

Old Age, Poverty and Gender in Rural England: A case study of Suffolk 1750-1834

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Abstract

This thesis investigates the complex interaction between old age, poverty and gender with the aim of adding to our understanding of the impact of old age on the achievement of self-sufficiency and residential independence for elderly poor men. It examines the expectations and experience of old age of elderly farm labourers in rural Suffolk between 1750 and 1834 and the extent to which they were able to achieve self-sufficiency and maintain residential independence. Continuity with earlier periods in the manner that the process of ageing and old age were perceived and understood and the extent to which these ideals continued to be influential in the establishment of masculine status and identity is explored. The study examines the size and diversity of the aged population and the gendered nature of the lifecycle options and the coping tactics available to old male paupers and the contribution they afforded to the the achievement of elf-sufficiency and residential independence.

The impact of the significant demographic, economic and social changes that Suffolk underwent in the eighteenth century and the impact they had on the day-to-day realities of life for poor aged men of the lower orders, including continued working, home environment and opportunities for leisure are explored. The occupational constraints faced by older farm labourers as a result of the region's reliance on agriculture as a source of employment are also examined. The thesis also considers changes in the manner the poor law was administered and the basis on which decisions for the provision of relief to aged male claimants were made by Suffolk's rural poor law incorporations and whether demographic and economic pressures resulted in a gendered poor law policy which disadvantaged aged men.

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Abbreviations

SRO(I)	Suffolk Record Office, Ipswich
ERO(C)	Essex Record Office, Chelmsford

Chapter 1. Introduction

This thesis explores the expectation and experiences of old age for poor men in rural Suffolk in the second half of the eighteenth century and in the first half of the nineteenth century. It seeks to justify the historiological significance of the complex relationship between old age, poverty, and gender for men of the lower orders. Focusing on the expectations and experiences of aged farm labourers in Suffolk it aims to reveal the complex interaction between poverty, age and gender in the definition of old age and construction of masculine status and identity.

The thesis presents a number of arguments which challenge the current accepted understanding of the process of ageing and the onset of old age. Importantly, it explores questions of gender, masculinity and old age which have not previously been considered explicitly in this region. It challenges the commonly accepted age of sixty as marking the onset of old age for men of the lower orders in rural Suffolk in this period. It contends that how old age was perceived and understood in this period displayed significant continuity with earlier periods. Furthermore, it argues that the interaction of age, status and gender often had a significant and detrimental impact on the experience of old age for many poor men. It aims to reveal that the manner in which the demographic, economic and social changes experienced by Suffolk in this period undermined the well-being of many old men and their ability to achieve self-sufficiency and residential independence. Finally, it aims to demonstrate that the pressures exerted on poor law expenditure experienced by parishes due to on-going problems of rising population, economic pressures, structural unemployment and increased demand for poor relief resulted in changes to social welfare policies which became increasingly gender biased and detrimental to old men.

Histories of Old Age

Despite the historiographical shift towards social history in the 1960s and increased historical interest in the importance of social class, economics and gender, the role and place of old age

received very little recognition from scholars. Prior to the 1970s, ‘the elderly were still viewed, if at all, as an insignificant and largely historically inaccessible group.’¹ As Paul Thompson remarked:

Like ordinary people in general, old people usually show up vividly in the record only when they become a problem. At death, in the moment of passing, all secure an entry, and some a lasting monument: but of most people’s later life little is ever known, or knowable.²

It was not until the 1970s and early 1980s that a perceivable scholarly interest in old age as a historical theme can be identified and which was initially explored from a demographic perspective. Most noteworthy of the historical demographic studies conducted in this period being those of Peter Laslett, David Glass, Richard Wall, Edward Wrigley and Richard Schofield.³

Through the adoption of a demographic approach much of the early scholarship focused on the history of the household and the family. Laslett’s studies in the late 1960s and through the 1970s were characteristic of this approach which focused on the family, household structures and the role of the old in kin networks and addressed issues such as life expectancy, diet, literacy, rates of migration, work and social mobility. Laslett’s study on changes to household structure between the sixteenth and nineteenth century explored changes in the distribution of

¹ Lynn Botelho & Pat Thane, eds. *Women and Ageing in British Society Since 1500*, (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 3.

² Paul Thompson, ed. *I Don’t Feel Old* (Oxford: OUP, 1990), p.11.

³ Peter Laslett, ed. *The World We Have Lost* (London: Methuen, 1965); Peter Laslett, ‘Size and Structure of the Household in England Over Three Centuries’, *Population Studies*, 23, (1969). 199-223; Peter Laslett, ‘The Comparative History of Household and Family’, *Journal of Social History*, 4, (1970), 75-87; Peter Laslett, Comparing Household Structure Over Time and between Cultures, *Comparative Studies in History and Society*, 16, (1974), 73-109; David Glass, *Population and Social Change* (London: Arnold, 1972); Richard Wall, ‘Mean Household Size in England’, in *Household and the Family in Past Time*, ed. by Peter Laslett and Richard Wall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, (1972), pp. 159-204; Edward Wrigley, *Family Reconstitution: Introduction to English Historical Demography* (London: Weidenfield and Nicholson, 1966); Edward Wrigley, Richard Davis, John Oeppen and Roger Schofield, *English Population History from Family Reconstitution, 1560-1837* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

sex, marital status and occupation and their impact on the size and structure of the family and household.⁴ In fact, the family as a subject for historical research in the 1970s and 1980s was certainly not neglected, as evidenced by further studies, such as that of Glass, which focused on social mobility between generations.⁵ Historical demographic studies of the family and household structure undertaken by historians, such as Wall, have also made a significant contribution to the construction of population models spanning significant time periods.⁶ It is, however, the work of Wrigley and Schofield undertaken from the late 1960s through to the early 1980s, that is of particular note in the field of demographic history and which has been particularly influential in historical research generally.⁷ Wrigley's study on family reconstitution and his joint collaboration with Schofield on English population history between 1541 and 1817 enhanced historical understanding by demonstrating the application and value of two principal methods, family reconstitution and the aggregation of parish register data to determine population size, life expectancy at birth, age structure and net migration totals. Importantly this methodology has also facilitated a revised model of the interplay between economic and demographic variables. However, the work of Wrigley and Schofield has not escaped criticism and their demographic approach to population history has been accused of being based on 'a mere handful of variables, and ... at almost every stage it is held to have operated in a manner which was simple, predictable and linear, rather than complex, volatile and non-linear.'⁸ Their methodological approach is further criticised for being at variance with the more recent approaches, 'which increasingly stress localism and particularism, and assert the importance of economic, social and cultural factors, and acknowledge the complexity and

⁴ Laslett, 'Size and Structure of the Household'. 199-223.

⁵ Glass, David *Population and Social Change*.

⁶ Wall, 'Mean Household Size in England', 159-204.

