their attendance on the day while quietly finding some premise on which the children who were not up to scratch might stay away from school.

School teaching did not begin and end with religious instruction, however, and from the outset National Schools offered lessons in reading, writing, arithmetic and, for the girls, sewing. By the early twentieth century a Church of England School like that at Cranworth was providing an educational timetable that was 85% secular in terms of teaching time (Table 7.3). Religious instruction still loomed large on the Cranworth timetable – each day started with a 40 minute Scripture lesson and there were other prayers and hymns during the day – but it by no means predominated.

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142 Knight, Nineteenth-Century Church, p. 191.
143 This notion that it was the school being tested rather than its individual pupils is an interesting and recurrent one. For the flurry of activity associated with the annual Diocesan Inspection see N.R.O. C/ED 67/1, Honingham School Log Book 1873 – 98, passim.
144 Knight, Nineteenth-Century Church, p. 191.
Table 7.3: Cranworth Church of England School timetable, 1901, showing percentage balances between religious and non-religious teaching time (per week).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Teaching time (hrs. mins.)</th>
<th>% timetable time per week allotted to this subject</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arithmetic</td>
<td>4hr 35min</td>
<td>16.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious Instruction</td>
<td>4hr 25min</td>
<td>15.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>4hr</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>4hr</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recreation</td>
<td>2hr 30min</td>
<td>8.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Needlework</td>
<td>1hr 30min</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drawing</td>
<td>1hr</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History</td>
<td>1hr</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>1hr</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Object Lessons</td>
<td>1hr</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singing</td>
<td>1hr</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geography</td>
<td>1hr</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spelling</td>
<td>50min</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Registration</td>
<td>40min</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Teaching Time</strong></td>
<td><strong>28hr 30min</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SOURCE: N.R.O. PD359/69 Cranworth C.E. School timetable, 1901

Rigidly-cast weekly timetables like this were, perhaps, symptomatic of the ‘wooden routine’ that was seen by some to be destroying the creative, the individual and the local in education. Even so, plenty of scope for flair and imagination remained, as many teachers realised that entertaining lessons were the ones most likely to hold the attention of their pupils. Marcus Bardwell, the schoolteacher at South Lopham, may well have been unusual in bringing into school his gramophone, his working model of Tower Bridge, and his back-numbers of *TitBits* for the children to enjoy, but other teachers were demonstrating a desire to engage the children, to work on their cognitive and motor skills, and to enhance their capacity for self-development. At Lingwood in 1918, E. M. Royal compiled a volume of class preparation notes that were remarkably free from

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147 Serpell, *Lophams*, P. 178. Bardwell was schoolmaster at South Lopham c. 1900 – 1906.
ideology. Royal’s teaching methods were conservative, and there was an excessive preoccupation with correct pronunciation, but they demonstrated a general and a genuine desire to bring the best out of all students of all abilities.¹⁴⁸

Education did not, however, have to rely on religious education in order to indoctrinate. Much teaching was deeply political in that it propounded the virtues of the existing social structure. The ‘King of the Norfolk Poachers’ offers a clue to this when he relates his experiences at school:

‘I lerned those things they thought proper, reading, and Arithmetic, the colleck for the week, and Beleff and that sort of thing. Also to Honer and Obay the Queen and order ourselves Lowley and revently to ower Pastors and Masters’.¹⁴⁹

Many clues to this social and political indoctrination can be picked up in the historical record: the rector who bought for his school a framed portrait of the Queen;¹⁵⁰ the two-week struggle to teach the words and music of the National Anthem to the children of Honingham;¹⁵¹ and the patriotic prayer designated to start each day in National Schools.¹⁵² We might consider, too, the presence on recommended reading lists of Goldsmith’s Deserted Village with its loving and sentimental picture of the ideal clergyman, and of Gray’s Elegy, with its celebration of the stasis and immobility of rural life.¹⁵³

The co-existence, within the same classroom, of the different classes of pupil, divided by ability rather than age, was an early and sometimes brutally transparent lesson in the notion of hierarchy and of the ‘classification’ of the poor that would stay with most labourers throughout their lives. Similarly the recommendation that ‘the child might,

¹⁴⁹ The King of the Norfolk Poachers’ (ed. L. Rider Haggard), I Walked By Night (Ipswich, 1974), p. 25.
¹⁵² N.R.O. DN/NDS/162 Diocesan papers on the foundation of local National Schools, 1812. The prayer starts: ‘Pour down, we pray thee, thy blessings upon our Sovereign Lord King George, and all that are in authority under him in Church and State’.
¹⁵³ Both poems were on the recommended reading list of East Walton School (N.R.O. PD 362/32 Log Book 1877–89). Goldsmith’s description of the ‘ideal clergyman’ – which may or may not have accorded with the children’s own experience – is quoted on p.83 of this thesis, while the significance of Gray’s Elegy is discussed in the Introduction and an excerpt from it quoted on pp. 11 - 12.
intuitively, be made to feel that, by making a progress in humility he would be rewarded by a continuation of that protection and kindness he had, and now, experienced', 154 was a means of inculcating the values of paternalism. Ultimately, the technical education being advocated for farmers by the 1890s, through which they were to be trained in 'Chemistry, Botany, Geology and Biology', 155 would eliminate the last vestiges of belief in the supernatural intervention in agriculture, and would also enable the farmer to 'easily apply his knowledge to a new district', 156 thereby breaking the mould of a purely localist approach to living and working.

An ideological closeness between school and church was matched in many parishes by a series of physical and emotional ties which, in a subtle but nevertheless profound way, demonstrated the incontrovertible links between these parish institutions. Chadwick offers a cameo of this relationship in *Victorian Miniature* when he describes the tug-of-war between Squire Boileau and the Rev. Wayte-Andrew over control of the village schoolmistress, a dispute that left the teacher with an agonised sense of conflicting loyalties. 157 As Knight has put it, 'schoolteachers were expected to show public loyalty to the church by training the choir, playing the organ or harmonium, or teaching at the Sunday School. There was no question of their being permitted to hold Nonconformist opinions'. 158 This was certainly the part played by the teacher at Honingham School who could absent himself for days at a time if the organ in the parish church required his attention, 159 and an absolute paragon in the role was Miss Pickersgill from the Rev. William Allen's school at Shouldham. On May Day 1867, for instance, Miss Pickersgill, schoolmistress and village organist, made the May Day garland to be carried in procession through the village by the children. She also directed the members of the parish choir in decorating the church. 160 The work of Miss Pickersgill indicates how an active schoolteacher could bring the parish children closer to their church and could

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154 Adams, *Effects of Education*, p. 27.
156 *ibid.*
158 Knight, *Nineteenth-Century Church*, p. 194.
159 N.R.O. PD C/ED 67/1 Honingham School Log Book, e.g. 14 November 1874.
160 N.R.O. PD 356/125 newspaper cuttings on Shouldham Parish Festivals.
become a force for establishment conservatism. The contrast with the Higdons, with whom the Rev. Eland fell out so disastrously at Burston, could hardly be more marked. Tom Higdon recounted how Eland had, from the outset, tried to persuade them to use their influence to encourage church attendance, but ‘few of the working class went [and] my wife & myself seemed to be held largely to blame for this by the rector’.  

The Honingham School Log Book provides a number of illustrative examples of the many ways in which links were forged between church and school. The rector supplied the school with hymn books ‘like those to be used in the churches for the future’, important services in the church calendar, like those on Ash Wednesday, were dovetailed into the school timetable; children from the school decorated the church and rectory for Christmas; and special rectory tea parties were given exclusively for those schoolchildren who had helped with the singing in church over Christmas. No opportunity was missed by the Honingham incumbent to exploit the political potential of such gatherings:

‘On Monday evening the most regular attendants at the evening school . . . were entertained at the Rectory to a substantial Supper at 7.30 after which a short and appropriate address was given them by the Rector relative to the “union” and “wages” question & the placing of their surplus money in the S[avings] Bank’.

The political dimension to the linkage between schools and the Church of England was denounced by Nonconformists throughout the nineteenth century. In parishes where the dissenting influence was strong, Church of England schools were often difficult to establish, or could be directly opposed by a Nonconformist school set up in competition. At Denton in 1814 the Rev. William Chester advised the Diocesan Inspectorate that he could never hope to get a National School off the ground because local farmers would

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161 N.R.O. MC 31/63/1 Burston Strike School papers: Letter from Tom Higdon to unidentified recipient, 26 July 1915.
162 All of the following five footnotes are referenced from N.R.O. C/ED 67/1 Honingham School Log Book 1873 – 1898, with the date of the relevant entry being given.
163 28 November 1874.
164 28 February 1874.
165 20 and 27 December 1873.
166 26 December 1874.
167 4 April 1874.
oppose any such move on principle. At North Lopham a Wesleyan Day School, set up and run for many years by the radical weaver ‘Coby’ Cobb, competed directly with the parish’s Anglican school. And at Whaplode – just over the border into Lincolnshire – the trope of the ‘enrolling actor’ was again fulfilled as a dissenter called David Hurn captured hearts and minds, to the fury of the Rev. Samuel Oliver:

‘About two years ago (more or less) there came a Man into this Parish, named David Hurn, and set himself up as a schoolmaster; who tells my Sunday school, in his vernacular Fens slang, that the Catechism is nought but a pack of lies; and that I have no right to teach it in the Church on Sundays! – in short, my Lord, I clearly understand him to be a confirmed Infidel! for which reason, more than any other, he is warmly Patronised, and strenuously supported by the great majority of leading People in the Parish.’

One of the provisions of Forster’s 1870 Education Act was that Board Schools could provide religious instruction so long as it was not distinctive of any denomination, and it was this ‘soullessness’ that led many Anglicans to work so frantically to avoid the imposition of a School Board. Nonconformists, on the other hand, were equally antagonistic towards the 1902 Education Act which brought denominational schools under the umbrella of local authority funding: this was, argued many, sectarian education on the rates. The provision of central funding for Church of England schools was not a new source of aggravation in 1902, however. From the 1870s trade unionists had complained about government grants to church schools, and the specific complaint was being woven into a general argument that linked clerical control of schools to other facets of clerical power in the parish. Joseph Arch argued that ‘in a village where the parson had the purse of the clothing club, the money bags of the blanket club, and the key to the soup kitchen, if a labourer dared to take his child out of school while the catechism were being taught he was a marked man.’

In a series of Norfolk cases, the denominational management of schools became an issue at the heart of local, regional, and even national political tensions. At Scarning a trade union-inspired effort was made to wrest control of the Free School from the hands of the

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168 N.R.O. DN/NDS/275/1 Diocesan Schools Survey, 1814.
170 Rev. Samuel Oliver, Whaplode, Lincs., writing in 1835, cited in Knight, Nineteenth-Century Church, p. 194. Oliver’s response to the crisis was to revive the office of parish schoolmaster.
Church of England. Chairman of the trustees was Augustus Jessopp, who refused to recognise any valid interest among political opponents who were "paid agitators or professional speechmakers". From Great Ellingham Lord Walsingham received disturbing reports of the way in which "designing dissenters" had packed a vestry meeting with labourers, lured there on the promise of a debate about local charity mismanagement, and had then sprung upon them the issue of a School Board, which "large numbers voted for, . . . not in the least understanding the nature of it". The Swaffham campaign to establish a Board School was fought across a clear divide between Liberal/Nonconformists and Conservative/Anglicans. The Liberals argued that Tory farmers were conniving with the National School managers to have children released to work in the fields and that insufficient recognition was being given to the "conscience clause" which allowed the children of Nonconformists to absent themselves from certain aspects of Anglican doctrinal teaching. The conscience clause, the Swaffham dissenters argued, had in any case been "wrung from the clergy almost at the point of the bayonet". To the intense irritation of the National School headmaster, W. M. Pheasant, it was proved to him that "a radical clique" could indeed force a vote over a Board School — even when the Education Department had passed the existing school accommodation as satisfactory — provided the "radicals" could summon a meeting of 50 ratepayers, of whom 10 subsequently demanded a poll of all ratepayers. In the event the Liberals suffered a crushing defeat, by 435 votes to 153. *Vox populi, vox dei!* crowed the victorious church party, but an electorate of under 600 in a town with a population of 3636 demonstrated how far they were from being given a democratic mandate to continue with the National School.

174 N.R.O. MC 335, BUL 16/299, 707 x 6: Bulwer papers, Jessopp to Bulwer (12 May 1883).
175 N.R.O. WLS XVIII/19, 410 x 9: Walsingham papers, correspondence re. establishment of a School Board, 1864 — 73. Henry Colman, Great Ellingham, to Walsingham (17 June 1873).
177 N.R.O. PD 52/386, arguments aired at a public meeting held in the Swaffham Assembly Rooms, 23 January 1899.
178 N.R.O. PD 52/386 W. M. Pheasant to The School Guardian, 28 November 1898.
179 N.M. 4.3.89. Population figure from the 1891 census.
Education and society, morality and social relations

John Alexander, the Nonconformist minister of the Princes Street Chapel in Norwich, stood back aghast to view the wreckage of ecumenical relations that had been caused by struggles over education. ‘If those who profess to have the same mind that was in Christ,’ he wrote, ‘refuse to associate with those who love the same Redeemer . . . merely because they differ respecting some points of discipline in the Church . . . will not such conduct bring religion itself into dishonour?’ Alexander was responding to an unseemly scramble among the denominations to secure infants for religious indoctrination. This was an attempt, as he saw it, to ‘enlist infants just weaned from the breast as parties in ecclesiastical strife’, a pre-emptive strike for ‘hearts and minds’ that the Anglican Robert Walpole had recommended as the best means of reducing religious dissent.

The problem with religious dissent was, of course, that it often went hand-in-hand with social and political dissent. Again and again disputes over the direction of education became bound up in much broader issues of control and authority in the nineteenth-century countryside. This was nowhere better illustrated than at Burston, whose strife, to quote one near-contemporary source, represented ‘a microcosm of the rural war. Its characters are of the farm and field, of cottage and big house, its politics are of village life at the time’. The Higdons had come to Burston fresh from political triumph at Wood Dalling where they had engineered a coup in the parish council elections on behalf of the agricultural labourers. This was a feat they aimed to repeat at Burston, using the poor quality of workers’ housing as the basis for their campaign.

Walpole’s vision of 1812, that ‘the civil and religious parts of our constitution are so united that a disregard and neglect of the one must affect the other’, still had its adherents a century later, but there had for some time been a growing sense that National

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180 J. Alexander, An Affectionate Remonstrance Addressed to the Members of the Established Church (Norwich, 1836) p. 11.
181 Alexander, A Vindication, p. 12.
182 Walpole, Remarks, pp. 8 – 9.
183 N.R.O. MC 31/15 Burston papers, extract from R. Groves, Sharpen the Sickle (c. 1949) – a history of the farmworkers’ union.
184 Walpole, Remarks, p. 4.
Schools were something of an anachronism. There was even some confusion over what the term meant. The National School headmaster, W. M. Pheasant, had to seek clarification on this point during the Swaffham dispute: ‘Are many of the schools of this country called National Schools,’ he enquired, ‘because, as one Radical says, they belong to the nation or, as I think, because they are in Union with the National Society?’ From the emergence of agricultural trade unionism onwards, National Schools were being denounced ever more forcefully as perpetuating the old ties of voluntary charitable and paternalistic giving. Beside the implications of this for social relations, the method was proving inadequate as a means of funding a modern education system. Consequently National Schools were heavily subsidised by government grants. The National School at Swaffham was alleged to receive £1288 per year in various grants underwritten by the taxpayer, while voluntary contributions amounted to just £118. Despite this enormous disparity ‘the taxpayer has no voice in the management while the voluntary subscriber . . . practically does as he likes’. Conflict over education provision duly took its place among the litany of contemporary concerns about cost, efficiency, and the size of the rate demand. Supporters of the National School at Swaffham argued that the alternative would add 6d. in the pound to local rates, to which supporters of Board Schools would respond that at least some transparent financial accountability would be introduced: the current system placed vast sums of money at the disposal of clergymen and churchwardens whose inefficient and partisan management of some local charity was increasingly being laid bare. There was also a growing sense that landowners could no longer be relied upon as an endless source of funding for schools, and even the Ecclesiastical Commission would refuse to bail out National Schools if it could identify

185 N.R.O. PD 52/386 Swaffham School Board Dispute, W. M. Pheasant to the School Guardian, 28 November 1898.
187 N.R.O. PD 52/386 Swaffham School Board Dispute, election address to the ratepayers of Swaffham by the Rev. Salisbury Everard et al, c. February 1899.
188 The demand for a Board School at Great Ellingham stemmed directly from dissatisfaction at the management of parochial charities (N.R.O. WLS XVIII/19, 410 x 9: Walsingham papers, Henry Colman to Walsingham 17 June 1873), while at Baconsthorpe the Rev. Fielden reacted sharply to questions about his financial competence which he regarded as ‘throwing odium upon him’ (N.R.O. PD 334/34 Baconsthorpe School Managers’ Meeting Book, 15 June 1882).
189 See the appeals launched by the rectors of Catfield, South Walsingham and Cawston, described elsewhere in this chapter.
no pecuniary advantage to itself. All of this added up to a mounting crisis in the funding of National Schools and an infrastructure that was in places beginning to look inadequate, dated and shabby — as two girls who made the mistake of jumping on a flagstone in the playground at North Lopham and disappeared through it into the school cesspit could no doubt testify.

Schools had an important role to play in the shaping — or suppression — of communal identities. Early in the nineteenth century an organic closeness with the local community and its culture can sometimes be glimpsed — ‘in the season of gleaning we make a holiday’ reported the Rev. Day of Seething in 1814 and even into the twentieth century schools could be one means by which parish elites kept in touch with some of the needs, problems and attitudes of the local poor. At Fritton, for example, the Rev. L. P. Howes was confronted with a case of malnutrition in his school, and he took the pivotal role in liaising with parents, doctors and poor law guardians to help rectify the situation. Among the more far-sighted clergy, steps were taken to break down parochial barriers in a positive way; at Baconsthorpe, for instance, the Rev. Theophilus Girdlestone had ensured that the National School was ‘free to the Children of the Poor of this and all adjoining parishes’. But the enforced sharing of premises was not always a good idea. Some parishes felt that the lack of a school building was damaging to their ‘civic pride’, while in other cases xenophobia was greatly exacerbated: ‘There were two villages went to one school,’ wrote the ‘King of the Norfolk Poachers’, ‘as is often the way in Norfolk . . . and of course as a result we were always fighting each other’.

Among the farmers and middle classes towards the end of the nineteenth century, educational issues could also demonstrate the shallow provenance of senses of identification and responsibility. Not only were popular and local systems of knowledge

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190 On 27 December 1895 the Commission wrote to the Rev. Arthur Brown at Catfield refusing his request for a contribution, on the grounds that the Commission owned only ‘a very small amount of property’ in the parish (N.R.O. PD 531/65, 67 Catfield School papers, 1895).
191 Serpell, Lophams, pp. 175–6. The two girls survived their ordeal, which occurred on 10 May 1898.
192 N.R.O. DN/NDS/275/1 Diocesan School Survey, 1814.
194 N.R.O. DN/VIS 55/2 Ingworth Rural Deanery Visitation Returns, 1820.
195 At Stanford, for instance, the parishioners objected so strongly to the closure of their school and an enforced sharing scheme with Tottington that their persistent lobbying forced the council to build a new school in the village (N.R.O. PD 54/18 Stanford Vestry Book, 1910).
being broken down by a new tendency towards scientific education, an increasingly mobile class of tenant farmers no longer felt themselves obliged to underwrite the education of parishioners with whom they might have only a temporary association.

'Rev. Sir,' wrote one, when approached to contribute towards the National School, 'I am in receipt of yours & beg to say I am leaving my Farm next October and therefore I shall not have any further interest in the Parish and do not consider I am entitled to pay any charge for the alterations to the school'.

An ambivalence towards education that operated at a deep and cultural level can also be detected. While antiquarians certainly rehabilitated 'Hodge' and his native knowledge later in the nineteenth century, even coming to see in him 'the bearer of Englishness, the carrier of a folk tradition that transcended and superceded the ephemeral culture of the towns', there was also an unsentimental acknowledgement that the life and labour of his children was 'emphatically brutalising'. Schoolteachers like the one at Honingham might work hard to teach the boys that the school walls were not the place to pee, but if many of them went home to cottages in which wealthy landlords had not seen fit to install privies or sanitation, the ultimate blame for their dysfunction could scarcely be laid at the boys' door. Contradictions such as these, where moral intent seemed so much at odds with practical reality, were commonplace in rural communities and made the work of 'moral reformation', so enthusiastically attributed to the work of National Schools by men like the Bawdeswell curate, incalculably harder to achieve. Even a straightforward axiom like that expressed by Adams - that reading and writing could confer no benefit unless they were taught alongside an understanding of right and wrong - could falter when faced with the fundamentalist view that all education 'leads to evil'.

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199 Freeman, 'The “Hodge” stereotype', p. 182.
201 N.R.O. C/ED/67/1 Honingham School Log Book, 6 December 1873.
202 N.R.O. PD 155/35 Curate's list of parishioners, Bawdeswell 1842.
certainly a feeling that half-hearted attempts at education, where children (especially boys) drifted in and out of school as the requirements of agricultural labour dictated, could do more harm than good. Inadequately educated, the ex-National School pupil drifted towards the beershop, the argument went: he made an imprudent early marriage and became consumed with material (rather than spiritual) desires.205

A number of parallels may be drawn between contemporary approaches to the management of education and certain other aspects of the management of wider society that have figured elsewhere in this thesis. A financial chasm separated respective provisions for rich and poor: in the first years of the nineteenth century Lord Walsingham paid £120 per annum to keep his eldest grandson at Eton, as well as paying a man one guinea every month to supply his daughter with ass’s milk at her finishing school in Knightsbridge.206 Nonconformists were, wherever possible, excluded from involvement in the running of schools. Henry Colman at Great Ellingham was particularly scathing about one dissenter who put himself up for election to the School Board: James Barnard, he said, was ‘a very small farmer and dealer in Apples, Potatoes &c. who it is said cannot write his name, he is a Methodist preacher.’207 As the threat of Board Schools grew, with their Liberal, Nonconformist managers, the Church of England schools formed themselves into an Association ‘so that each school should feel that it does not stand alone,’ 208 acting in just the same way that landowners had done to combat arsonists and farmers had done to fight the agricultural trade unions. Wherever they could be sustained, National Schools played their part in the project of ‘cultural incorporation’. Having listened to William Allen’s lengthy discourse at the opening of their school, for instance, the children of Shouldham ‘were provided with a plentiful tea’ and a game of cricket with ‘materials provided for the choristers by Mr. J. Bird of the Abbey Farm’.209 And, during the nineteenth century, successive architects and inspectors invited managers to think again about the internal layout of their schools, encouraging them especially to do away

206 N.R.O. WLS LII/21, 427 x 5 and N.R.O. WLS LVIII/10a, 429 x 1.
207 N.R.O. WLS XVIII/19, 410 x 9: Walsingham papers, Colman to Walsingham (17 June 1873).
208 N.R.O. PD 227/41: East Lexham papers, circular from the Norwich Diocesan Association of Schools, (1902).
with galleries so that the children could be seated in forward-facing rows. Just like the restored parish church, the school was being designed as ‘instructional’ rather than ‘participatory’ space.

In spite of all, however, it still has to be acknowledged that the education of the poor played its part in changing the social order. As the Rev. Henry Ffolkes admitted in 1873, strikes were the new weapon of the thinking working class and, although mighty inconvenient, they were infinitely preferable to the riots and arson attacks of an earlier generation. The trade union generation had, Ffolkes implied, acquired the power to reason, to argue, and to persuade.

Conclusion

“What is education? It is not merely teaching reading, writing and arithmetic but it is the drawing out those good principles which exist in the hearts of all – the keeping down the evil principles; the instilling the love of truth, honesty and self-respect; the training up the young as members of Christ and making them fit for the Kingdom of Heaven.”

William Allen’s pride at opening his long-awaited National School led him to make a number of pronouncements about the ideal role of education in contemporary society, none more transparent than the above acknowledgement that what was intended was primarily social and moral – rather than academic – instruction. What seems to be absent from Allen’s vision – and from that of most of his clerical contemporaries – is any sense that education could and should transform the life-chances of its recipients. Instead, education was used as the means to make limited life-chances acceptable, to still the grumbling hive by explaining the great divine scheme within which ‘all things worked together for good’.

\[^{210}\text{e.g N.R.O PD 136/103 New school building at Denton, Committee of Council on Education to the Rev. W. A. Bouverie, December 1840.}\]
\[^{211}\text{Rev. H. Ffolkes, Some Dangers and Duties of the Higher Class (Norwich, 1873), p. 9.}\]
\[^{212}\text{N.R.O. PD 356/125 Rev. W. Allen, speech at the opening of Shouldham National School, Lynn News, 4 August 1866.}\]
This attitude can be detected as an undertow to even the most ostensibly liberal viewpoints. Cited as the broad-minded antidote to the views of the Rev. Kirby Trimmer—who considered any theoretical or abstract education for the poor to be an absurd waste of time—the views of the Bishop of London contained a heavy conservative proviso: ‘I see no reason,’ he said, ‘why the education given to the poor should differ from the education of their superiors, more widely than the different circumstances and duties of their respective conditions in life render absolutely necessary’.\textsuperscript{213} No less terrifying to the Bishop of London than to anyone else would have been the spectre of men like Richard Nockolds—arsonist, radical, reading-room proprietor and self-educated working man\textsuperscript{214}—for at the root of many clerically-driven approaches to education was the notion, as summed up by the Rev. Henry Bathurst, that ‘if an established clergy be necessary it must be necessary also that they should have a hold on the minds of men’\textsuperscript{215}

The conservative ideal of the role of education in contemporary society is encapsulated by Knight:

\begin{quote}
In the period from 1840 the ideal Anglican parish, with its restored Gothic church, resident incumbent and comfortable parsonage, also had its neat National School, filled with the children of the poor, all apparently learning their catechism, and growing up to be useful in their station in life, protected from the dangers of Dissent.\textsuperscript{216}
\end{quote}

Adherents of the ideal preached a catechism of contentedness. For one clergyman’s wife, an essential element to instruction was the notion that ‘the most certain way to be happy in this world is to be contented with what we have, without aspiring at, or wishing for, more’.\textsuperscript{217} Against elite views such as this, incidental details like Lord Walsingham’s travails to keep his daughter supplied with asses’ milk acquire a new and bitterly ironic aspect.

\begin{footnotes}
\item[214] N.C. 2.4.31.
\item[215] Rev. H. Bathurst, Practical Suggestions to Promote Clerical Residence and Ameliorate the Habits and Conduct of the Poor (Norwich, 1825), pp. 44 – 5.
\item[216] Knight, Nineteenth-century Church, p. 191.
\item[217] N.R.O. FEL 630, 554 x 2 Fellowes papers, ‘A short account of certain facts from scriptural history with some observations and reflections for the use of my children’ Ann Fellowes (n.d.).
\end{footnotes}
Early nineteenth-century elites often found it difficult to distinguish between education and sedition, and there can be little doubt that their successors took control of education – at least partly – for the same reason. Contemplating the possible causes of the ‘Swing’ risings, the parish overseer of Stiffkey laid the blame squarely at the door of ‘partial education, teaching their heads to reason rather than their hands to work’. A generation later, William Allen at Shouldham was able to cite education as the reason for the poor’s acquiescence in new modes of living and working. The educational strategy for countering sedition was both overt and covert. Overtly, the Norwich Diocesan National School Society stated that ‘the best corrective of Chartism is Christianity, and the best preventive of Socialism Church of England principles’. More subtle, covert methods might be read into the deployment of maps: banned from many schoolrooms when they depicted nothing more sharply than the labourers’ disarmally narrow horizons, they were subsequently encouraged in a later, more confident time when the glorification of the British Empire became a primary concern.

Certain efforts that were made to establish an Anglican education in the early part of the nineteenth century - before the political impact of Nonconformity had begun to bite – were nevertheless marked by half-heartedness and complacency. At Sheringham a prospective teacher had been sent to Norwich for training but ‘was terrified by the confusion of voices & gave it up’. Consequently the vicar concluded that ‘for the present I do not see what can be done’. Similarly the plans of the Rev. W. Deighton at East Dereham had been scuppered by the fact of ‘the Roads being very bad in the Winter season’. Half-hearted and easily-deterred attempts like these represented an open invitation to Methodists – much more diligent and organised in many (though by no means all) parishes – to steal a march on the Church of England in the battle for hearts and minds. The Church of England countered by fostering organic links between church

\[\text{\footnotesize 218 James Buck, in evidence to the Poor Law Report Appendix B (1834).} \]
\[\text{\footnotesize 219 N.R.O. PD 356/125 Shouldham National School opening, Lynn News, 4 August 1866.} \]
\[\text{\footnotesize 221 Snell, Annals, p. 123.} \]
\[\text{\footnotesize 222 N.R.O. DN/NDS/275/1 Diocesan Schools Survey, 1814. Return of the Rev. J. Girdlestone, Sheringham.} \]
and school. Children like those at Honingham were encouraged to move between the environments of church, school and rectory, and a factor in the appointment of their teachers was often prowess on the church organ. The presence of the local clergyman on the school’s board of managers was so automatic that it acquired the status of elite custom: in 1902 the managers of East Lexham school included the ‘Rev. C. R. Bingham . . . ex officio by custom, as rector of East Lexham’.

The effectiveness of the education offered in such circumstances might justifiably be considered in the light of whether ‘macroscopic’ or ‘microscopic’ ends were intended. At an individual level the ‘King of the Norfolk Poachers’ and many of his contemporaries found their education to be worthless: ‘If they had lerned anything at school they went to work in them days so young that they never practized reading or riting and so forgot all that they had lerned . . . All the lerning they had got was starved and worked out of them’.

On a social scale, however, it can be argued that education had achieved something profound. The views of the Rev. William Marcon and of Daniel Gillett, discussed in chapter one of this thesis, respectively that the labouring poor had ‘different’ knowledge and that this knowledge was being destroyed by ‘the wooden routine of the School Board’ – might be taken as evidence that nineteenth-century education succeeded in extinguishing one system of knowing and understanding and replacing it with another.