⁷ Wrigley, Edward, *Family Reconstitution*; Wrigley Edward & Schofield, Richard, *English Population History*.

⁸ John Hatcher, 'Understanding the Population History of England, 1450-1750', *Past and Present*, 180, (2003), 83-130 (p. 85).

unpredictability in the relationship between cause and effect.’⁹ However, despite this very valid criticism, the study of population history based on demographic analysis and its ‘immersion in relevant social, economic and political data,’ has contributed to the understanding of late early modern society.¹⁰

An increasing interest in cultural and social issues developed from the late 1970s and into the 1980s. In fact, much of the greater interest in the experience of old age as a subject for historical research can be traced back to Keith Thomas’s seminal essay on age and authority in early modern England, in which he began by stating that, ‘there is nothing constant about the social meaning of age.’¹¹ This, in the view of Helen Yallop, ‘opened the door to the “problematization” of ageing as a subject for historical investigation.’¹² Thomas’s essay pulls together a wide range and variety of evidence and while seemingly agreeing with the view that in early modern England the status of the elderly was to an extent, ‘determined by their rarity and accumulated wisdom’, he questions any depiction of them as revered and venerated members of society. Rather he believed that, ‘for those whose earning capacity depended on their physical strength, old age had little to commend it.’¹³ Importantly, Thomas concludes that eighteenth-century society became more ‘age graduated’ and that the ‘redundancy of the elderly was increasingly emphasised.’¹⁴ Interestingly, Thomas’s essay coincided with rising present-day societal concerns regarding the demographic changes being experienced and the

⁹ Ibid., p. 126

¹⁰ Paul Fideler, *Social Welfare in Pre-industrial England* (London: Palgrave: MacMillan, 2006), p. 161.

¹¹ Keith Thomas, ‘Age and Authority in Early Modern England’, *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 62 (1976), 205-248 (p. 205).

¹² Helen Yallop, *Age and Identity in Eighteenth-Century England* (London: Routledge, 2013), p. 6.

¹³ Thomas, ‘Age and Authority’ 46.

¹⁴ Margaret Pelling & Richard Smith, eds. *Life, Death, and the Elderly: Historical Perspectives* (London: Routledge, 1991), p.4.

implications of an ageing population, concerns which certainly introduced ‘a degree of urgency and relevance to the intrinsic scholarly appeal of the subject.’¹⁵

Historical interest in ageing and old age also came about through the historiography of poverty, which while acknowledging the importance of social class has also paid significant attention to the impact of ageing, the role of the poor law and, communal care for the sick and elderly. A number of historians including Keith Snell, Paul Slack, John Broad and Samantha Williams have explored poverty and the role of the poor law within the context of economic change and its impact on the rural labour market and by implication on the aged poor.¹⁶ In particular, Snell’s seminal study of the labouring poor together with his later studies on settlement and poor relief in rural England and Wales provide a comprehensive overview of social and agrarian change between the seventeenth and nineteenth century. Snell’s study which is based on a comprehensive review of the settlement records of a number of eastern and south-eastern counties concluded that local economic conditions and the seasonality of agricultural employment largely determined the response of each parish to settlement and poor relief issues. Importantly, in so doing, Snell established an important causal link between poverty and economic structure upon which other historians have subsequently built.

In a similar vein, Byung Khun Song in his study of the administration of the poor law in Oxfordshire explored whether parishes adopted different policies on poor relief according to the particular economic circumstances they were experiencing.¹⁷ While, Tim Hitchcock and

¹⁵ Botelho, Lynn & Thane, Pat, eds. *Women and Ageing*, p. 2.

¹⁶ Keith Snell, *Annals of the Labouring Poor*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); Paul Slack, *From Reformation to improvement: public welfare in early modern England*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); John Broad, ‘Housing the Rural Poor in Southern England 1650-1850’, *The Agricultural History Review*, 48, (2000), 151-170; Samantha Williams, *Poverty, Gender and Lifecycle under the English Poor Law 1760-1834* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2011).

¹⁷ Byung Khun Song, ‘Parish Typology and the Operation of the Poor Laws in Early Nineteenth-Century Oxfordshire’, *The Agricultural History Review*, 50 (2002), 203-224.

Robert Shoemaker argue that alterations to the administration of poor relief were to an extent the result of pressure exerted by the labouring poor as a result of economic change.¹⁸

Although paying little specific attention to rural parishes Slack's work on public welfare in early modern England provides a valuable insight into the thinking, re-thinking and experimentation in welfare provision which took place between the fifteenth and eighteenth century. While Broad in his study of accommodation for the poor in southern England, which focused on the nature and provision of accommodation available for the rural poor, has argued that housing provision was a significant factor in the welfare support provided to the poor. Based on the case studies of two Bedfordshire communities, Campton and Shefford, Williams has also examined the complex interaction of lifecycle, gender, and poverty. A significant contribution towards our understanding of the complex interaction of poverty, gender and social welfare has also been made by Kevin Siena's study on venereal disease, hospitals and the urban poor.¹⁹

The historiography of poverty is considerable and the impact of the old poor law on the well-being of the elderly has been extensively debated from a legalistic, administrative and institutional perspective.²⁰ However, more recently, historical interest on the treatment of the poor has 'shifted much more to reconstructing the multiple experiences of poverty' based on the analysis of poor law records.²¹ Typical of this approach is Henry French's study of the size, scope, changes and significance of poor relief to the labouring poor in this period. The generosity, or lack of generosity, of the poor law has also been an important focus for a number

¹⁸ Tim Hitchcock and Robert Shoemaker, *London Lives: poverty, crime and the making of a modern city, 1690-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

¹⁹ Kevin Siena, *Venereal Disease, Hospitals and the Urban Poor: London's 'Foul Wards' 1600- 1800*, (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2004, Paperback, 2010)

²⁰ Steven King, *Poverty and Welfare in England*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), p. 3.

²¹ Henry French, 'An irrevocable shift: detailing the dynamics of rural poverty in southern England', *The Economic History Review*, 68 (2015), 769-805 (769).

of historians. Some historians, such as Steven King, argue that the poor law provided minimal assistance while others, such as David Thomson, emphasise the generous nature of the support it provided to the aged poor. The studies of Thomson although primarily concerned with the early nineteenth century have made a significant contribution to the historiography of poverty and that of old age. Thomson focused principally on paupers at the start of the nineteenth century and argues, based on his analysis of eighteenth-century legal interpretations and accounts of the law relating to poor relief, that despite the legal provisions of the 1598-1601 legislation it was the community rather than family which became responsible for the care of the aged, based on the cultural norm that 'it is un-English behaviour to expect children to support parents'.²²

The generosity of the poor law towards the aged is also argued by Richard Smith in his influential study on pension trends and gender between 1650 and 1800. Based on an in-depth analysis of both census returns and poor law records, Smith considered the value of poor law pensions to relief recipients.²³ His findings suggesting that not only were the aged in receipt of an increasing amount of poor law expenditure and that although weekly pensions compared favourably to prices and wages at the beginning of the eighteenth century they then declined in value in the face of a significant rise in the rate of inflation in the second half of the eighteenth century and in the first half of the nineteenth century. In doing so, Smith confirmed the findings of Tim Wales earlier study which had focused on poverty and the critical points in the lifecycle where poor relief was likely to be necessary, within the context of the economy of makeshifts employed by the poor.²⁴

²² David Thomson, 'The Welfare of the Elderly in the Past; A Family or Community Responsibility?', in *Life, Death, and the Elderly*, ed by, Smith, Margaret & Smith, Richard, pp. 194-221 (p. 194).