Whatever its apparently liberal antecedents, it is also worth noting that education, as constituted by the nineteenth-century church, was heartily detested by the agricultural trade union movement. The Norfolk unionist George Rix argued that the poor ‘wanted their children educated not in creeds and catechisms for those had never done any good and never would. They wanted a good sound education administered for their children and not schools where the parson reigned supreme’.

At the same meeting, Joseph Arch had made categorical links between clerical control of schools and other facets of clerical

25 ‘King of the Norfolk Poachers’, I Walked By Night, p. 25.
26 Marcon pp. 20 – 1; Gillett p. 68.
power in the parish. Rix and Arch had identified the fact that clergy management of education had become inseparable from Tory politics and from the conservatively-motivated management of the poor. It was a theme to be picked up by the Burston strikers at their first public meeting:

'We protest . . . against the number of Church clergy folk upon the school managers. Why should there be two clergymen and a clergyman's wife on the school managers of a Provided School? . . . We are of opinion that the Managers have been influenced by motives which lie outside Education altogether, such as Labour Politics, the Parish Council and the Church'.

These Liberal and Socialist understandings of what the Church of England was doing with its stewardship of education shed a telling light on the views of conservatives like William Allen, who believed his National School to herald a new era of quiescence and quietude in rural society. Allen celebrated the fact that education had supplanted unrest and violence in the countryside, but the counter-argument could well have been made that social unrest had stemmed from a growing perceptiveness on the part of the poor, and that education in the 'Allen-style' had actually re-imposed the poor's ignorance of the ways in which society was organised in opposition to their interests. A handwritten snippet in the Burston documents, directed generally at clergy managers of education, made the point: 'You teach the ground down starving man / That squire's greed is Jehovah's plan'.

The Burston campaigners also made a poignant and metaphysical link between their own conflict and the infinitely larger one that raged in Europe between 1914 and 1918. Contemporary labour commentators, buoyed with patriotism, placed the Burston struggle in the context of the wider battle for freedom being fought in Flanders:

'We want that Freedom in Burston. The people require freedom to worship God in their own way. Freedom to have their children taught by those whom they love. Freedom to remain in the villages where their fathers died, and not to be ousted at the caprice of every gentleman whom they do not see eye to eye with'.

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228 Ibid.
229 N.R.O. MC31/59, 478 x 1. Protest themes raised at Burston Common public meeting, c. 1913.
231 N.R.O. MC31/2, 478 x 1. 'The Burston School Strike', pamphlet published by The Labour Leader (c. 1916).
It was only the perspective afforded by time that enabled Reg Groves, author of the farmworkers' union history in the 1940s, to speculate on a yet deeper meaning to the events in Burston. Groves argued that the mourners at the funeral of John Potter, an old antagonist of the rector who had refused to allow any involvement of church or incumbent at his interment, would have equated the local struggle with the international one and would have read into it a means by which the labourers might ultimately turn the tables on their oppressors:

‘Can it be doubted that men and women at the grave’s edge cherished in their hearts the belief that the lives of such men as John Potter would bring nearer the day when cruel war would be ended forever’.232

The years of world war did little to revolutionise education, however. Those present at the first meeting of the Thorpe St. Andrew Church of England School in 1903 would have noticed very little substantive change if they had also been present at its last, in 1952. At both the rector presided; at both a major landowner proposed a vote of thanks to the two spinsterly schoolmistresses; at the latter children danced and sang after taking tea with the rector, in a way that would not have disgraced a ‘parish entertainment’ of the 1880s.233 Academic opportunities were still limited for the poorest children. An autobiographer recounting her school days in the 1950s wrote that ‘school . . . had been designed to produce domestic servants and farm labourers and functional illiteracy was still part of the expectation, almost part of the curriculum’.234

What, then, became of that generation of ‘lively, committed, enthusiastic incumbent[s]’ in whom the Royal Commission of 1867 had vested such hope for the future of education?235 Undoubtedly such men did exist. It is hard not to engage with the motives and sentiments of the Rev. T. Skrimshire of South Creake, for instance, when he appeals for diocesan funding for his schools on the grounds that it would ‘render essential service

232 N.R.O. MC31/15, Extracts from Groves, Sharpen the Sickle.
233 N.R.O. PD 228/136 Thorpe St. Andrew School Log Book, 6 November 1903; 31 July 1952.
to our little scholars. Like Skrimshire, many clergymen struggled valiantly and single-handedly to provide an education for the children of their parishes, often in the teeth of opposition from parents and employers. At one level the effect of their work (to give the youngest children somewhere warm and dry to sit for at least part of the week) and its intention (to raise their consciousness from stone-picking and bird-scaring towards something higher) should be allowed to stand unchallenged as achievements in an uncongenial social environment. Church of England schools were clearly not going to change the world, but improvements at the margins of the lives of agricultural labourers – by making them aware of the world of words and numbers – were still worthwhile.

Even so, it is the very modesty of this ambition that must stand as the ultimate indictment of clerical management of education. In the nineteenth century clergymen were in positions of life-changing – on a parochial scale, world-changing – power, and as magistrates and poor law guardians they flexed their social muscles readily enough when it was necessary to defend the interests of the elite. Furthermore, when bodies and individuals appeared that were better equipped for taking education in the direction that clergymen could not or would not go, the clergy were not keen to hand over the baton. After 1870, and again after 1902, they struggled on, determined to protect a specifically Anglican education from something broader, more secular, and less politically malleable. Nowhere among the myriad platitudes and statements of good intent that were uttered about the education of the poor have I come across a clergyman who was prepared to argue definitively that education was the means by which the poor might break the mould and so move on to more fulfilling and remunerative employment. Instead education was to be the means by which they might understand their positions, and come to accept their place in the great scheme of things. The rationale was that the labourer educated to the meaning of his station would acquiesce rather than protest. Far from being an exercise in visionary benevolence, the education of the poor in the nineteenth-century countryside – with Anglican clergymen so often at its helm – must take its place alongside poor law and charity administration, the demise of popular culture and custom, and the

237 An honourable mention should be made at this point of the Rev. A. Taylor’s ‘Hodge and his Parson’, Nineteenth Century, 31 (1892), 359 – 62, which comes closest to being the exception to this rule.

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management of law and order, and be acknowledged as a key component in contemporary mechanisms of social discipline.
Plate 19: The Higdons — schoolteachers at the centre of the Burston Rebellion

Plate 20: National School, Salle

Plate 21: Burston Strike School
Conclusion

The principal concern of this thesis has been to trace the influence of Anglican clergymen as agents of social rather than religious change. As this influence can be read most directly in the work of individual clergymen at the parish level, major issues concerning the church’s national role – and the shades of political and liturgical opinion that fought for ascendancy within the church – have often been by-passed. Nonetheless, local events were necessarily affected by broader issues, and certain contexts should be borne in mind: the number of Anglican clergymen in England and Wales increased by 71% between 1841 and 1911; they became much more active in their pastoral roles; absenteeism substantially declined; and clergymen demonstrated much more concern to evangelise the Anglican faith. Socially and educationally their backgrounds became more diverse. Even so, although great disparities remained between the income of the richest and the poorest clergy throughout the study period, there was sufficient commonality of experience between them for a corporate notion of ‘the clergy’ to retain some legitimacy. The prominent role of clergymen in managing law and order, poor relief and education diminished – although at different rates – during the study period, and by the early twentieth century a career path that did not depend upon private income but could be instigated by means of a preliminary period of service in a curacy was becoming well established. By 1914, Haig writes, the clergy were ‘well on the way to their modern position as rather awkward and shabby professionals, too poor for their social expectations, yet unable wholeheartedly to reject the expectations which have defined this image’.

If national trends provide a primary context for the work of the clergy, a secondary context, shaped by political machinations in Cathedral Close and Bishop’s Palace, was

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1 The relationship between church, clergy and society on a national scale is thoroughly covered by A. Haig, *The Victorian Clergy* (London, 1984), from which the following, very brief synopsis has been derived.
2 From 14,613 to 24,968, although this did not keep pace with population growth which ran at 125% over the same period. (Haig, *Victorian Clergy*, p. 3).
3 There is some evidence that clerical involvement in poor law management was actually on the increase in the early twentieth century (see Table 5.1).
4 Haig, *Victorian Clergy*, p. 361.
also a significant factor. The Norwich diocese was dominated for a crucially long period (1828 – 1866) by Dean George Pellew. Pellew was a Tory, the son-in-law of Viscount Sidmouth, a moderniser in the church but an arch-opponent of Whig and Liberal political reforms. He sent a cold blast of reality round the complacent stalls of Norwich Cathedral, and in so doing undoubtedly played his part in dismantling that set of social and economic relationships that Parson Woodforde had once found so congenial.\(^5\)

While bearing these important contexts in mind, this thesis has been posited on the notion that it was at a profoundly local level that national trends and diocesan power politics made their impact on the lives of the poor. It has been argued, too, that the Anglican clergyman was the conduit through which the national and the regional passed into the parish. More than this, the institution of ‘the clergy’ was an instrument of local authority, encountering and managing in an infinitely complex and varied way the struggle between elite hegemony and ‘the politics of insubordination’.\(^6\) The great Victorian motif of ‘quest’ might be invoked here, in this case the quest to find the means by which the politically insubordinate poor might be managed. Thompson has suggested that the gentry had four principal resources at their disposal to help them in this quest: ‘a system of influence and preferment; . . . the majesty and terror of the law; the local exercise of favours and charity; and the symbolism of their hegemony’.\(^7\) If Thompson’s list is accepted, the proximity and involvement of the clergy – with whom, of course, the gentry frequently shared political, social and kinship links – can readily be seen in every element of it.

Of course, other systems of local authority – principally parish, district and county councils – came to the fore in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. Clergymen generally struggled to make an impact upon any of these, but although the political landscape was changing by 1914, it was by no means clear that the clergy-gentry hegemony had been broken. Rearguard actions were fought deep into the

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twentieth century, particularly in the field of education, and the scars of battle are still to be discerned in the social patterns and structures of rural Norfolk in the twenty-first century.

Exposition and interpretation of nineteenth-century rural society is rendered more complex by the fact that its administrative base-unit, the parish, was far from being a tidy, homogenous geographical and social space. A pattern of 'open' and 'close' parishes, defined in landownership terms and bearing certain distinguishing characteristics, can be discerned in the countryside, but this was one pattern among many and is not strong enough to stand alone as a model with 'predictive' or 'explanatory' powers. Wrightson's description of the parish has been tailored to fit his work on early modern England, but every word of it applies to the rural parishes of Norfolk between 1815 and 1914. The parish was, he wrote:

'a tangled, messy skein of overlapping and intersecting social networks, most of which extended beyond its boundaries outwards and upwards into the larger society, and many of which were networks of power... It was in many ways a community, an association of neighbours, a unit of identity and belonging, a primary group - but one perennially defined and redefined by processes of inclusion and exclusion'.

This thesis has attempted to explore the tangled world of the nineteenth-century parish by following threads of cultural, social and political investigation, for beyond even those structural and societal complexities identified by Wrightson there existed another, metaphysical layer. Here revolutionary change had to be balanced against - sometimes even disguised as - the appeal of the unchanging past. Consequently the destruction of local custom and, with it, the dismantling of listening and responding mechanisms of the moral economy, coincided with popular pageants and historical re-creations which celebrated an almost feudal ideal of deference. Here, too, the rural worker had to be prised away from the old, while being denied the benefits of the new. In the process, concepts of who was 'radical' and who 'conservative' in parish politics became so muddied as to defy categorisation in twenty-first century terms. Custom was frequently conservative. It thrived on stasis, and was often founded on xenophobic senses of...
identity. Whatever else might be said of them, enclosure and the New Poor Law were, in this context at least, radical measures.

What begins to emerge is a sense that the Anglican clergyman was absolutely central to the process of change, and the extent to which he involved or absented himself could have a profound effect on the political and social development of his parish. The clergyman was not usually the instigator of change – though in the cases of enclosure and education he could often be its prime mover – but he was frequently its administrator. His status as ‘colonial governor’ of the parish, perceived to be doing the bidding of his gentry masters and sometimes enjoying considerable material benefits, undoubtedly contributed to a good deal of anti-clerical feeling.

Even so, it might justifiably be said that some clergymen were as ambivalent about aspects of social change as the labouring poor. Among them were inveterate campaigners against its harmful side effects. Campbell Wodehouse at Attlebridge, for example, ‘was continually making representations to the chief landowner of the parish that there should be better accommodation’, and Octavius Matthias of Horsford campaigned against the way in which the New Poor Law had polarised the interests of open and close parishes.

Understanding must also have been promoted to some extent by long incumbencies. These were, by the end of the nineteenth century, becoming increasingly anachronistic, but there seems no reason to doubt the sincerity of the grief felt at the death of the Rev. C. Norman of Northwold in 1873. Even though his was a parish of active and anti-clerical trade unionism,

‘no country Pastor ever had his remains followed to the grave with sincerer mourners, and never did a parish more truly mourn than did Northwold around that open grave... [Those present] will remember the hundreds of classes and both sexes who lined the street as the mourners passed through; they will remember the remarkable silence, broken only by sobs – the hundreds of Sabbath-school children, most of whom were in tears, while the numerous teachers in attendance could not suppress their grief’.

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10 See, for example, Matthias’s evidence to the S. C. on Settlement and Poor Removal (1847), pp. 41 – 51.
Similar scenes marked the funeral of Bartholomew Edwards in 1889. For 76 years the incumbent at Ashill, Edwards represented a throwback to an earlier age, offering an impressionistic link with Woodfordian times that was reinforced by the fact that he had married Emily Custance, daughter of Woodforde’s great friend, the squire of Weston Longville. Men like Edwards and Norman seem to bring us close to the Rev. Augustus Jessopp’s vision of a rural Utopia:

‘The ideal village is a happy valley where a simple people are living sweetly under the paternal care of a gracious landowner . . . [and] the happy parson always finds a cordial welcome . . . Parson and squire work together in perfect harmony, the rectory and the hall are but the greater and lesser parts of a well-adjusted piece of machinery’.  

But even Jessopp had to acknowledge that his ‘happy valley’ was far removed from reality. Misty-eyed sentimentality at Batholomew Edwards’ funeral tended to obscure the fact that his life and ministry encompassed a time when clerical management of parishes was closest to the ‘colonial governor’ model. He had, after all, been the recipient of the Ashill enclosure letter, written by those of the parish poor that saw in him the epitome of exploitation and privilege, and whose subversive protest Edwards had responded to by alerting the Home Secretary.

Jessopp’s view of rural society – its idealism soured by exposure to reality - should, if nothing else, fire a warning shot across the bows of any who seek to locate a ‘golden age’ in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century countryside. This mythic time has been sought for so long, in so many different eras, from such a range of political perspectives, that it has become devoid of all conceptual validity. In 1817 the Rev. George Glover of Southrepps claimed that his proposals for poor relief would ‘restore those good old times of England, upon which memory dwells with so fond a recollection’, good old times which William Cobbett, from a very different political standpoint, attributed to pre-

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14 P.R.O. H.O. 42/150 Edwards to Sidmouth, 22 May 1816.
Reformation England, when the ‘beautiful chain of dependence from man to man’ was as yet unbroken. For the antiquarians of the later nineteenth century, sensing that something indeterminate but valuable was being lost, the golden age resided in an unspecified pre-enclosure era, when society had been by turns properly paternalistic and deferential. This conservative vision was, paradoxically, not far removed from that of the Chartists who, from their predominantly urban perspective, placed the golden age in the years before what they saw as the great land-theft of Parliamentary enclosure.

It could be argued that this bi-partisan quest for a specious and mythic past took the heat out of contemporary political conflict, so remarkably similar were the lost worlds that both sides of political society harked back to. The trade union movement removed their golden age vision well away from the dangerously smouldering embers of enclosure by eulogising the freedoms enjoyed by Saxon England before the imposition of the ‘Norman yoke’, and the waters were muddied still further by Blatchford’s ‘Merrie England’ approach to socialism, a version endorsed by such luminaries as William Morris and Keir Hardie. Hardie dreamed of a time when ‘youngsters will dance around the Maypole, whilst our young people will dance Sir Roger de Coverly and the many round dances sacred to the memory of the village green’. This was a regressive rather than a radical vision of socialism, and one that seems, superficially at least, indistinguishable from the conservative pageants and historical re-creations that the process of ‘cultural incorporation’ was bringing to so many Norfolk village greens. In due course the Burston rebellion began to acquire an epic status of its own (Plate 22):

‘It grows as green as the grass, and in other centuries the story might have been shaped by the artistry of the common people into a ballad, a folk tale, a legend, told and retold around the winter’s firesides’.

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19 N.R.O. MC 31/15 Extract from R. Groves, Sharpen the Sickle (c. 1949).
If the quest for a Golden Age was both specious and doomed, it cannot be denied that the rural world of the early twentieth century was a very different place from that of the early nineteenth. Between James Woodforde’s Epicurean indulgences, or William Gunn’s tear-stained wonder at the beauty of Allegri’s *Miserere*, and Charles Eland awkwardly negotiating a war memorial for parishioners who despised and ostracised him, there seems an unbridgeable chasm. Somewhere during the course of the nineteenth century, despite its ubiquitous involvement, the Church of England lost contact with rural society and lost its relevance to the lives of the labouring poor. Some would argue, too, that it lost its soul. William Marcon, connected with Edgefield from the 1850s to the 1920s, may well have felt that he had improved upon Woodforde’s record as a caring and hard-working pastor, but there was one profoundly important aspect of rural life with which he – unlike Woodforde – had never been fully involved. The Anglican church of Parson Woodforde’s era can broadly be described as a sponsor of ‘folk society’. Woodforde himself gave ‘largess, Christmas boxes, Valentine’s money and other doles as the local customary calendar demanded. He also recorded Whitmonday sports, St. Thomas’s Day ‘doleing’ and local benefit club processions and feast days’. In addition, ‘the Church’s role in the maintenance of the Rogation week perambulation was fundamental’. It was by these means that the church of the late-eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries ‘legitimated the activities of the crowd’ and ‘reaffirmed an older economic and social structure’. By Marcon’s era these modes of legitimation and affirmation had substantially come to an end.

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20 See p. 10.
22 R. Bushaway, *By Rite: Customs, Ceremony and Community in England, 1700 – 1880* (London, 1982), p. 23. Bushaway has drawn together the threads of his investigations into popular custom and culture into something that he describes as ‘folk society . . . primitive, small, isolated, non-literate and homogenous with a strong sense of solidarity’.
23 Bushaway, *By Rite*, pp. 40, 84.
24 Bushaway, *By Rite*, p. 87.
Marcon and his contemporaries often faced a very different social landscape, with politicised, proletarianised labourers in the village and rentier arrivistes at the Hall. In many parishes the most influential minister of religion was now a Nonconformist and the ‘colonial governor’ of secular affairs a wealthy stranger, disconnected from all the usual geographic and social ties. Imperceptibly but irrevocably the clergyman had embarked upon his journey into shabby gentility, his status as ‘parson’ stripped of exactitude as a job description but gathering new layers of cultural and political meaning at the hands of successive generations. The ‘parson’ was becoming a mildly interesting, faintly absurd figure, at best marginalised from mainstream society, at worst a complete anachronism, still preaching – like Charles Eland – to ‘two old ladies and the sexton’. Parson Woodforde came to be seen more as a literary than as a historic character, an iconic personification of a dimly-understood ‘world we have lost’, in a process which undoubtedly romanticised the eighteenth-century past but which nevertheless contained a kernel of historic truth. Only a century or so after Woodforde’s death, the stereotype of the avuncular, florid-faced parson, closely in tune with his local community and its customs, had given way to the awkward, abrasive misanthrope of Eland’s generation. Late twentieth-century depictions of the post-World War I clergyman frequently settled on the image of a withdrawn, buttoned-up character, symbolically lost in the echoing corridors of a too-big rectory, demonstrating by word and deed that he was ill-at-ease with his parishioners, his family and his job:

‘It’s not easy . . . the English are not a deeply religious people. Even many of those who attend divine service do so from habit. Their acceptance of the sacrament is perfunctory: I have yet to meet the man whose hair rose at the nape of his neck because he was about to taste the blood of his dying Lord. Even when they visit their church in large numbers, at Harvest Thanksgiving or the Christmas Midnight Mass, it is no more than a pagan salute to the passing seasons. They do not need me. I come in useful at baptisms, weddings, funerals. Chiefly funerals.’

Many examples of ‘rentier culture’ could be cited from Edwardian Norfolk, but this quote from Howkins neatly sums up the situation: ‘In Hockham, as elsewhere in Norfolk, the Hall proper was let to a stranger, a wealthy banker called Green who was begrudgingly given the title “squire”.’ Howkins, Poor Labouring Men, p. 3.

For a fictionalised account in which arrivistes are described as the ‘viceroys’ of the aristocratic interest, see L. P. Hartley, The Go Between (London, 1953), p. 70.

J. L. Carr’s literary portrait of the fictional Rev. J. G. Keach in A Month in the Country (London, 1980), pp. 97 – 8. The novel is set in 1920. See also pp. 43 – 8 for an evocative description of Keach in a vast and anachronistic rectory.
Decline could be actual as well as perceptual, and few episodes illustrate the extent to which the clergy had ‘lost their way’ more poignantly than the fate of the Rev. Ambrose Johnson of Toftrees. Having attended his bankruptcy hearing in Norwich in February 1890, Johnson clearly decided to save on rail fares by walking home. Overtaken by a sudden blizzard, he took shelter in the shrubbery of Bramerton Hall where he was discovered ten days later, fatally ill from the effects of frost-bite, exposure and malnutrition.28

The Anglican clergy had been the willing administrators of change – even, in some cases, its architects – but by the start of the twentieth century they had been marginalised by it. Tension between ‘change’ and ‘stasis’ was a constant and paradoxical theme of the clerical management of rural parishes. Enclosure and the New Poor Law undoubtedly revolutionised the lives of many labourers, but even as he helped usher these changes through, the clergyman often protected the unchanging core of those institutions that were closest to his seat of authority. Benjamin Armstrong, for instance, saw stability as the greatest virtue of his parish vestry: ‘Easter Vestry. Happily the same parish warden was chosen, and I chose Mr. Carthew for the twenty-third time’.29 Writing a kind of parish retrospective in 1918, the Rev. A. E. King of Denver adopted a tone that the poet Edmund Blunden would later characterise as ‘how much that we loved is going or gone!’30 King’s report suggested that many of the old systems of power and landownership had been decapitated, traceable now only in the patchy survival of ‘core families’ that came from farming rather than elite backgrounds:

‘Caius College have sold all their property . . . & all the big farms have gone . . . The present owners of Crow Hall are people of the name of Valentine. Unfortunately for the Parish, they live the life of hermits . . . The only “old family” we have in the place is represented by John Sutleff, yeoman farmer & churchwarden. He occupies the same house & office as John Sutleff did in 1675’.31

28 NC. 1.3.90. Johnson was taken to the Norfolk & Norwich Hospital where both his frost-bitten feet were amputated. Despite moments of lucidity, Johnson died there on 2 May. C. Mackie, Norfolk Annals: A Chronological Record of Remarkable Events in the Nineteenth Century (Norwich, 1901).
29 Armstrong, Norfolk Diary, p. 224. (16 April 1879).
An ambivalent view of the early twentieth-century clergyman is beginning to emerge. His relevance and his influence were fading, but memories of his omnipotence were recent enough - and in some places vestiges of it were still visible enough - for him to remain a target for social satire and political dissonance. The ‘King of the Norfolk Poachers’ introduced a brief passage of religious introspection by saying ‘perhaps some people as reads this will think as I am against all Parsons and Church and Religon but that is not so’, but he nevertheless went on to quote from the ‘Parson’s Creed’, versions of which are not difficult to find in the early twentieth century:

‘Money, O money thy praises I sing
Thou art my Saviour, my Lord and my King,
It is for thee that I preach, for thee that I pray,
And give praises to God three times in the day.’

The clergyman’s pecuniary interest and his political allegiance had intertwined themselves in a way that the Rev. Arnold Taylor acknowledged in an article of searing insight and honesty:

‘The truth is that all the parson does is tainted in Hodge’s nostrils. Hodge sees that in all that is done for him only sops to keep him quiet, and if possible contented where, and as, he is . . . The question then arises whether the Church has lost her influence over the labouring classes in the rural districts. I am afraid she has to a very great extent. But I am sure it is chiefly so because the clergy have allowed themselves to be identified, in the minds of the labourers, with one political party, and that the party which has always stood in the way of Hodge’s ambitions’.

Within the context of agricultural trade unionism, the political challenge to the clergyman centred on those facets of his role that have been covered in detail in this thesis: his management of the vestry, of tithes, education, charity, poor relief and the law, and his social and political alliances with the gentry. Aspects of these were frequently mediated through Hundred Associations, the Primrose League and the Conservative Party. But there was a level, too, at which political anti-clericalism transcended the artificially-imposed division between unionist and employer, Liberal and Conservative. The

impressionistic sense among the poor that the parson was their enemy often existed in the absence of any confirmatory empirical evidence. Clerical involvement in poor law administration effectively declined after 1834, for instance, as the principal management role passed from magistrates to guardians. In the Union boardroom the clergymen were outnumbered and often outvoted by farmers, but such distinctions were of no interest to the poor: the parson's culpability was greater in their eyes than any detail of his direct involvement. Guilt by association was the root cause of much nineteenth-century anti-clericalism. This hidden fault-line revealed itself whenever labourers attended their Nonconformist chapels, or whenever poachers appeared before clerical magistrates, or whenever some shadowy character committed an act of rural incendiarism. These were all, in their way, acts of political protest, made so because they ran counter to established interests of authority and property.

The development of networks of religious and trade union dissent undoubtedly enabled the agricultural labourer to attain new levels of political organisation and sophistication. Some form of dissent was present in almost every parish by 1870, and the abstractions of 'self-help' and 'anti-clericalism' had both begun to acquire sharp political connotations. Nonconformity also encouraged the labourer to nurture a fuller and deeper 'interior life'. By the end of the century he had the vote. But nineteenth-century social history cannot offer much that resembles a *bildungsroman* of cultural and material progression among the rural poor, a fact for which the Anglican church must shoulder a substantial portion of blame. The church and clergy were, for the most part, the willing accomplices and uncritical observers of an elite-inspired drive to build a new power nexus in the countryside, one in which ostensible liberalisation and democratisation concealed new mechanisms of control and authority. The savagery of the eighteenth-century penal code was softened, but a new police force and a new system of poor relief ensured social complicity by other means. Education was offered to the poor, but it was conservative in scope and intent, responding to disaffection by teaching and reinforcing the importance of the status quo. Enfranchisement of the labourers was the cloak that concealed the

34 The fact that Lord Walsingham broke a poaching ring on his estate that doubled as a trade union meeting is highly significant in this context (N.R.O. WLS/LX/27 429 x 8, Walsingham papers: Campaign against poaching and political agitation, 1873).
dagger of the Primrose League, an organisation that, as the Rev. Arnold Taylor acknowledged, often had the parson or his wife at its helm and which existed 'to keep [the labourer] in his state of bondage'. New systems of charity management imposed mechanistic structures upon customary practices. At Marham Fen, for instance, the trustees introduced new measures to regulate 'the present practice of cutting turves which, according to the evidence, is rapidly tending to the destruction of the property for every useful purpose . . . it may be expected that the parishioners at large will approve of the adoption of this course upon the matter being sufficiently explained to them'. That common lands could be more remunerative if managed on sound economic principles is hardly open to question, any more than the fact that church music improved when choirs and organs replaced parish singers and bands. The point is, surely, that management of this kind represented the antithesis of independence in the management of their own affairs by the poor.

Systems of social control like these were the despair of the Church’s opponents throughout the nineteenth century. At Burston in 1913, Charles Eland’s bête noire Tom Higdon wrote of the 'besotted pass . . . the labourers [have] been reduced [to] by decades . . . of oppression', while Joseph Saville, a pamphleteer during the Swing rising, inveighed against 'You clergy, ye vipers, you love Tithes, Cumin and Mint: ye are men-eaters and not soul-savers but ye are Blind, Blind leaders of the blind, twice dead, plucked up by the roots'. These men were political sophisticates – Higdon a radical socialist, Saville a reader of the Political Register, a Primitive Methodist and a philanthropic landlord - but both had been brought to the point of despair, in their very different generations, by the network of elite power that circulated around them, seen and unseen.

36 N.N. 3.4.69.
39 Archer, By a Flash, p. 95.
Even so, although cycles of reciprocal patronage and preferment between clergy and gentry must have seemed unbreakable to observers such as Higdon and Saville, Higdon, at least, was living through a time of change. In 1892 Arnold Taylor described a situation which, with hindsight, seems to mark the last high-water mark of clerical involvement in local government:

‘In a great number, I should say in the vast majority of parishes, the squire, the parson and the large farmers form a ‘ring’ which controls all parochial affairs, so that no outsider has a chance even of knowing what goes on, much less of exerting any real influence on the management of those affairs. This ‘ring’ practically is the vestry. Whoever heard of labourers coming to vestry meetings and expressing their view of affairs. If they did come, what would be the good? Who would listen to them? And the parson is ex officio chairman of the vestry. He is the leader, in Hodge’s eyes, of this exclusive ring’.40

Significantly, Taylor was writing just two years before the advent of parish councils. The parish vestry lingered on as an entity after 1894, but shorn of its secular powers it was a pale shadow of its former self. Quite suddenly the ground had shifted beneath the clergyman’s feet. Presiding over a vestry with little power, faced with an election campaign even to become a member of the parish council, remote from those aspects of of local authority now vested in district and county councils, the parson showed every sign of having been left behind by the forces of political evolution.