²³ Richard Smith, 'Ageing and well-being in early modern England: pension trends and gender preferences under the English Old Poor Law c. 1650-1800' in *Old Age from Antiquity to Post Modernity*, ed. by Paul Johnson and Pat Thane, (Abingdon: Routledge, 1998), pp. 64-95.

²⁴ Tim Wales, 'Poverty, Poor Relief and Lifecycle', in *Land, Kinship and Lifecycle*, ed. by Richard Smith, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1984) pp. 351-404.

In contrast, studies by King and Pat Thane, have cast doubt on the generosity of the poor law towards the elderly. Thane, for instance, argues that the poor law system was ‘flexible if never generous’.²⁵ While also questioning the generosity of the poor law, King’s study of Calverley in northern England, demonstrated the value of using an approach known as multi-source record linkage to recreate the social and demographic lifestyles of members of the lower orders.²⁶

King’s study of the poor law and welfare in Calverley reconstructed the experience of poor relief based on an analysis of poor law records, revealing that regular long-term relief payments to the elderly in this region were almost non-existent and that weekly payments were below subsistence level, a pattern he found duplicated across northern England and which he argues was a result of economic structures and cultural traditions and which demonstrated, ‘the depth of intra- and inter-regional variety in the demand for, and supply of, communal welfare.’²⁸ In addition, he identified the problematic nature of the manipulation and interpretation of poor law sources which he stressed needed to be undertaken with great care, an issue also identified by Smith who highlighted the problematic nature of identifying who relief provision was actually intended for.²⁹ King’s studies which are the result of the extensive mining of poor law records and documentation display a methodology characteristic of later studies in this area.³⁰ In addition, his collaboration with Alannah Tomkins resulted in an important attempt to quantify the concept known as the ‘economy of makeshifts’ in order to arrive at a more precise

²⁵ Pat Thane, ‘Government and Society in England and Wales 1750-1914’, in Francis Thompson, *The Cambridge Social History of England* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge, 1990), pp. 1-61 (p.10).

²⁶ Steven King, ‘Multi-Source Record Linkage in a Rural Industrial Community’, *History and Computing*, 6 (2010), 133-142.

²⁸ King, Steven King, *Poverty and Welfare*, p. 51.

²⁹ Richard Smith, ‘Ageing and well-being’ in *Old Age from Antiquity to Post Modernity*, ed. by Johnson and Thane, pp. 64-95.

³⁰ King, Steven, *Poverty and Welfare*, p. 13. Lynn Botelho, *Old Age and the English Poor Law 1500-1700* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2004); Richard Smith, ‘Ageing and well-being’ in *Old Age from Antiquity to Post Modernity*, ed. by Johnson and Thane, pp. 64-95.

definition rather than the vague label which is often used by historians.³¹ Furthermore, in his study of the economic development which took place in the eighteenth century, King argues that early economic development was underwritten by the poor law.³²

Joseph Harley, in common with King, adopts a regional perspective in his study on the material lives of the poor in the long eighteenth century and highlights, that apart from the occasional case study, that historians have generally neglected this aspect of the lives of the poor. Harley, through an analysis of pauper inventories identified changes in the material lives of the poor which took place in this period. His analysis of pauper inventories revealing that the poor acquired a greater quantity and variety of household goods and which he suggests points to an improvement in their material lives as the eighteenth-century progressed.³³ However, the view of Harley needs to be considered within the context of the overall standard of living. Charles Feinstein in his study of real wages and the standard of living between 1770 and 1850 concluded that for the average lower orders family the standard of living improved by less than 15%.³⁴ While, more recent studies by both Vivienne Richmond and Louise Falcini, have explored the material lives of the poor through clothing and cleanliness and identified the discomfort and physiological trauma which was caused through old and inadequate clothing and poor cleanliness in this period.³⁵

³¹ Steven King & Alannah Tomkins, eds. *The Poor in England 1700-1850: An Economy of Makeshifts* (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 2003).

³² Steven King, 'Poor Relief and English Economic Development Reappraised' *The Economic History Review*, 50 (1997), 360-36.

³³ Joseph Harley, 'Material lives of the English poor: a regional perspective, c.1670-1834', (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Leicester, 2016).

³⁴ Charles Feinstein, 'Pessimism Perpetuated: Real Wages and the Standard of Living in Britain during and after the Industrial Revolution', *The Journal of Economic History*, 58 (1998), 625-658.

³⁵ Vivienne Richmond, *Clothing the Poor in Nineteenth-Century England* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2013); Louise Falcini, 'Cleanliness and the Poor in Eighteenth-Century London' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Reading, 2018).

Histories of Gender

Since the 1980s gender has become an important focus for historical study and has increasingly been used as a category of historical analysis and as the means of characterising the difference between men and women. By considering the role of gender in the construction of old age historians have revealed the manner in which female old age was understood by contemporaries and also how ageing and old age was thought to differ between early modern women according to social class. Of particular significance has been the work of Joan Scott and her identification of the usefulness of gender as an analytical tool. Scott's assertion that the characteristics assigned to and agreed to by women differed according to social class and that they were liable to change over time has been of fundamental influence for later studies. Scott defined gender as 'a social category imposed on a sexed body,' which provides 'the knowledge that establishes meanings for bodily differences ... and is used in images, texts, and practices to influence meanings, and these meanings then shape people's understandings and experiences.'³⁶ It is now recognised that gender is socially and culturally constructed and therefore prone to change and is not immutable. In contrast, the term 'sex', suggests differences between men and women are biologically based and which are unchanging. The acknowledgement that gender is socially and culturally constructed and can therefore 'vary with time, culture, class and ethnicity', has exerted significant influence on the historiography of gender.³⁷ In the development of gender history, the inclusion of old age within the dialogue focusing on the differences between the sexes was viewed as being a logical step.

Initially, early gender studies were subject to the influence of social history and were concerned about the representation of gender differences and how these differences impacted on social,

³⁶ Joan Scott, 'A Useful Category of Historical Analysis', *The American Historical Review*, 91, (1986), 1053-1075 (p. 1056).

³⁷ Hannah Barker, and Elaine Chalus, eds. *Gender in Eighteenth-Century England: Roles, Representations and Responsibilities* (London: Routledge, 2014), p. 6.

economic, cultural and legal structures to restrict women's lives. Studies by Lawrence Stone and Anthony Fletcher typified this approach which focused on the interconnections between age, status and the construction and experience of old age. Fletcher's work on gender in England from the sixteenth century to the nineteenth century providing an overview of patriarchy and the social and cultural dominance of the male.³⁸ In common with Judith Bennet, who considered patriarchy to 'have existed in many forms and varieties', Fletcher considered patriarchy to be a diverse entity which should be viewed as being dynamic rather than static.³⁹ Fletcher charts changing societal attitudes and gender constructs from sources drawn from drama, literature, ballads, conduct books and medical texts to explore the means through which men and women understood and made sense of their social world and interrelationships.

Interest in gender as a subject for historical investigation has now come a long way from the focus on representations of patriarchy and on the elite, such as typified by the studies of Fletcher. In their influential work on women and ageing, Lynn Botelho and Thane, drew attention to the 'historical specificity of the cultural value of age and ageing,' and in doing so made a significant contribution to the historiography of old age by drawing attention to the impact of gender on the ageing process and old age.⁴⁰ Botelho's research on the depiction and contemporary perceptions of post-menopausal women in early modern England provides a further important example of the relationship between gender and old age.⁴¹ Importantly,

³⁸ Anthony Fletcher, *Gender, Sex and Subordination in England 1500-1800* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1995); Alice Clarke, *The Working Life of Women in the Seventeenth Century* (London: Routledge, 1992); Joan Kelly, *Woman, History and Theory: The Essays of Joan Kelly* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1986); Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800* (London: Penguin, 1979); Judith Bennett, *Ale Beer and Brewster's in England: Women's Work in a Changing World* (Oxford: University of Oxford, 1996); Martha Howell, *Women, Production and Patriarchy in Late Medieval Cities* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1986).

³⁹ Judith Bennett, 'Feminism and History', *Gender History*, 1, (1989), 259-263.

⁴⁰ Yallop, Helen, *Age and Identity*, p. 7.

⁴¹ Lynn Botelho, 'Old Age and the Menopause in Rural Women of Early Modern Suffolk', in *Woman and Ageing*, ed. by, Botelho, Lynn & Thane, Pat, 43-66.

studies of this nature reinforced the belief that 'ageing is gendered (that is, operates differently for men and women), and is also socially constructed.'⁴²

More recent studies by historians such as Alexandra Shepard and Amanda Flather have also begun to explore the relationship between ideas and experience and that people could absorb, adapt or ignore ideas depending on context.⁴³ Consequently, scholars are now also interested in gendered experience according to social categories such as social status and age, as well as a chronological and social context.

Shepard's pioneering work on manhood in early modern England, which focuses primarily on the sixteenth and seventeenth century, examines the relationship between manhood and patriarchy and explores the extent to which older men were able to maintain their identity and masculine status.⁴⁴ Shepard identified how the experiences of old men and their ability to maintain their masculine status in old age differed according to social and economic status as well as physical well-being, drawing attention to what she terms as the 'emergence of deepening fissures between concepts of manhood along class lines.'⁴⁵ Social status, according to Shepard, determined the lifecycle choices of old men in rural Suffolk and was key to their expectation and experiences of old age and of their masculine identity and status.

Shepard after initially focusing on idealised representations of manhood before exploring actual social practice draws attention to the multiple and various meanings of manhood and what she considers the 'muddled' and 'contradictory' nature of patriarchy.⁴⁶ Importantly, Shepard suggests that old age had a complex and variable impact on men's access to patriarchal

⁴² Yallop, Helen, *Age and Identity*, p. 5.

⁴³ Alexandra Shepard, *Meanings of Manhood in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Amanda Flather, 'Space, Place, and Gender: The Sexual and Spatial Division of Labour in the Early Modern Household', *History and Theory*, 52 (2013), 344-360 (p. 344).

⁴⁴ Shepard, Alexandra, *Meanings of Manhood*.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 186.

⁴⁶ Lawrence Haber, 'Meanings of Manhood in Early modern England (review)', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 58, (2005), 723-725 (p. 723).

power which changed depending on social and economic status and physical debility. Her work has revealed, in common with that of Elizabeth Foyster's earlier work, that while patriarchal constructions of masculine identity were based on ideals of economic and social independence as well as marriage and authority over dependents, few men were in fact able to achieve these ideals.⁴⁷ The hierarchies of social status, marital status and age characteristic of early modern England, in the view of Shepard, interacted with gender 'to produce a complex multidimensional map of power relations which by no means privileged all men or subordinated all women.'⁴⁸ Both the young and old were dependent members of society and so had less access to 'patriarchal dividends', while men from the middling classes often depended on the income from the paid employment performed by their wives. The additional income that a wife provided to the family budget of elderly unskilled farm labourers often being the difference between maintaining independence in old age or sinking into dependency.

Shepard utilized prescriptive literature to identify the commonly held notions of masculine normative behaviour, examining the expectations and experiences of men at various stages in the lifecycle from youth to old age and, explaining differences with reference to age, marital status and behaviour. The second part of Shepard's work, based on local archival research in Cambridge, explored the manner in which the norms described in prescriptive literature were actually enacted in everyday behaviour with a particular emphasis on the importance of reputation and credit to masculine identity. This approach exposed the manner in which contradictions and tensions between the ideal model of gender relations, disseminated through the pulpit and prescriptive literature and, the experiences and practices of every-day life. Shepard's approach also revealed ways in which men either benefited, were penalised, resisted, or simply ignored patriarchal dictates, and facilitated an evaluation of the allocation of

⁴⁷ Elizabeth Foyster, *Manhood in Early Modern England* (London: Longman, 1999).

⁴⁸ Shepard, Alexandra, *Meanings of Manhood*, p. 3.

patriarchal benefits not just between men and women but also between men, providing the means to understand the manner in which gender interacts with social class and identity.⁴⁹ This signified an important development in the study of masculinity as ‘gender rarely, if ever, stands alone in the formation of human subjectivity; rather, gender is one set of cultural codes which usually enmesh with other important aspects, such as ... hierarchies of class.’⁵⁰

Shepard’s study of masculinity revealed that men were not uniformly powerful and that access to ‘patriarchal dividends’ depended upon age, marital status, social status and gender and that for some men and in certain situations, patriarchal ideals were mostly irrelevant.⁵¹ Shepard also challenged the model of anxious masculinity, a common theme in the historiography of the period.⁵² Alternatively, Shepard claims ‘manhood and patriarchy were not equated in early modern England’.⁵³ Not all men aspired to patriarchal ideals and the differences between men were of more significance than between men and women, ‘manhood was forged as much between men as between men and women’.⁵⁴ Shepard’s work which explored the relationship between patriarchal ideals and the actual experience of men as it varied according to age, status and context has been highly influential and encouraged the exploration of masculine experience in a number of contexts in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Flather’s study has two concurrent themes, the notion about gender and the space that comprised part of the conceptual structure for men and women’s lives and how they imposed meaning on it. The core of her study explores how men and women ‘interpreted patriarchal notions of gendered space in the course of daily life’ and revealed how space was important for establishing and sustaining the hierarchy of social and gender order in early modern

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 251.