His ultimate marginalisation from the political process could not, however, obscure the perception that for much of the preceding hundred years the clergyman had been in all senses close to the ruling elite at a time of considerable change and social injustice. ‘We work hard . . . we till and sow the land till there is an abundance of food, and our reward is starvation’, said one of Thomas Campbell Foster’s interviewees in 1844.41 This awareness of injustice among the poor can only have been exacerbated by contemporary campaigns waged by clergymen to oppose tithe commutation or to minimise their poor rate contributions.42 Campaigns such as these were broadly contemporaneous with the

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40 Taylor, Hodge and his Parson, p. 360.
41 *The Times* 21.6.44.
42 See, for example, ‘A Norfolk Clergyman’, *The Justice and Equity of Assessing the Net Profits of the Land for the Relief of the Poor, Maintained in a Letter to the Poor Law Commissioners* (London, 1838). The author, Rev. S. Hobson of Kirstead, was concerned that poor rates levied on the value of glebe land and rectory would penalize the clergyman. Rates levied on the profits from agricultural land would reduce the clergyman’s contributions while increasing those of farmers and landowners.
building of vast new rectories, intended to demonstrate a residential commitment to the parish, but all too visibly displaying the Church's enormous wealth, status and privilege. By the early twentieth century, only a generation or two after many of them had been built, these rambling mansions were already contributing to the sense of alienation and marginalisation among some clergymen. In June 1925 the Rev. G. Stewart Addison of Wood Norton wrote plaintively to the Dean and Chapter of Norwich Cathedral:

'The house is approximately half a mile from the church, and stands alone. I feel with many others that, if possible, the Parish Priest's place is near his church and among his people... The day of big Rectory houses is gone. Whatever may have been useful and proper in the past is not necessarily so now and the trend of opinion in the church is, I think, towards the doing away of these large properties which tax a man to the full extent of - and even beyond - his income. I have a large house... [it is] impossible, I fear... for a man, such as myself, with no private means to live here'.

In the space of perhaps 75 years, Anglican rectories passed from cultural impositions in the landscape to cultural relics. This 'significance curve' seems to mirror that of the Primitive Methodist chapel in an intriguing way, and strongly suggests that the stately rectory and the wayside bethel opposed each other in the countryside as deliberate and visible statements of political intent. The 'moral purpose' of architecture is an area of study only tangentially connected with this thesis. Nevertheless it can be said that church and rectory in the landscape clearly meant something in social terms, just as the 'imposing outline' of the workhouse towering above 'the frailty of the paupers themselves provided a powerful symbol of the utilitarian calculus... at the heart of the [New Poor Law]'.

Churches had long been the 'focus for a secular display of power and wealth by local landowners', but they were also the places upon which the disaffected poor might march, or where they might pin their protest notices. Rectory gateways, too, had an iconic status. It was here that the Ashill protest letter was thrown; here that

43 N.R.O. PD 407/32 Wood Norton dilapidations correspondence, Rev. G. S. Addison to Dean & Chapter, 10 June 1925.
46 As they did at Walsingham in the charity dispute of 1868. (N.N. 4.1.68).
47 See, for instance, 'An Inhabitant', The Ryburgh Scandal (Norwich, 1888), passim.
48 A. W. Reid, 'The process of parliamentary enclosure in Ashill' Norfolk Archaeology 37 (1979), 169 - 77.
the note satirising the Irish vicar of West Bradenham was posted; here that a woman seeking a charitable donation from Parson Woodforde collapsed; here that the effigy of the Rev. James Bateman was found swinging.

Rectories and restored churches remain in the landscape as evidence that, in the nineteenth-century countryside, a cultural collision took place. Parishes that were still ‘early-modern’ – even medieval – in their structures, attitudes, customs and conventions, were confronted by something new: something that tended towards the industrial, the material, the capitalistic but which adopted, ironically, the symbolism of medieval art and architecture as its leitmotif. Such symbolism further alienated the labouring poor because it was didactic in intent. Sir Gilbert Scott’s own notion of the purpose of the church building is revealing in this regard. It should, he said, ‘act upon the people at large, upon the artisans and mechanics, the labourers and the poor’.

Cultural collision was profoundly and keenly felt in most parishes because one culture – an holistic system of calendrical custom which gave structure and meaning to the lives of the labouring poor – was gradually being suppressed by another. Thompson has described agrarian custom as ‘ambience . . . a lived environment’. Politically, it defies categorisation: radical in that it favoured working-class interests and was posited on collective action; conservative in that it resisted change and had no dimension of ‘class consciousness’ beyond the strictly local. Popular culture and custom was, as Thompson says, neither revolutionary nor deferential. It was, however, of profound importance to the social cohesion of the local community, and customary rituals sanctioned by the church – especially the parish perambulation – were essential as means of establishing senses of identity and belonging. Ghostly echoes of custom and culture can be heard in the marches, rough music and ‘carnival’ protests of the 1860s, 1870s and beyond, long

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49 Armstrong, Norfolk Diary, pp. 69–70 (15 February 1860).
53 Thompson, Customs in Common, p. 102.
54 Thompson, Customs in Common, p. 64.
after elite systems of listening and reacting had been dismantled. In place of these systems there appeared the synthetic constructs of ‘Merrie England’, which Bushaway has described as ‘a new form of deference’. The sense of community solidarity and popular right which had, in the minds of the poor, illuminated much of the popular customary calendar had been replaced by a sense of duty and respect to the village hierarchy’. 55

The past was being emptied of its meaning for the labouring poor and, sure enough, they began to be criticised for lacking a culture of their own. Richard Jefferies, an observer of the social scene in rural Wiltshire and a close contemporary of Augustus Jessopp, wrote that the English labourers ‘have no myths; no heroes. They look back on no Heroic Age, no Achilles, no Agamemnon, and no Homer. The past is vacant’. 56 Progressively stripped of their own culture, the poor sought refuge in the culture and heritage of the elite. There is more than a hint of Thomas Hardy’s Tess of the d’Urbervilles in a letter received by the rector of Beeston-next-Mileham in 1884:

"Sir, I have taken the liberty of writing to you hoping you will be so kind to look for us if you have got name henry Clark or Aney More names of Aney More generations in your Books as we want we want [sic] 3 more beside henry Clark I had a letter this Morning that he was born at Beeston and came to Bradnham east to live rite as soon as you possible Can please sir... if we can gett 7 generations we can have the Money we are poor peepel and shold be very glad to have it and if you sir can help us so we can gett it we will hansumly pay you for the Trubel you take. I think Henery Clark was born 1620". 57

Perhaps this was part of the trend that William Phillippo detected in the labouring poor in the 1870s, a trend that caused him to say of them, ‘they are a sort of lickspittle, who will fawn, cringe, lick, flatter and bow and sell their birthright for a mess of pottage’. 58

The sense that the poor were being ‘acted upon’ rather than involved in any constructive, participatory way, was one that typified much of the management of nineteenth-century

55 Bushaway, By Rite, p. 274.
57 N.R.O PD 377/42 Beeston-next-Mileham parish papers, Mr. W. Clark (Necton) to rector, 11 August 1884. The tragic course of Tess Durbeyfield’s life in Hardy’s novel is set in train when her father becomes convinced – after a chance meeting with an antiquarian clergyman – that his family are the true heirs of an aristocratic family with a phonetically similar surname. T. Hardy, Tess of the d’Urbervilles (London, 1891).
58 The English Labourer 3.2.77.
rural society. It stemmed, at least in part, from a conviction among elites that the person they were managing was ‘Hodge’. Among his parishioners, the rural clergyman would have had regular encounters with ‘Hodge’. Far more evocative as a descriptive term than ‘agricultural labourer’, the notion of Hodge had long been employed as a means of depicting the bovine stupidity of his class. Undoubtedly, perceptions of Hodge changed between 1815 and 1914, and Freeman has argued that the stereotype was substantially redrawn towards the end of the nineteenth century as antiquarians began to identify him as the last custodian of an ancient rural English culture now threatened by urbanisation and industrialisation.59

Even so, there are indications that unreconstructed views of Hodge lived on, some of them in the minds of rural clergymen. To the Rev. Charles Tucker Eland at Burston in 1916, Hodge had been rehabilitated only as far as his economic utility made strictly necessary. Eland had ‘nothing against’ him: ‘we must be fed and clothed and housed’.60 For one clergyman’s wife, Hodge was the object of strong – and mutual – suspicion and dislike. A patchy education combined with his exposure to demagogic preachers and union leaders had transformed his stupidity into something more calculating and cynical.61 Whatever material improvements had been made at the margins of lodge’s life, it is quite clear that they had not gone far enough to satisfy socialists of the early-twentieth century. The Burston teacher, Tom Higdon, pulled no punches when he wrote a summary of the ways in which rural society continued to operate cynically and corruptly to the detriment of Hodge’s interests. Higdon’s title for his pamphlet – *The Rabid Rottenness of Rural Life*62 – leaves little room to doubt that, in his view, social injustice was severe, endemic, and deliberate.

61 H. M. Batson, ‘Hodge at Home’, *Nineteenth Century*, 31 (1892), 174 – 180. In the interests of balance, Batson’s article should always be read in conjunction with the Rev. A. Taylor’s rejoinder, ‘Hodge and his Parson’, published in the same edition of *Nineteenth Century* magazine, pp. 359 – 62. Taylor demonstrated that clergymen were capable of viewing Hodge with social and political sympathy.
62 N.R.O. MC 31/52, handwritten MS, 1913.
Hodge was by no means the only casualty of the paternalistic management of rural society. Women, too, who appear so infrequently in this male-dominated thesis, can be numbered among its victims. Certainly Mrs. Cresswell the farmer and Mrs. Batson the vicar's wife found a platform for their opinions, but the daily travails of working-class women precluded them from the luxury of political philosophy. Such women included the pauper Elizabeth Rudd, whose reputation as an unmarried mother ensured that her paternity suit against the workhouse schoolmaster failed, even though he was the only possible father of her child, and Ann Jarvis who lost seven children to cholera in her foetid riverside hovel in Corpusty. But there were other, less obvious, female casualties, too. In January 1821 Anne Howes, wife of the vicar of Morningthorpe, made one of a number of disturbing entries in her diary:

‘O God why am I permitted to live. I more (if possible) than ever long to quit this life, my wishes for this event certainly exceed the bounds prescribed by religion for I ought to wait my appointed time with patience. I consistently offer up my prayers to be taken from this life wicked miserable sinner that I am, but time does not now improve me and I do most heartily repent me all of my youthful sins and transgressions. O my saviour intrude for me. O Almighty God ardently do I hope shortly to be taken from this world. I am more anxious for it than any mortal can have a conception of for it is said that we all cling to this life as long as we can. I have not a well-regulated mind or I suppose that I should. I have no power of acting up to well formed resolutions, I am very imperfect and very useless. One source of my uneasiness proceeds from our living beyond our income so that apparently in the midst of plenty we are still struggling to get on’. Here, at least, was one lost soul, experiencing to the full the utter uselessness of the middle-class woman in a paternalistic society, a theme that was taken up by a number of nineteenth-century writers. The life, work and attitudes of clergy wives would repay further careful study.

63 'A Lady Farmer', Norfolk and the Squires. Clergy. Farmers and Labourers, etc. (London, 1875).
65 N.R.O. C/GP 14/20 Mitford & Launditch Poor Law Union Guardians Minute Books, 30 December 1867 – 3 August 1868. The President of the Poor Law Board concluded the enquiry by stating: ‘The evidence of a woman who has had 5 bastards . . . needs, to my mind, very strong confirmation before it can be believed.’
67 N.R.O. MC/150/57 625 x 4 Diary of Anne Howes, January 1821.
68 The work of George Eliot is particularly relevant in this respect, especially Middlemarch (1871), in which Dorothea embraces a kind of living death by marrying the stultifyingly ascetic clergyman Casaubon, and Scenes of Clerical Life (1857) in which three characters, Milly Barton, Caterina Sarti and Janet Dempster – all 'too good for life' – are 'saved' by death. The uncanny extent to which Anne Howes' diary seems to be life imitating art is summed up by this description of the nineteenth-century woman's role, as portrayed in contemporary literature: 'Exorcised from public life, denied the pleasures (though not the pains) of sensual existence, the Victorian angel in the house was allowed to hold sway over at least one
For the most part rural issues were marginalised by party politics and by economic and social reforms that were largely urban in their interests and aims. As Howkins has put it, 'up to the early 1920s the culture and consciousness of the rural poor was local as opposed to national'. This 'local consciousness' having been recognised, however, it should be remembered that 'no parish was an island'. Even in its most closed form the parish existed in some kind of symbiotic relationship with neighbours, and one that was shaped by the infinite complexities of kinship links, the labour market, the 'spheres of influence' of elite and proletarian networks and the 'communities of interest' that periodically formed and disbanded across class boundaries. Studies that concentrate on the internalised history of specific locations can sometimes be too myopic to see this, and the problem is one that confronts county-wide, regional, even national histories. The repeated refusal of parishes to be strait-jacketed by S.P.S.S correlations or by taxonomies of my own devising is indicative of the variety and fluidity of contemporary social structures.

There is bedrock beneath these shifting sands, however. No amount of twenty-first century debate on the validity of 'open' and 'close' parish concepts can obscure the fact that contemporaries understood their existence and felt their effects in their daily lives: this was as true for the labourers trudging backwards and forwards to work through restrictive landscapes as it was for the clergymen who alerted parliamentary committees to the system's pernicious impact upon labour markets, housing quality, family life and morality. Perceived differences long outlived the Union Chargeability Act of 1865, suggesting that open and close parishes were not simply the products of poor law legislation: indeed, sufficient clues remain in the Norfolk landscape to this day for the observer to become aware that 'parish A' had a very different set of nineteenth-century social and economic relations from 'parish B'. And senses of identification and belonging among the poor retained their power – as did their alter ego, local xenophobia – in ways

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realm beyond her own household, the kingdom of the dead'. S. M. Gilbert & S. Gubar, The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination (London, 1984), p. 26. Pages 478 – 535 of the same book are also recommended for an exposition of the same theme. It should be noted, of course, that Anne Howes was not a 'Victorian'.

69 Howkins, Poor Labouring Men, p. xii.
that often mirrored patterns in the landownership, politics and society of the elite classes above them.  

Cultural incorporation and the process of cutting the rural poor adrift from their customary past nevertheless meant that the mould of cultural identity was more malleable than before, and notions of belonging that were ‘national’ rather than ‘local’ began to be adopted. This was not entirely new, of course. In response to the ‘Swing’ risings, the Norfolk lieutenant and his deputies published *A Patriotic Address* which opened with the words ‘Englishmen were never assassins! Englishmen were never incendiaries!’. As it developed, however, the *Address* proved itself to be an appeal to a very traditional and local sense of ‘moral economy’: ‘Be faithful to your employers . . . They on their parts will . . . preserve the peace and prosperity of our county’. Most subsequent appeals of this kind during the nineteenth century — notably those made by Lord Walsingham to unionised estate workers in the 1870s and 1890s72 — centred on notions of loyalty to the closed world of parish, estate or workplace and on the importance of excluding and ignoring the influence of ‘outsiders’. To the extent that many farmworkers were suspicious of Joseph Arch and of the interventions of his Leamington-based organisation in Norfolk affairs, this was an appeal that seemed to work. The first of the organised Norfolk labourers’ trade unions eventually fragmented on localist lines.73 With World War I looming, however, a very different series of strings had to be pulled if the ruling elite were to carry the rural poor with them, and it is worth briefly considering the role of

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71 *A Patriotic Address*, under the imprimateur of Boileau, Astley and Bulwer, E.A. 23.11.30.