⁵⁰ John Arnold & Sean Brady, *What is Masculinity?* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 4

⁵¹ Shepard Alexandra, *Meanings of Manhood*, p. 1.

⁵² Harvey, ‘The History of Masculinity, 1650-1800’, *Journal of British Studies*, 44 (2005), 296-311 (p.299).

⁵³ Shepard, Alexandra, *Meanings of Manhood*, p. 1.

⁵⁴ Harvey, ‘The History of Masculinity’, 299.

England. That the social system was ‘highly complex, dynamic and varied according to context’ is a key argument in Flather’s study.⁵⁵ Gender and the construction of identity are complex and the introduction of spatial theory by Flather complicates understanding even further, however, her innovative approach, together with that of Shepard, has made a significant contribution to the historiography of age and gender and in particular an understanding of the diversity, inconsistency and ambiguities inherent in the construction of gender.

It is now acknowledged that early modern notions regarding the division of work and space, ‘between men and productive work outside the home on the one hand and women and the reproduction and consumption inside the house, on the other, bore little relation to reality.’⁵⁶

Flather’s work on the sexual and spatial division of labour in the early modern household and her subsequent studies which focus on gender and space provided a new perspective on social relations in the early modern period. While arguing in common with Laura Gowing and Amanda Vickery that the construction of gender in early modern England was the result of the interaction between moral prescriptive literature and everyday experience her study differs in the emphasis she gives to space as ‘an arena of social interaction.’⁵⁷ Similarly, the notion of space and access to space, is also explored in Emma Griffin’s study of popular sports and pastimes in the late seventeenth century and eighteenth century.⁵⁸

With the exception of the rare occasions when gender has been considered in relation to old age, the focus of previous studies has almost solely been on the lives of aged women. Studies on eighteenth-century masculinity are more limited in number, however, a number of more recent studies by historians such as Hannah Barker, Karen Harvey and Judith Bailey have

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 174.

⁵⁶ Flather, ‘Space, Place, and Gender’, 344.

⁵⁷ Flather, ‘Space, Place and Gender’, 2.

⁵⁸ Emma Griffin, *England’s Revelry: A History of Popular Sports and Pastimes, 1660-1800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

utilized various approaches to the subject and have made a valuable contribution to our understanding of the complex relationship between old age and gender in this period.⁵⁹ Barker's study of middling and lower class masculinity in eighteenth-century Manchester, focused on masculinity amongst different social groups.⁶⁰ By focusing on middling and lower class masculinity in eighteenth-century Manchester, rather than on a London-centric elite, her study reveals the emergence of a variety of masculinities and has identified the need for greater attention to be paid to men outside the public sphere and in regions other than London as well as from different levels of society.

Harvey's studies on masculinity and domesticity in eighteenth-century Britain have also explored the relationship between men and domesticity, focusing on the transformation of domestic patriarchy to new types of family relationships, through the course of the century.⁶¹ By investigating how men expressed and accounted for their involvement in domestic activities Harvey's study has increased understanding of masculinity, the domestic environment and domestic patriarchy. Yet, in spite of prevalent contemporary notions about gender differences in the latter part of the eighteenth century, and the gender divide becoming more acute, there was still a considerable degree of continuity in gender roles throughout the century. However, it is important to note that Harvey focuses primarily on the middling and upper orders and the relevance of her work to the labouring class is more questionable. Interestingly, the association between the experience of old age, social status and gender was recognized as early as 1696 in the *Essay In Defence of the Female Sex*, which forwarded the view that there was a greater

⁵⁹ Hannah Barker, 'Soul, purse and family: middling and lower class masculinity in eighteenth-century Manchester', *Social History*, 33. (2008), 12-25; Karen Harvey, 'Masculinity and Domesticity in Eighteenth-Century Britain', *Gender and History*, (2009), pp. 520-540; Karen Harvey, *The Little Republic and Domestic Authority in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Joanne Bailey, 'Masculinity and Fatherhood c. 1760-1830', in *What is Masculinity*, ed. by Arnold, John and Brady, Sean, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 167-188.

⁶⁰ Barker, 'Soul, purse and family century Manchester', 12-35.

⁶¹ Harvey, 'Masculinity and Domesticity', 520-540.

degree of equality between men and women who were at the bottom of the social ladder, ‘the inferior sort ... such as not having Stocks to follow ... who subsist upon their daily labour. For amongst these, though not so equal as that of Brutes, yet the Condition of the two sexes is more level, than amongst Gentlemen, City Traders, or rich Yeomen.’⁶²

Historical understanding of masculinity in the eighteenth century has also been enhanced by Bailey’s study of the relationship between masculinity and fatherhood and in so doing identified new directions for further historical research through the exploration of fatherhood as an individual or generational experience.⁶³ Bailey’s gendered study has also increased our understanding of change over time. By conceptualising how fatherhood interacts with different masculine domains her study demonstrates ‘a dynamic picture of fatherhood and fathering’.⁶⁴ This has made it possible for historians to historicize fatherhood, identifying that its meaning and significance change according to social and economic contexts.

The history of work undertaken by men and women has also been the subject of numerous studies since the ground breaking work of Susan Amussen.⁶⁵ Nicola Verdon’s influential study which examined the decline of the hand-spinning industry and the subsequent increased reliance on casual and seasonal work in agriculture has been particularly influential in highlighting the significance of region, gender and age in determining the experience of work for an unskilled labourer.⁶⁶ While much has been argued about the impact of parliamentary enclosure and the increased wage dependence of agricultural workers, the extent to which labourers enjoyed common pasture rights, as Leigh Shaw Taylor points out, has never been

⁶² Anonymous, *An Essay In Defence of the Female Sex* (London: A. Roper, 1696), p. 15.

⁶³ Bailey, ‘Masculinity and Fatherhood’, in *What is Masculinity*, ed. by Arnold, John and Brady, Sean, 167-188.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 181.

⁶⁵ Susan Amussen, *An Ordered Society : Gender and Class in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988).

⁶⁶ Nicola Verdon, ‘The rural labour market in the early nineteenth century: women’s and children’s employment, family income, and the 1834 Poor Law Report’, *The Economic History Review*, 1 (2002), 299–323.

demonstrated. In fact, his study on the emergence of an agricultural proletariat, reveals that enclosure of common pasture did not result in agricultural labourers being proletarianized due to their loss.⁶⁷

Stuart Hogarth's study of health, sickness and plebeian masculinity, which explores the relationship between work and health, revealed that the masculinity of men from the lower orders was predominately determined by the ability to perform physical labour.⁶⁸ An understanding of manliness and masculinity is also the subject of Joanne Begiato's study on manliness between 1760 and 1900, whose particular value lies in the consideration it gives to elderly and disabled men, who are often neglected in the history of masculinity and in this respect builds on the earlier work of David Turner on physical impairment.⁶⁹

Throughout much of the 1980s the study of ageing and old age remained of only peripheral interest to scholars of the eighteenth century and while the medieval and modern period were subject to a number of studies the eighteenth century remained largely neglected.⁷⁰ The neglect of old age as a subject of study in this period prompting Botelho to state that 'it is the late early modern period that is the most neglected era of this generally neglected subject.'⁷¹ However,

⁶⁷ Leigh Shaw Taylor, 'Parliamentary Enclosure and the Emergence of an English Agricultural Proletariat', *The Journal of Economic History*, 61 (2001), 640–62.

⁶⁸ Stuart Hogarth, 'Reluctant patients: health, sickness and the embodiment of plebeian masculinity in nineteenth-century Britain. Evidence from working men's autobiographies' (unpublished PhD thesis, London Metropolitan University, 2010).

⁶⁹ Joanne Begiato, *Manliness in Britain 1760-1900: Bodies, Emotions, and Material Culture*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020); David Turner, *Disability in eighteenth-century England: imagining physical impairment* (London: Routledge, 2012).

⁷⁰ Shulamith Shahar, *Growing Old in the Middle Ages: Winter Clothes Us in Shadow and Pain* (London: Routledge, 1997); David Thomson, 'Provision for the Elderly in England, 1830-1908' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Cambridge, 1980); Thomson, 'I Am Not My Father's Keeper: : Families and the Elderly in Nineteenth Century England, *Law and History Review*, 2(1984), pp. 265-286.

⁷¹ Botelho, 'Aged and Impotent; parish relief of the aged poor in early modern Suffolk', in *Charity, self-interest and Welfare*, ed. by Martin Daunton (London: Routledge, 1996), pp.91-112 (p. 93).

in the 1990s and early 2000s a number of collections focusing on early modern England, edited by historians such as Martin Daunton, Paul Johnson and Tim Hitchcock, were published.⁷²

The collection of essays edited by Daunton trace the development of welfare policy in Britain and examine the support provided to the poor, infirm and aged from the sixteenth to the twentieth century. While, the collection of essays edited by Johnson and Thane examine the role of the elderly in history and its empirical approach makes a significant contribution to our appreciation of old age in past societies. The essays edited by Hitchcock demonstrate the value of archival sources in providing an insight into the lives of the poor in the eighteenth and nineteenth century. Collections of this type, despite criticism from Ottaway, for containing narrowly focused studies which have 'rarely sought to deliver more than general truths about old age in history,' have undoubtedly been important in contributing to our understanding of ageing and old age.⁷³

Despite the absence of monographs devoted to old age prior to 2000, a number of studies have made a significant contribution to our understanding of ageing and old age in the late early modern period. Adopting a variety of approaches, recent studies have increasingly focused on the experiences of elderly men of varying social status, geographically and at different times.⁷⁴ Historians such as Botelho, Thane and Ottaway provide through their studies a valuable insight into the realities of poverty, gender and old age in the eighteenth century from a variety of

⁷² Paul Johnson and Pat Thane eds. *Old Age from Antiquity to Post-Modernity* (London: Routledge, 1998); Martin Daunton, ed. *Charity and Self-Interest in the English Past* (London: Routledge, 1996). Tim Hitchcock, ed. *Chronicling Poverty: The Voices and Strategies of the English Poor, 1640-1840*, (London Macmillan Press Ltd., 1997).

⁷³ Susannah Ottaway, *The Decline of Life, Old Age in Eighteenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p, 5.

⁷⁴ French, 'An irrevocable shift', 769.

perspectives, including communal care for the sick and the elderly, living standards, accommodation and gender.⁷⁵

Thane, in her study of old people and their families, examined the role of the old and contribution to the family as well as societal views regarding the provision of support for the old. While Botelho's study of parish relief of the aged in early modern Suffolk focused on two parishes, Cratfield and Poslingford, and explored not only the provision of pensions to the aged but significantly for future research, the need to place the study of poor relief within the context of the interrelationship between poverty, the economic structure of the parish and community attitudes towards relief provision to the aged poor. Importantly, Botelho's study reveals that poverty and poor relief did not exist in a simple cause and effect relationship. The relative importance of familial and community support for the aged and importantly the particular motivation behind each source of support, is the subject of Ottaway's study on the provision of support for the elderly in the eighteenth century. The study's significance lies in Ottaway's acknowledgement that while family and community support were important she also identifies the key role played by self-help. Self-help, as Ottaway notes, epitomized eighteenth-century expectations that the elderly would seek to continue to work until prevented by physical decrepitude. Although in the view of Ottaway previous studies have enhanced the profile of the aged she also argues that it has also resulted in the aged as being viewed in terms of 'disability, poverty, isolation and role loss.'⁷⁶ She suggests that while previous studies have focused on the provision of support to the elderly from external sources they have neglected to

⁷⁵ Pat Thane, Old People and their families in the English past, in *Charity, Self Interest and Welfare in the English Past*, ed. by Dauntton 113-138; Pat Thane, 'The family lives of old people', in *Old Age from Antiquity to Post-Modernity*, ed. by Johnson & Pat pp. 180-210; Lynn Botelho, 'Old Age and menopause in Rural Women of Early Modern Suffolk', in *Women and Ageing in British Society Since 1500*, ed. by Lynn Botelho and Pat Thane (London: Routledge, 2001), pp. 41-65; Susannah Ottaway, *The Decline of Life*; Susannah Ottaway, 'Providing for the elderly in eighteenth-century England', *Continuity and Change*, 13.3 (1998), 391-418.

⁷⁶ Ottaway, 'Providing for the elderly in eighteenth-century England', p. 415.

consider adequately the various ways in which the elderly supported themselves and which provide the means to arrive at a more nuanced picture of old age in this period.

A monograph on the subject of old age in the eighteenth century was absent until the publication of Ottaway's work on old age in eighteenth-century England.⁷⁷ Ottaway's work examined, how old age was determined, the extent to which individuals continued to work during old age, the aged's home environment and community support for the aged poor within the context of the economic and social changes being experienced in the eighteenth century. However, in common with much of the preceding historiography of old age, Ottaway fails to consider adequately the diversity which existed in the aged population and although she explores what age marked the onset of old age she ultimately conforms to the historiographical consensus that 60 years marked the threshold of entry into old age.⁷⁸ In addition, her viewpoint that the onset of old age was not unduly impacted by social class and occupation is open to challenge, as the contemporary source material on which her views are based predominantly reflect the experiences and situation of the middling and upper orders of eighteenth-century society.