72 See, for example, the speech delivered by Walsingham to striking estate workers in November 1890, N.C. 15.11.90.

73 Howkins, *Poor Labouring Men*, pp. 71 – 79 has much more on the breakdown in relations between local and national union leaderships. Whether local or central control is ultimately the more conservative or the more radical route is a moot point. ‘Centralism is Toryism rank and rife’, argued George Rix, Arch’s chief antagonist in the split and his sentiments, if not his words, would have been echoed earlier in the century by the leaders of Wesleyan Reform.
the parish clergy in shaping some of the attitudes that prevailed in the build-up, duration and aftermath of the conflict.

The First World War provided clergymen with a striking opportunity to involve themselves more fully and more intimately with the lives of the people they had been helping to manage during the preceding century. If the labouring poor were expected to fight and die in pursuit of the obscure political interests of a class other than their own, was the clergyman up to the challenge of offering practical assistance – whether on the battlefield or on the ‘home front’ – to servicemen and their families?

Crockford’s Clerical Directory of 1920 records that 3,409 clergymen were commissioned as temporary or permanent chaplains during the war. For the most part they were not to be found at the front-line – a Church of England directive forbade chaplains to go forward of brigade headquarters - and they busied themselves in organising concert parties or, as was the case with Charles Kent of Merton, found work as censors. Others defied the Church’s directive and became ambulance drivers and stretcher bearers, or entered no-man’s land after battles to minister to the dead and dying. In all, 130 chaplains were killed in action or died from wounds or disease. I can find no evidence that any Norfolk clergyman died as a direct result of the fighting, but sacrifices could be made in other ways and the names of at least sixteen clergyman’s sons can readily be identified among the lists of the dead. A correspondent to the Crockford’s Directory of 1920 said that he had ‘been much struck by the enormous number of the sons of the clergy who have made the supreme sacrifice, hardly a day passes without the record of some

76 Crockford’s Clerical Directory (1920).
77 The Rev. Charles J. S. Hood appears in the ‘Roll of Honour’ of Sidestrand parish and Sidestrand rectory was described as ‘vacant’ in Kelly’s Directory of 1916, but I have searched in vain for Charles Hood in successive editions of Crockford’s Directory.
78 Norfolk Roll of Honour 1914 – 18: List of Men From Norfolk Parishes Who Fell in the Great War (Norwich, 1920). The names of the sixteen clergy sons could be easily identified because they still lived in the parishes where their fathers worked. There were undoubtedly many other such casualties who, by living away from their families, became invisible to my search.
clergyman’s son having died for his country’. The editors of the Directory agreed. ‘It is indeed but a final proof of the way in which the clergy have always served their country’. If the details of their numbers could be collated at some future date ‘there is no doubt that a striking piece of social history could thus be established’. 80

Clergymen found themselves with practical work to do on the ‘home front’, continuing in the tradition of Benjamin Armstrong who had collected for widows and orphans during the Crimean War. 81 At Fritton the vicar’s wife ran a St. John’s Ambulance Brigade and a Home Nursing Society; 82 at Lyng the Rev. D. F. Allen became a special constable, emergency powers conferring upon him a pre-emptive authority that had more than an echo of the special constables of the ‘Swing’ era; 83 at Merton Charles Kent transformed the parish magazine into a newsletter through which all parishioners, at home and abroad, might keep in touch. 84

As a minister of religion, the clergyman at times became the mouthpiece for the Church’s official stance on the war, promulgated through the forms of Special Service. These were not innovations – Special Service forms were and continue to be used on occasions of national importance – but they do give clues to the trajectory of public opinion as the war progressed. 85 During the early years of the war, for instance, the triumphalism and jingoistic fervour of some of the Boer War service forms was strikingly absent. Sentiments from 1900 which implied that God himself had called upon the English to fight 86 had given way to concern for the enemy – ‘Let us pray for the sick and wounded whether our own or of the enemy’ – and even to an acknowledgement that some political or spiritual failing in British society may have brought about the conflict – ‘we beseech

80 The Norfolk Roll of Honour reveals that two sons were lost by the Rev. A. Barton of Strumpshaw, by the Rev. J. Enright of Fundenhall, and by the Rev. J. Steward of North Runcton. The Rev. M. Kaufman’s son was the only casualty from the parish of Ingworth.
81 Armstrong, Norfolk Diary, p. 26, November 28, 1854.
84 Yaxley (ed.), ‘The Rector’, p. 44.
85 All the examples which follow have been taken from the Special Service Forms collected in Ashwellthorpe parish, N.R.O. PD 53/21.
86 ‘Thou who hast called our sons to fight / For England’s glory, England’s right / ... O God our soldiers help, we pray / And make them victors of the day’.
thee, good Lord... to pardon whatever in us has helped to cause the war'. By 1917, however, the indications were that a faltering congregation, burdened by loss and privation, needed bolstering:

'It is right that... we should recall to our minds the motives with which three years ago we entered on this war. We did not enter on it for gain or for glory, nor did we enter on it, as other nations were compelled to do, for self-preservation... The events of the past three years have more than justified our entrance upon the war. The action of our enemy has been such as to make the issues at stake increasingly plain. We are fighting for truth, for justice, for decency in warfare, for the world's freedom from oppression'.

Sobriety of tone and some applied psychology may well have been pre-requisites in the management of public opinion during a conflict which, more than any other, had brought home to the civilian population the true scale of loss and suffering. Norfolk lost a putative figure of 11,771 men during the war, a proportion of 1 in 42 of its total population and 1 in 9 of its men of fighting age (18 – 41). Both these proportions were higher than for most other English counties. The impact of such death rates was undoubtedly compounded in parishes where groups of men were suddenly lost in a short space of time because of engagements by 'pals' regiments'. This was true in the case of Salhouse, for instance, which lost five men in one action. Impressionistically the sense of a 'lost generation' took hold, even though the overall casualty rate in Norfolk was probably not significantly higher than that caused by the predations of child mortality during the preceding century. Some parishes experienced no casualties at all – among them Fishley, Stratton Strawless, Topcroft and Wheatacre – while others suffered to a grotesquely disproportionate extent. Table 8.1 makes clear, however, such distributions were entirely random and owed nothing to patterns of landownership or authority in the parish. Any suggestion that the inhabitants of 'close' parishes were protected from the ravages of

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87 These figures and proportions are taken from the Norfolk Roll of Honour. The difficulties of making such calculations are well-known: should the figure include deaths from disease? men who died from their wounds long after the armistice? the 'burnt-out' generation whose life-expectancy was curtailed by the physical and mental scars of their experience? See J. M. Winter, 'Some aspects of the demographic consequences of the First World War in Britain', Population Studies, 30 (1976), 539 – 552.
89 Norfolk Roll of Honour, statistical summary.
90 Earsham, for example, lost 13.3% of its population (23 deaths from the population of 173 recorded in 1911). Only three other parishes recorded losses of over 8% (Walcott 8.1, Dunston 8.2 and Kirstead 8.5), and only eleven parishes in the entire county suffered so much as half the Earsham casualty rate.
war or, indeed, that they showed an enhanced willingness to enlist and thus made themselves more vulnerable cannot, on this evidence, be sustained.

Table 8.1: An analysis of 'open' and 'close' parish types among those communities which suffered casualties during the 1914–18 war

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parish type</th>
<th>No. Norfolk parishes in this category recording WWI casualties</th>
<th>Median casualty rate among parishes of this type, expressed as a % of 1911 population figure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 (close)</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 (semi-close)</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 (semi-open)</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 (open)</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 (estate)</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SOURCES: Norfolk Roll of Honour; Population Census returns, 1911; Imperial Gazeteer (1874)91

Dealing with multiple losses nevertheless stretched to its limits the clergyman's capacity for maintaining his spiritual authority within the parish. Culturally, the First World War clergyman found himself dealing with the ruins of a late-Victorian belief system that had sanitised death and had begun to entertain expectations that children would outlive their parents.92 The horrific deaths of young men in the trenches, and the mutilation and sometimes complete disappearance of their bodies, shattered the comforting notion of death as sleep—a peaceful repose spent in 'God's acre...sown with the harvest of the resurrection'.93 The clergyman might be a bereaved parent himself or he might, like

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91 There were sufficient continuities in land-ownership patterns between 1874 and 1914 for the use of the Imperial Gazeteer to be warranted here, although the likelihood of some profound changes needs to be acknowledged.


93 N.R.O. PD 601/31 Notes on Sedgeford church, 1842.
Charles Kent, diligently record the scale of the holocaust, but something more was expected of him – leadership, perhaps, or comfort, or ‘answers’ – and he was, too often, found wanting. ‘It was noted,’ writes Haig, ‘that in the Great War the Anglican chaplains seemed bumbling in comparison with the acknowledged skills of the Roman Catholic priests when faced with dying men’. Increasingly, the Spiritualist church offered those balms of hope and denial that the Church of England had so conspicuously failed to deliver.

Barriers to communication between clergymen and servicemen and their families undoubtedly stemmed from the class divisions between them. Superficially, the war – and, of course, death – was a democratising influence: Capt. George de Grey of Merton Hall fought alongside Merton estate workers in the trenches, and was happy enough to reminisce with them about old times. But there were limits to this process. Lord and Lady Walsingham saw out the war years in the south of France, and when the Rev. Charles Kent was asked to minister to wounded and convalescent soldiers in northern Italy he refused on the grounds that the region was too cold, too expensive, and that he would have to ‘be content with bully beef and army rations, which are all right for young men’s teeth’. The army chaplain automatically acquired the rank of captain, entitling him to private quarters and the services of a batman, and the complaints of servicemen against him and his regime soon took on an aspect familiar from countless domestic antagonisms between them: ‘lack of fellowship; pew rents; a “classy”, socially exclusive priesthood; the enemy of labour and the friend of nobles and capitalists; . . . church parade; the army’s version of the traditional English Sunday’.

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94 Kent’s entry in his *Breckland Magazine* of October 1916 notes that ‘it has been our sad duty to chronicle month by month the passing away in action of the splendid Tottington lads’. Cited in Yaxley (ed.), ‘The Rector’, p. 55.

95 Haig, *Victorian Clergy*, p. 16.

96 Yaxley (ed.), ‘The Rector’, p. 59. April 1917, Sgt. Hurring met de Grey: ‘We had quite a long chat about Merton and things in general. He was very pleased to see me’.


99 Marrin, *The Last Crusade*, p. 207.

100 Marrin, *The Last Crusade*, p. 205, citing the Bishop of Kensington’s report for ‘The Army and Religion’. 
There can be little doubt that the management of the war actually fuelled some class tensions, and few incidents illustrate the point more keenly than the attempt by Harry Garnham to smash the war memorial tablet in Burston church that commemorated his son.\textsuperscript{101} Set against this, of course, must be the fact that for thousands of young men like 'The King of the Norfolk Poachers', volunteering to fight was their duty as 'Patriot to my King and Country'.\textsuperscript{102} But even from this patriotic and, apparently, compliant standpoint 'The King' voiced his dislike and contempt for war memorials,\textsuperscript{103} and it may well be that — a full century on from the phenomenon being described by E. P. Thompson — patriotism was being used as 'a rhetorical stratagem which the crowd employs to mount an assault upon the corruption of the ruling powers'.\textsuperscript{104} Certainly the parishioners of Burston, in endorsing the war, saw its aims and potential rewards in a very different light to that of the ruling classes:

'Our brothers are laying down their lives in Flanders to preserve that heritage of the ages, freedom. We want that Freedom in Burston. The people require freedom to worship God in their own way. Freedom to have their children taught by whom they love. Freedom to remain in the villages where their fathers died, and not to be ousted at the caprice of every gentleman whom they do not see eye to eye with. Freedom is a goddess worth dying for'.\textsuperscript{105}

Folk memories were long enough to remember that patriotic loyalty did not always receive its reward. Two Waterloo veterans had been executed after the 1822 riots in Norfolk,\textsuperscript{106} and a similar act of class betrayal — the execution and transportation of ex-soldiers after the Fenland riots of 1816 — was still being debated and discussed among soldiers from the area as they set off for France.\textsuperscript{107} Nevertheless, anti-war sentiment — of the kind prevalent among Socialists, Liberals and trade unionists during the Boer War\textsuperscript{108} — was less visible in 1914. There is more than a suggestion that ruling class and working class fought the same war but on different agendas: the one to keep things the same, the

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{102} 'The King of the Norfolk Poachers' (ed. L. Rider Haggard), I Walked By Night (Ipswich, 1975), p. 173.
\textsuperscript{103} 'King', I Walked By Night, p. 176.
\textsuperscript{104} Thompson, Customs in Common, pp. 92 – 3. Thompson cites popular patriotic support for Queen Caroline in the 1820s which was, in other respects, a veiled attack on King George IV.
\textsuperscript{105} N.R.O. MC 31/2, 478 x 1 'The Burston School Strike', pamphlet published by the Labour Leader, p. 19.
\textsuperscript{108} Howkins, Poor Labouring Men, p. 80, credits the Boer War for the resurgence of trade unionism in the early twentieth century.
\end{footnotes}
other to bring about change. Such a dichotomy was not without precedent. Celebrations in Coltishall to mark the end of the war against Napoleon – held, prematurely, on 24 June 1814 – were marked by banner-waving crowds proclaiming ‘Peace to the World – Plenty to the Poor’. The frustration of these aims – particularly the second – would lead directly to post-war class antagonism, social tension and political conflict.

As elites began to contemplate the fate of society in the aftermath of war, they sometimes betrayed a profound ambivalence towards what the future might hold. ‘We have made the world safe for democracy,’ wrote the Rev. A. E. King of Denver, ‘but it will not be an easy matter to make democracy safe for the world’. The potential dangers foreseen by King were described more explicitly by another correspondent of the Bulwer family: ‘We ... have a duty to perform – to see that our beautiful lads have not died in vain, and that the politicians shall not give away what the soldiers have won’.

If one of the fears of the elite was that old power and authority structures had not survived the war, the early post-war signs would have encouraged them. Totemic in this regard was the raising of the village war memorial, onto whose fund-raising and organising committees the old faces of parish influence enthusiastically elected themselves (Plates 23 & 24). At Winfarthing a public meeting attended by 37 of the 397 population was chaired by the Rector. The meeting elected five members of a war memorial committee, and voted the Rector into the chair of that body, too. At Garboldisham the unveiling of the war memorial took place amid pre-war activities that were burgeoning and flowering anew in the summer of 1921:

‘Major Denney D.S.O., whose previous feats had been on the field of battle, was to be seen scrambling to victory in the father’s race at the School Treat held in his ... garden. The reading room was re-opened, school and choir outings took to motor transport, the Mother’s Union resumed its meetings and cricket was played again ... Finally, the Village Band broke its war-time silence’.

110 N.R.O. BUL 4/285, 614 x 4: Bulwer papers, King to E. Bulwer (15 November 1918).
111 N.R.O. MC 335/BUL16/73, 705 x 4: Bulwer papers, Mr. W. Benson to Col. Bulwer (20 July 1916).
112 The politics of the war memorial are explored in Mansfield, ‘Class conflict’, passim.
113 N.R.O. PD 78/23 Winfarthing: War Memorial Correspondence and Minute Book, 28 January 1919. The population figure relates to the 1911 census.
The nature of the dispute over the Ashwellthorpe memorial, however, suggested that things had begun to change. The Rev. Canon Fardell faced escalating costs as the wages demanded by his contractor's workmen began to rise.\textsuperscript{115} Shortages in the labour market brought about by the war had produced one of those occasions when the rules of political economy suddenly favoured the men, and they showed signs of a determination to exploit their advantage.\textsuperscript{116}

Tension between those who had fought and those who had not was a constant theme of post-war literature, and it may be that antipathy towards Anglican-sponsored war memorials stemmed from a feeling that they were conscience-salvers for those in whose interests the war had been fought and so many sacrifices made. Siegfried Sassoon was one writer who gave voice to the feeling that war memorials were a poor substitute for anything resembling true empathy, true understanding, true contrition on the part of the ruling class:

\begin{quote}
\textquote{At sermon time, while squire is in his pew,  
He gives my gilded name a thoughtful stare;  
For, though low down upon the list, I'm there;  
"In proud and glorious memory" – that's my due.  
Two bleeding years I fought in France for squire:  
I suffered anguish that he's never guessed,  
Once I came home on leave; and then went west,  
What greater glory could a man desire?}\textsuperscript{117}
\end{quote}

If Sassoon's words suggest that, for the squire at least, the post-war years were a time for re-adopting old habits, old attitudes and old pews, the historical evidence of contemporary service books indicates that the squire's vigil would have been an increasingly lonely one. Fig. 8.1 charts the average numbers of people taking communion in sixteen of the parish churches of the Aylsham Poor Law Union between 1910 and 1918, and its downward trajectory clearly suggests that the war years coincided with a

\textsuperscript{115} N.R.O. PD 53/29 Ashwellthorpe war memorial correspondence, Mr. G. Upcher to Rev. Fardell, 5 February 1921.  
\textsuperscript{116} Howkins has described renewed trade union power during the war years and a concomitant rise in wages, facilitated by labour shortages. Howkins, \textit{Poor Labouring Men}, pp. 113 – 117.  
\textsuperscript{117} S. Sassoon, \textit{Memorial Tablet}, cited in Giles & Middleton, \textit{Writing Englishness}, p. 123.
loss – rather than a renewal – of faith in the Anglican church. The graph does not measure church attendance, but it does measure the level of engagement with and participation in the church’s most profound sacrament. It may well be that longer-term trends either side of this snapshot would help to place it in context, but even without them its meaning is plain. World War One did not drive people back into the arms of the Church of England: in these churches the average number of communicants in 1918 had declined by one-third from the figure achieved in 1910.  

![Fig. 8.1: The average number of all communicants in sixteen of the parish churches of the Aylsham Poor Law Union 1910 – 1918*](image)

**SOURCE:** N.R.O. Parish service books: Alby PD543/15; Buxton PD160/13; Colby PD398/10; Coltishall PD398/20; Erpingham PD474/33; Heydon PD435/11; Lammas PD170/15; Marsham PD231/20; Scotto PD415/18; Salle PD328/10; Thwaite PD544/8; Great Hautbois PD596/8; Reepham PD440/21; Belaugh PD434/11; Tuttington PD401/46; Hackford PD441/16.

* Numbers of weekly communicants for each of these churches were aggregated to give total numbers of communicants for the year. Those totals were then averaged across the sixteen churches in the survey to give the figure used on this chart.

World War One seems to have helped consolidate a subtle but profound shift in the role and perception of the Church of England. Its declining relevance to the lives of most

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118 The average total figure of 352 communicants in 1918 is 66.9% of the equivalent figure in 1910 (526). The low-point occurred in 1916, with an average of 334 communicants.
people, and the political antipathy that it continued to excite in the minds of many, have
to be set against its increasingly important iconic status as a symbol of the pastoral ideal.

'The townsman envies the villager his certainties and . . . has always regarded urban life
as just a temporary necessity. One day he will find a cottage on the green and "real
values", wrote Ronald Blythe,119 and somewhere close to the townsman's fantasy
cottage would be the sunlit tower of the parish church and the gentle peal of its bells. The
sentimental appeal of the parish church can be detected in the letters home of the Merton
soldiers, collected by Charles Kent. Their alien and frightening circumstances had
focused their minds on 'the dear old church and . . . a game of cricket',120 on 'the
improvement at Tompson in getting an organ [and] people all going to church . . . of a
Sunday',121 and even on the prospect of subscribing to the bell repair fund.122

To the post-war generation, the pre-war era rapidly took on the aspect of an impossibly
distant, semi-mythological age. Transcending the pastoral and the sentimental was the
spiritual: English soldiers were said to have been protected by the Angel of Mons,123 and
a lost company of soldiers — estate workers from Sandringham — had been gathered
heavenwards in a ghostly mist and never seen again.124 John Masefield might write
elegiacally about the return of gleaners to the shattered landscape,125 but gleaning would
never fully regain its place in the rural calendar any more than the term 'No Man's Land'
could recover the meaning that Augustus Jessopp had applied to it, as a patch of land
over which the poor might graze an animal or two, or collect fuel and firewood.126
Clergymen, too, seemed sometimes to occupy the same surreal place in the collective
memory. Rupert Brooke's Rectory lawn at Grantchester was shadowed by the parish

121 Yaxley (ed.), 'The Rector', pp. 50 - 1.
122 Yaxley (ed.), 'The Rector', p. 56.
123 N.R.O. MC 641/1, 785 x 2. Cutting from the Church Times (n.d.), in the papers of Catherine Hall,
Southery.
124 http://www.culturevulture.net/Television/All the King's Men.htm. An unspecified number of
Sandringham men were lost in an action on the Gallipoli peninsular, 12 August 1915. The Norfolk Roll of
Honour records that a total of 16 men from the parish died during the war.
125 J. Masefield, The Old Front Line (1917), cited as frontispiece in A. Price, Other Paths to Glory (London,
1974)
church, and it was haunted by another presence, too: phantom clergymen from the recent but immeasurably distant past.

And in that garden, black and white,
Creep whispers through the grass all night,
And spectral dance, before the dawn,
A hundred vicars down the lawn,
Curates, long dust, will come and go
On lissome, clerical, printless toe;
And oft between the boughs is seen
The sly shade of a Rural Dean.127

Here, perhaps, a remarkable continuity may be observed, for the clergy of another age – implicitly more sympathetic – had been eulogized 150 years earlier in Oliver Goldsmith’s poem *The Deserted Village*. The prominence of the clergyman in the English literary imagination can only be attributed to the centrality of his role in the key structures of social management. Most took this role very seriously, and worked hard to fulfil it. Without them, many things – some of them designed to help the poor – would not have happened. Archaic charities were administered. Schools were opened, often in the face of opposition from farmers and parents. Clergymen as poor law guardians frequently performed the unheralded task of ameliorating the harshest measures propounded by farmers and landowners. Some of them also respected and rather liked many of the hard-working Nonconformists in their parishes, and a significant number of them were more sympathetic to the trade union movement than the trade unionists themselves ever seemed prepared to acknowledge.

Ultimately, however, a generalised judgement has to be attempted. If it is that the nineteenth-century rural clergy were administrators rather than innovators, busy in the interests of elites but relatively silent on the problems of the poor, it may be that one more mystery can tentatively be solved. At the start of this thesis I offered the image of a clergyman struggling through a belfry trapdoor. William Allen had a long ministry in Shouldham, during which he had much to say on many issues. His thoughts and exploits have been recounted at intervals in this thesis, and – whatever else they reveal about him

---

they demonstrate clearly that Allen was constantly active, busy and involved in the life of his parish. Absentee rectors who were strangers to their communities, remote tithe-gatherers and haughty patricians, might readily be understood as the targets for contempt and opprobrium. Allen was none of these things. Why, then, was a hard-working clergyman subjected to such an indignity, and why was it associated with at least three years of ill-feeling, litigation and political turmoil? As far as his climb into the belfry was concerned, the most immediately relevant point was that Allen had banished the ‘parish ringers’ from the church. Allen’s presence at the church on that Christmas Eve in 1869 was entirely due to the fact that he had arrogated to himself the principal responsibility for bell-ringing. By then he also presided over a parish in which his appointee as clerk and sexton, John Towler, was challenged in all his duties by James Malby, the unofficial appointee of the parishioners. Malby’s appointment was the by-product of a vestry coup, during the course of which agricultural labourers had gathered on the village green and had marched en masse to the church, demanding the election of an independent churchwarden to scrutinise Allen’s management of parochial charities.

Allen had restored Shouldham church in the Gothic style, and had overseen the development of one of the best parish choirs in west Norfolk. He preached specifically that a Ritualistic church service, filled with spectacle and music that was designed to be performed rather than participated in, was intended for the ‘edification’ of the congregation. All that was expected of them was that they should trust to his good intentions, even if they did not understand what was happening.

A restored church and a Ritualist service were, Allen believed, the keys to an appreciation of higher things, and the complementary role of education was to weave the spirituality of Sunday service into the secular atmosphere of the working week. Education was best placed in the hands of clergymen, and it should have the Church of England catechism at the centre of its curriculum. It should be primarily religious and moral in character, and should begin to distance children from the negative influence of their parents. Allen made explicit links between the education of the poor and a new

---

128 Full details of all the following incidents can be found in the relevant parish papers (N.R.O. PD 356/125).
complicity with the social order that was becoming apparent to him in the late 1860s. He had consequently fought, single-handed, a sixteen-year campaign to establish a National School in Shouldham. The school was eventually built, he claimed, with negligible help from local farmers and landowners. Within it, Allen employed a schoolmistress called Miss Pickersgill, who led the church choir, played the church organ, and was prominent in the organisation of ‘parish entertainments’. These had been re-established by Allen along lines that presented mythologised, ‘Merrie England’ versions of May Day and Whitsuntide celebrations.

In due course Allen came to face a challenge to his authority from leading parishioners – among them Nonconformist farmers – who sought to wrest control of the National School from him by having their own placemen appointed as churchwarden/school managers. Allen had deliberately conflated the two posts, thereby creating a management structure that was expressly designed to maintain Anglican hegemony over the school.\textsuperscript{129}

Allen’s was an agenda that trod on too many toes in the parish; that challenged too many customs and too many vested interests; that gave too many people cause to put a negative construction on his involvement. In many parishes beside Shouldham, the parson’s considerable administrative workload – far from winning him the respect and gratitude of parishioners – earned him their suspicion, and a resentment that control, management and manipulation were everywhere. We might even detect, in late nineteenth-century antiquarianism, a tacit acknowledgement that rural communities had become over-managed. The element of social compact in the ‘moral economy’ was long gone. In its place threatening new networks had formed – of political and religious dissent that surged across the old boundaries of authoritarian and deferential communities – and a sudden clerical interest in all those things that had once made the poor so picturesque can begin to look like an attempt to put the genie back into the bottle.

\textsuperscript{129} Allen’s carefully crafted management structure was almost his undoing. The farmers, led by Thomas Brown, argued that Allen was a perpetual curate and, technically, not the incumbent at all. He therefore had no right to elect either of the churchwardens. A case heard at the Court of the Queen’s Bench in November 1872 eventually ruled in Allen’s favour.
The clergy themselves might have argued that their work in poor law and charity administration, in the reorganisation of landscape and landownership at enclosure, in the introduction of ‘high quality’ music into elegantly refurbished churches, in the provision of education, and in the dispensing of law and order, originated from a desire to combine altruism and benevolence with social duty and economic responsibility. For the labourer, undoubtedly, the perspective was very different. By identifying themselves so closely with these mechanisms of social and economic change, the clergy had become inextricably linked to the great elite project that had made – intentionally or otherwise – the labourers’ own past a foreign country.

Plate 23: The Church of England and war memorials. Exterior memorial at Strumpshaw.

Plate 24: The Church of England and war memorials. Interior memorial at Cawston.
### APPENDICES

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<th>Page</th>
</tr>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX A
NORFOLK POPULATION 1801 – 1911

(Note: These population figures include the urban populations of Norwich, Great Yarmouth and Kings Lynn)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1801</td>
<td>273,479</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1811</td>
<td>291,947</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1821</td>
<td>344,368</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1831</td>
<td>390,654</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1841</td>
<td>412,664 (of which: Norwich 63,343; Great Yarmouth 24,259; Kings Lynn 16,039)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1851</td>
<td>442,714</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1861</td>
<td>434,798</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1871</td>
<td>438,656</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1881</td>
<td>444,825</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1891</td>
<td>456,475</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1901</td>
<td>476,553</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1911</td>
<td>499,116 (of which: Norwich 121,478; Great Yarmouth 55,905; Kings Lynn 20,201)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Overall increase in population 1801 – 1911: 82.5%
Percentage of population living in urban centres: (1841) 25.1%
(1911) 39.6%
APPENDIX B
OPEN AND CLOSE PARISHES

The definition – even the existence – of ‘open’ and ‘close’ parishes remains the subject of academic discussion and debate,1 and the unsatisfactory nature of interpreting parish types solely from patterns of landownership is discussed at various points in this thesis. Nevertheless, as a rapidly accessible and consistent indicator the concept does have its uses in quantitative analysis, and I have employed it in my own S.P.S.S. dataset.

Landownership information has been sourced from J. M. Wilson, Imperial Gazetteer of England and Wales (London, 1874). Wilson described land in most (not all) parishes as being ‘all in one estate’, ‘divided among a few’, ‘partly sub-divided’ or ‘much sub-divided’, and the way in which I have used Wilson’s definitions to classify parishes in rural Norfolk is explained in Table B.1 below. To Wilson’s four categories I have added a fifth: ‘close’ parishes in the hands of one landowner, and with a population of 150 or less, I have designated as ‘estate’ parishes.

Table B.1: Definition of ‘open’ and ‘close’ parish type used in this thesis as related to landownership patterns described in Wilson, Imperial Gazetteer.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Landownership patterns described by Wilson</th>
<th>Parish type</th>
<th>Parish type code used by me in this thesis and in quantitative analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‘All in one estate’</td>
<td>Close</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Divided among a few’</td>
<td>Semi-close</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partly-subdivided</td>
<td>Semi-open</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Much subdivided</td>
<td>Open</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One landowner; population 150 or less</td>
<td>Estate</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table B.2: Prevalence and size of parish types 1 – 5, based on an analysis of their relative populations in 1851

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parish type</th>
<th>Number of rural parishes in this type</th>
<th>Percentage of rural parishes in this type</th>
<th>Total population in 1851</th>
<th>Percentage of Norfolk’s rural population living in this parish type (1851)</th>
<th>Average population of parishes in this type (1851)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>12.8</td>
<td>29,643</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>349</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>230</td>
<td>34.6</td>
<td>87,949</td>
<td>26.9</td>
<td>382</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>28,485</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>593</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>15.7</td>
<td>106,853</td>
<td>32.7</td>
<td>1027</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>5,357</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No data</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>20.5</td>
<td>68,496</td>
<td>21</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>326,783</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX C
SOCIAL, RELIGIOUS AND POLITICAL DISSENT

An attempt was made to classify parishes according to the levels of dissent to be found in each one during the nineteenth century. Table C.1 explains the classification, and indicates how many parishes fell into each category. The meaning of the terms 'social', 'religious' and 'political' dissent, and the sources used to identify instances of them in each parish are as follows:


**Religious dissent:** Either an application for a licence to establish a Nonconformist meeting house, lodged with the Diocese between 1751 and 1852 or an active Nonconformist congregation(s) identified in the 1851 census of religious worship. Sources: N.R.O. DN/DIS 1/2, 4/1, 4/2 Norwich Diocesan Meeting House registers 1751 – 1852; J. Ede & N. Virgoe (eds.), *Religious Worship in Norfolk: The 1851 Census of Accommodation and Attendance at Worship* (Norfolk Record Society vol. LXII, 1998).