However, Ottaway's consideration of the relationship between chronological and cultural determinants in the definition of old age is of significance. Although concurring with Thane that chronological age played an increasing role in the determination of old age she ultimately concludes in line with the historiographical consensus that an understanding of the impact of cultural determinants are essential to an understanding of ageing and old age in the eighteenth century. However, perhaps Ottaway's most telling observation was that the increased interest

⁷⁷ Ottaway, Susannah, *The Decline of Life*.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 16-64.

in calendar age in the eighteenth century had an important corollary and resulted in the aged becoming more identifiable as a distinct and dependent group in society.⁷⁹

Ottaway's more recent study on the eighteenth-century workhouse makes a significant contribution to our understanding of its place in the provision of institutional welfare.⁸⁰ She highlights the need to examine the perception of these institutions with the actual reality and in particular the image of the workhouse as 'an object of fear and loathing ... a potent symbol of oppression of the poor ... and the ultimate system of neglect and despair for the old sunk in poverty.'⁸¹ While examining the frequency with which the elderly were placed within workhouses Ottaway seeks to understand society's rationale for their use. The study contrasts the view of the workhouse as a hospice catering for the medical needs of the elderly, with the opposite view, 'of the ubiquitous and compelling depiction of the workhouse as malodorous and unsanitary prisons.'⁸² Ottaway's study highlights the need for further research in this area and that only by reconciling these two incompatible views can a more nuanced picture of the workhouse and its place in eighteenth-century society be established. In her innovative study on poor law institutions a digital 3D model of a house of industry was created which facilitated an analysis not just of the aims and aspirations of the elite that created it but how the agency of the poor, their lives, social relations and duties were influenced by the design and layout of the workhouse building itself.⁸³

⁷⁹ Ibid., 12.

⁸⁰ Susannah Ottaway, 'The Elderly in the Eighteenth-Century Workhouse', in *Medicine and the Workhouse*, ed. by Jonathan Reinartz and Leonard Schwarz, *Studies in Medical History* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2013), 40-57.

⁸¹ Ottaway, Susannah, *The Decline of Life*, p. 247.

⁸² Susannah Ottaway, 'The Elderly in the Eighteenth-Century Workhouse', in *Medicine and the Workhouse*, ed. by Reinartz & Laslett, p. 41.

⁸³ Susannah Ottaway, 'Reconsidering poor law institutions by virtually: reconstructing and reviewing the eighteenth-century workhouse', *Historical Journal*, 64 (2021), 557-582.

The workhouse is also the subject of Tim Hitchcock's study of the creation of Corporations of the Poor between 1695 and 1750.⁸⁴ While Jeremy Boulton and Leonard Schwarz make an important contribution to the study of institutional medical provision in their work on the medicalization of the parish workhouse and the increased medical services provided by the workhouse between 1725 and 1824.⁸⁵

Although the institutional accommodation provided by workhouses has been the subject of a number of studies the nature of the accommodation provided by almshouses, with the exception of studies by Alannah Tomkins and Angela Nicholls, has been largely neglected. However, the study by Tomkins which contrasts the difference in the nature of almshouse and workhouse accommodation provides a valuable insight into the *modus operandi* of both institutions and the quality of life they afforded the elderly and in particular the possible loss of personal independence suffered by almshouse residents and workhouse inmates.⁸⁶

The studies of Williams, on labourers living standards in rural England and the support provided to the elderly during the 'crisis' of the English old poor law, which explore both living standards and relief provision for the elderly have been important not only for the depth of her findings but also for the methodology she adopted.⁸⁷ Her study of Campton and Shefford in Bedfordshire provides an in-depth analysis of the family situation of elderly paupers in the

⁸⁴ Tim Hitchcock, 'The English Workhouse: A Study in Institutional Poor Relief in Selected Counties, 1696-1750' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Oxford, 1985).

⁸⁵ Jeremy Boulton & Leonard Schwarz, 'The Medicalization of a Parish Workhouse in Georgian Westminster: St. Martin in the Fields, 1725-1824', *Family & Community History*, 17 (2014), 122-140.

⁸⁶ Alannah Tomkins, 'Almshouse versus Workhouse: Residential Welfare in the Eighteenth-Century Oxford', *Family and Community History*, 7 (2004), 45-58; Angela Nicholls, *Almshouses in early modern England: charitable housing in the mixed economy of welfare 1550-1725* (Martlesham: The Boydell Press, 2017).

⁸⁷ Samantha Williams, 'Poor relief, labourers' and living standards in rural England c. 1770-1834: A Bedfordshire Case Study', *Economic History Review*, 58 (2005), 485-519; Samantha Williams, 'Support for the Elderly during the 'Crisis' of the English Old Poor Law', in *Population, Welfare and Economic Change in Britain 1290-1834*, ed. by Chris Briggs (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2014), pp. 129-152.

late eighteenth century when the poor law was considered to be in ‘crisis’. The methodology adopted by Williams enabled the creation of a significant number of biographies of elderly paupers through nominal linkage between poor law records and family reconstitution based on analysis of parish registers. This approach provided uncommonly detailed accounts of the nature and value of poor relief which is unobtainable from poor law records alone and fully demonstrates the value of a microhistory approach in revealing trends over time and providing an insight into individual lives. While the recent collection of essays edited by Peter Collinge and Louise Falcini re-examines the micropolitics of poverty between 1750 and 1834 and brings together the wider arguments about the nature of welfare and increasing bureaucracy inherent in the administration of the poor law.⁸⁸

Gender is also now an important historical theme and attention has been paid to the impact of gender on poverty and old age by historians such as Williams, Thane, Botelho and Ottaway.⁸⁹

Williams whose micro-history and detailed case-studies of poverty, gender and life-cycle, drawn from her case study of two communities in Bedfordshire, also makes the very telling point that local studies provide the starting point for the exploration of much wider issues which can only be adequately addressed at parochial, family and individual level.⁹⁰

The most recent addition to the historiography of old age is Helen Yallop’s recent study of age and identity in eighteenth-century England.⁹¹ Central to Yallop’s work is the gendered nature of ageing and the relationship between masculine old age and identity. Yallop incorporates the methodologies of cultural history with the social history of medicine in order to investigate

⁸⁸ Peter Collinge and Louise Falcini, eds. *Providing for the poor: the old poor law, 1750- 1834* (London: University of London Press, 2022).

⁸⁹ Williams, Samantha, *Poverty, Gender and Lifecycle*; Susannah Ottaway, ‘The old woman’s home in eighteenth-century England’, in *Women and Ageing in British Society Since 1500*, ed. by Botelho & Thane (London: Routledge, 2001), pp. 111-138; Lynn Botelho, ‘Old Age and menopause’, in *Women and Ageing*, ed. by Botelho and Thane, pp. 43-65.