Table C.1: Explanation of parish classifications according to levels of social, religious and political dissent

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dissent classification</th>
<th>Number of parishes in classification group</th>
<th>Social dissent</th>
<th>Religious dissent pre-1851</th>
<th>Religious dissent post-1851</th>
<th>Political dissent</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>82</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>47</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>27</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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APPENDIX D
NORFOLK RURAL PARISHES 1815 – 1914: POPULATIONS AND TYPES

a. Parish population, 1851

b. ‘Open’ – ‘close’ parish type (see Appendix B)

c. Degree of unrest in parish (see Appendix C)

d. Primitive Methodist population, derived from the maximum attendance at Primitive Methodist places of worship in J. Ede & N. Virgoe (eds.), Religious Worship in Norfolk: The 1851 Census of Accommodation and Attendance at Worship (Norfolk Record Society LXII, 1998) and codeified as a percentage of the parish population: 0 = no Primitive Methodist congregation; 1 = maximum Primitive Methodist congregation constitutes 1 – 5 % of parish population; 2 = 6 – 10%; 3 = 11 – 15%; 4 = 16 – 20%; 5 = 21 – 49%; 6 = 50% plus.  


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parish name</th>
<th>a</th>
<th>b</th>
<th>c</th>
<th>d</th>
<th>e</th>
<th>f</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acle</td>
<td>816</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1797</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alburgh</td>
<td>575</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1801</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alby</td>
<td>272</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1839</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aldborough</td>
<td>380</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aldeby</td>
<td>554</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1806</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alderford</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alpington</td>
<td>204</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1801</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anmer</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antingham</td>
<td>251</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arminghall</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1800</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ashby</td>
<td>249</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1837</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ashill</td>
<td>696</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1785</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ashmanhaugh</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1808</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ashwellthorpe</td>
<td>467</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1811</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ashwicken</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Aslacton</td>
<td>412</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1803</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attleborough</td>
<td>2324</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1812</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attlebridge</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aylmerton</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1825</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aylsham</td>
<td>2741</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Town</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>c</td>
<td>d</td>
<td>e</td>
<td>f</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
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<td>Babingley</td>
<td>88</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td>Bacton</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>Bagthorpe</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>1812</td>
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<td>Bale</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>Banham</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1811</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barningham</td>
<td>1195</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1789</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barningham Town</td>
<td>330</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1818</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barningham North</td>
<td>430</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1812</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barham</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Barney</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
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APPENDIX E
ANALYSIS OF SUNDAY SCHOOL ATTENDANCE IN THE PARISHES OF THE
AYLSHAM POOR LAW UNION, 1851

The following table takes the maximum number of Sunday School attenders for each
denomination as recorded in the 1851 religious census,¹ and compares attendance rates
across the denominations with reference to the size of the 3 – 15 age-group population in
each parish.²

1. Open – close parish type (see Appendix B).
2. Parish population aged 3 – 15 years in 1851.
3. Maximum number of young people attending Church of England Sunday School on census
day 1851
4. Church of England attenders as percentage of relevant age-cohort in parish.
5. Maximum number attending Primitive Methodist Sunday School.
6. Primitive Methodist attenders as percentage of relevant age cohort in parish.
8. Wesleyan Methodist attenders as percentage of relevant age cohort in parish.
10. Wesleyan Reform attenders as percentage of relevant age cohort in parish.
11. Maximum number attending Baptist Sunday School.
12. Baptist attenders as percentage of relevant age cohort in parish.
13. Maximum number attending other Nonconformist denomination Sunday School
14. Other Nonconformist attenders as percentage of relevant age cohort in parish.
15. Total (maximum) number of those attending Sunday school in the parish.
16. Total number attending Sunday school as percentage of relevant age cohort.

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¹ J. Ede & N. Virgoe, Religious Worship in Norfolk: The 1851 Census of Accommodation and Attendance
at Worship (Norfolk Record Society LXII, 1998)
² Determined from 1851 census returns for each parish.
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* Attendance figures of ‘0’ are given wherever it is known that a congregation existed but no Sunday School was organised or recorded.
### APPENDIX F

**IDENTIFYING ‘DYNASTIC INCUMBENCIES’ IN SELECTED NORFOLK PARISHES BY ANALYSIS OF AVERAGE INCUMBENCY LENGTH AND CLERGY/GENTRY SURNAME CONCENTRATION**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hundred</th>
<th>Parish</th>
<th>Average incumbency length 1815-1914</th>
<th>Surname Concentration</th>
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<td><strong>Freebridge Lynn</strong></td>
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<tr>
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<td>Ashwicken</td>
<td>21.3</td>
<td>3.0</td>
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<td>Castle Acre</td>
<td>32.3</td>
<td>3.0</td>
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<td>18.0</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Gaywood</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>25.4</td>
<td>7.5</td>
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<td>Middleton</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>2.3</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Blakeney</td>
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<td>Rollesby</td>
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<td>1.9</td>
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<td>Runham</td>
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<td>1.3</td>
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<td><strong>East &amp; West Flegg</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td>ickleburgh</td>
<td>21.3</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Diss</td>
<td>28.8</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gissing</td>
<td>29.3</td>
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<td>Shelpanger</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Diss</strong></td>
<td>Bexwell</td>
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<td>Crimplesham</td>
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<td>Shouldham</td>
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<td>Southery</td>
<td>11.0</td>
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<td>Upwell</td>
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<td>6.0</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wimbotsham</td>
<td>19.1</td>
<td>2.3</td>
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</table>

Surname Concentration Each incumbency change has the potential to be associated with three surname changes: the surnames of the clergyman, the patron and the major landowner all have the potentiality to change or to stay the same. Consequently a parish which undergoes 10 incumbency changes could demonstrate a maximum of 30 surname changes. The division of this putative maximum by the actual number of surname changes gives a measurement of ‘surname concentration’, ranging from the lowest possible figure of 1 (where there have been 30 surname changes: the clergy, patron and major landowning families have changed every time giving a very low surname concentration) to the highest possible figure of 30 (where the surname has never changed: clergyman, patron and landowner have always been drawn from the same family, and the surname concentration is very high). Essentially, the higher the surname concentration in a parish, the closer the kinship links may be assumed to be between clergyman, patron and landowner. Surname information has been compiled from these sources: D. Turner, List of Norfolk Benefices (Norwich, 1847) (pre-1847) and N.R.O. DN/REG 35,36 Norwich Diocesan Book (post 1847).

Average incumbency length is calculated by finding the number of years between the starting date of the incumbency in place in 1815 and the finishing date of the incumbency in place in 1914 and dividing that number by the number of incumbencies during that period. Sources used are as above.
APPENDIX G
DEFINITION OF SOCIAL GROUPINGS USED IN THE TEXT

Any delineation of social grouping for quantitative analysis is fraught with sociological problems and judgmental dangers. The method applied in this thesis is based on employment occupation, and the classifications – with some examples of typical employment in each – are as follows:

**Clergy:** Clergymen have usually been given social grouping of their own for the purposes of comparative analysis. Where they have not been differentiated, they have been subsumed into **Social Group 1**.

**Social Group 1:** *Aristocracy, gentry and the professional middle classes.*
Aristocrat/landed proprietor; gentleman; medical practitioner; legal practitioner; civil servant; army/navy officer; academic.

**Social Group 2:** *Rural and urban middle class.* Farmer; banker; merchant; manufacturer; publisher.

**Social Group 3:** *Management and trade.* Bookseller; Wesleyan minister; schoolmaster; inn/hotel keeper; photographer; artist; clerical worker; dealer; grocer; draper.

**Social Group 4:** *Skilled and unskilled workers.* Carpenter; stonemason; builder; weaver; cook; baker; brickmaker; labourer.
APPENDIX H
THE WEALTHIEST LANDOWNERS IN NORFOLK, 1876

The Rev. George Crabbe of Merton kept this list, generated from a government return, pasted in his *Merton Annals* (N.R.O. PD 532/32). The list identifies the 72 landowners whose estates in Norfolk were worth more than £3000. Many, of course, also held large estates outside Norfolk.

<table>
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<th>Landowner</th>
<th>Family Name</th>
<th>Value (£)</th>
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<td>Earl of Leicester</td>
<td>Coke</td>
<td>49,009</td>
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<td>Marquis Townshend</td>
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<td>19,814</td>
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<td>Astley</td>
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<td>Sir T. Hare</td>
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<td>Walpole</td>
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<td>Earl of Kimberley</td>
<td>Wodehouse</td>
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<td>Harbord</td>
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<td>Hamon le Strange</td>
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<td>Burroughes' Trustees</td>
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BIBLIOGRAPHY

Notes

Primary source material from the parish (I), from estates and private collections (II), from the Norwich diocese and local government (III), from the free churches (IV), from the Norfolk Studies Library (V), and from the Public Record Office (VI) are listed alphabetically and then numerically according to their call numbers. Parliamentary papers (VII) are listed in date order. Contemporary printed material (VIII) and the Secondary sources of books (I), essays and articles (II) and theses (III), are listed alphabetically by author.

In addition to these principal sources I have also made frequent use of the following newspapers, periodicals and annual directories:

Bury and Norwich Post
East Anglian
Eastern Daily Press
Eastern Evening News
Norfolk Archaeology
Norfolk Chronicle
Norwich Mercury
Norfolk News
The Times (London)

Crockford’s Clerical Directory (dates throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth century)
J. G. Harrod & Co., Postal and Commercial Directory of Norfolk and Norwich (Norwich, 1868)
W. White, History, Gazetteer and Directory of Norfolk (Sheffield, 1845, 1854)
FX 189/1
Banham: vestry minutes 1836 – 44.

MF 8, 9,
Little Walsingham: Marriage Registers 1869 - 96

MF 11
Great Walsingham: Marriage Registers 1869 – 96

MF 20, 21, 22, 23
Watton: Marriage Registers 1869 - 1908

MF 594/10
Middleton: Baptism Registers 1813 - 42

MF 740/4
Docking: Marriage Registers 1869 – 96

MF 749 (23 – 191), 761 (23 – 191)
Edingthorpe: Tithe Apportionment 1840, Tithe Map 1840

MF 958/10
Great Ellingham: Vestry Minutes 1822 - 39

MF 1007/5, 6, 8, 9
Southery: Baptism Registers 1813 – 97, Marriage registers (2) 1813 - 94

MF/RO 371
Wymondham: Marriage Registers 1837 – 52

MF/RO 377
Thetford St Peter: Marriage Registers 1911 – 14

MF/RO 380A
Thetford St. Mary: Marriage Registers 1911 - 14

MF/RO 559
Corpusty: Burial Registers 1850 - 65

PD 5/17, 18, 19, 21, 33
Guestwick: Poor Rate Books (3) 1838 – 59, Emigration fund 1836, Emigration correspondence 1835 - 6

PD 34/7
Great Bircham: Marriage Registers 1911 - 14

PD 40/7
Special service forms 1856
PD 41/84
Hethersett: School re-building subscription list 1861

PD 50/73, 76, 77
Gissing: Settlement dispute 1800, Emigration correspondence 1835, Clerical J. Ps’ orders 1830s

PD 52/25, 218, 386, 491
Swaffham: Pew exchanges c. 1830, Tracing and indentifying a lunatic 1826, School Board dispute 1898 – 9, Marriage Registers 1859 - 1914

PD 53/21, 29, 58, 60
Ashwellthorpe & Fundenhall: Special service forms 1900 & 1914 – 18, War memorial correspondence 1919, Enclosure claims 1811, Plainsong harmony book by Rev. Thomas Helmore 1853

PD 54/18
Stanford: Vestry Book 1853 - 1914

PD 55/34
West Tofts: Choir appointments 1856

PD 56/47, 49
Fritton: School correspondence 1903 - 12

PD 60/33
Ashwellthorpe & Wreningham. Glebe and tithe correspondence 1830, 1893.

PD 62/43, 63
Edingtonthorpe: Enclosure Act (1812), Enclosure Award (1828)

PD 78/23
Winfarthing: War Memorial Minute Book 1914 - 18

PD 85/118
Carlton Colville: Gleaning rules C19th

PD 86/105
East Dereham: Vestry minutes 1864 - 88

PD 91/14
Great Witchingham: Pew dispute 1912

PD 93/26
Morton on the Hill: Proper conduct in church (n.d.)

PD100/78, 81, 84, 89, 128, 147, 157, 258
Diss: Use of west gallery for singing 1713, Organ correspondence (2) 1813 – 48, Vestry minutes 1877, Legal fees in settlement cases 1838, Emigration correspondence 1837, Allegations against workhouse master 1840, Arrest warrants in bastardy cases 1762 - 1813

PD 101/29
Burston: Land exchange 1857

PD 103/16
Booton: Choir and singing class 1893

394
PD 113/11
Little Barningham: Emigration fund 1836

PD 119/33, 85, 86, 125
Starston: Churchyards trees dispute 1885, Rector's Memorandum Books (2) 1840s, Committal to lunatic asylum 1817

PD 126/34, 36, 41
Herringfleet: Restoration fund (2) 1884, Organ installation 1901

PD 131/21
Great Cressingham: Organ Fund 1894

PD 136/100, 103
Denton: Appointment of constables 1840, New school correspondence 1840

PD 145/18
Scotton: Service book 1910 - 18

PD 155/35
Bawdeswell: Curate's list of parishioners 1842

PD 158/26
Caston: Purchase of organ, 1885

PD 161/8
Oxnead: Paston's Charity 1863

PD 160/13, 64, 65, 66, 74

PD 168/9
Thetford St. Cuthbert: Marriage Registers 1911 – 14

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M.H. 12/8478
Correspondence of Mitford & Launditch P.L.U., 1839

M.H. 12/8539
Correspondence of Swaffham P.L.U., 1835
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<td>Special Assistant Poor Law Commissioners on the Employment of Women and Children in Agriculture</td>
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<td>Emigration from Agricultural to Manufacturing Districts</td>
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<td>10th Annual Report of the Poor Law Commission</td>
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<td>1844</td>
<td>Return of the House of Lords on the Ages and Descriptions of Persons Committed for Trial for Incendiary Offences in Norfolk and Suffolk</td>
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<td>S.C. on Poor Rates</td>
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<td>Some Alleged Abuses of the Poor Law in Norfolk and Suffolk</td>
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<td>Report to the Poor Law Board on Settlement and Removal</td>
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<td>S.C. on Religious Denomination of Paupers</td>
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1864 – 65  17th Annual Report of the Poor Law Board
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