⁹⁰ Williams, Samantha, *Poverty, Gender and Lifecycle*.

⁹¹ Yallop, Helen, *Age and Identity*.

how ageing and old age were perceived in the eighteenth century. While being complimentary to Ottaway's earlier work on old age, Yallop adopts a different approach and rather than considering old age as a distinct life-stage focuses on the process by which a person achieves old age rather than on what she regards as the socially ambiguous condition of old age itself. Her work explores the meaning of ageing and old age in eighteenth-century England placing particular importance on understanding the different stages of old age prior to considering how social, spiritual, and cosmological notions influenced how the ageing process was understood. The relationship between identity and the process of ageing is approached through an analysis of socio-cultural and medical history. Drawing on contemporary advice literature as well as historical, philosophical and medical texts such as that from John Locke, Herman Boerhaave, George Cheyne, and Philip Thicknesse, Yallop investigates how the ageing process was understood by eighteenth-century society. However, while being a welcome addition to the historiography of ageing and masculinity in the eighteenth century, in common with previous studies, the situation faced by poor old men is largely neglected due to the nature of Yallop's source material, which inevitably results in a focus on the better off in eighteenth-century society and a consequent neglect of the lower orders.⁹²

Our understanding of old age has also been enhanced by a number of recent studies which have explored previously neglected aspects of ageing. For example, Ella Sbarai's recent study investigates the significant incidence of suicide in Georgian England and argues that the subject is best understood by reference to the 'ageing body', as this facilitates an appreciation of the complex interaction of issues such as physical and mental decline, social isolation and reduced

⁹² John Locke, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (London: Tho. Basset, 1690); Herman Boerhaave, *Dr. Boerhaave's Academical Lectures on the Theory of Physic* (London: W. Innys, 1751); George Cheyne, *An Essay on Regimen* (London: C. Rivington and J. Leake, 1740); Philip Thicknesse, *The Valetudinarians Bath Guide. Or, The Means of Obtaining Long Life and Health* (London: Dodsey, Brown and Wood, 1780).

status.⁹³ In similar fashion, the study of loneliness by Fay Bound Alberti argues that the loneliness experienced by many of the elderly in the eighteenth century was due to the rise of individualism and self-interest prompted by the social and economic changes being experienced.⁹⁴

Suffolk : Case Study

Despite the growing interest in old age and gender as subjects for historical research there is still a great deal to know about the situation and experience of old age for poor men in rural areas. Consequently, this thesis aims to fill some of the gaps in our understanding of the expectation and experiences of old age for men from the lower orders. A reconstruction of the expectations and experiences and an exploration of the day to day realities of old age for elderly men and how they endeavoured to achieve sustenance and maintain their residential independence is central to the study. The thesis focuses on rural Suffolk in the second half of the eighteenth century and in the first half of the nineteenth century, a geographical region that was particularly sensitive to patterns of continuity and change.

A number of factors make a strong argument for a case study of poverty, old age and gender in the rural parishes of Suffolk in this period. Suffolk experienced profound changes, demographically, economically and socially in the second half of the eighteenth century and first half of the nineteenth century, in what has been considered by some to have been, ‘a pivotal period in English history.’⁹⁵ Suffolk experienced protracted deindustrialisation during the course of the eighteenth century and declined from being one of England’s pre-eminent economic regions to one of the most heavily pauperised by the end of the century, a decline which significantly impacted the lives of the aged, their experience of old age and their quality

⁹³ Ella Sbarai, ‘The Ageing Body, Memory-Loss and Suicide in Georgian England’, *Social History of Medicine*, 35 (2021), 170–194.

⁹⁴ Fay Bound Alberti, *A Biography of Loneliness: The History of an Emotion* (London: OUP 2019).

⁹⁵ Ottaway, Susannah, *The Decline of Life*, p. 6

of life. Regional economic and social conditions allow for analysis that is especially sensitive to the influence of continuity and change and which is facilitated by the existence of extensive and rich source materials.

The study's findings are the result of a methodological approach which involved both quantitative and qualitative analysis of a wide range of national and local archival source material and which is described in greater detail in the relevant chapters. Research focused on the following archival sources, parliamentary reports, national and local official documentation, 1801, 1811 and 1821 census reports, parish registers, poor law accounts and records, workhouse records, friendly society documentation, charitable foundation statutes and ordinances and farm accounts. The findings from archival sources were complemented by contemporary qualitative sources, including contemporary essays, texts and pauper correspondence. The records that survive allowed a longitudinal approach to the compilation of a number of pauper biographies which provide rich detail that is not visible through quantification alone. The approach adopted has been through family reconstitution through in-depth analysis of parish registers together with nominal linkage of poor law records and supplemented by pauper correspondence.⁹⁶

⁹⁶ Essex Record Office, Chelmsford, Henceforth ERO(C), Lib/314/CEN1, *Abstracts of the Answers and Returns: Enumeration Part 1, England and Wales 813, Guide to Census Reports 1801-1966*, BPP. 1801 vi (140) 813; Suffolk Record Office, Ipswich, Henceforth SRO(I), HD2448/4/2/2/4, 1801 *Census, Abstracts of the Answers and Returns: Enumeration Part 1 England and Wales 1801 vi (140) 813, Abstracts of the Answers and Returns: Parish Registers, 1801-2*, vi, vii (140,9,112) 813; SRO(I), (FB159/D/1/2 *Mendlesham Parish Registers (1661-1712)*); SRO(I), FB159/D/1/3, *Mendlesham Parish Registers (1661-1712)*); SRO(I), FB159/D/1/4, *Mendlesham Parish Registers (1662-1794)*); SRO(I), FB159/D/1/5, *Mendlesham Parish Registers (1794-1813)*); SRO(I), FL600/4 *Lawshall Registers All Saints (1558-1812)*); SRO(I), FC581/D *Cookley Registers (1538-1812)*); SRO(I), FC22/D *Culpho Registers (1660-1823)*); SRO(I), FC46/D/1 *Trimley St. Martin Registers (1678-1818)*); SRO(I), FB187/D *Holbrook Registers (1721-1812)*); SRO(I), ADA/AB3/1-10 *Bawdsey Poor Law Records*); SRO(I), ADA11/AB3/1-10 *Hatcheston Poor Law Records*); SRO(I), ADA1/AB3/1-3 *Cookley Poor Law Records*); SRO(I), ADA10/AB3/1-10 *Culpho Poor Law Records*); SRO(I), ADA10/AB3/1-9 *Trimley St. Martin Poor Law Records*); SRO(I), AD&/AB4/1-7 *East Bergholt Poor Law Records*); SRO(I), FC25/L/3/1-2, *Seckford Charity Account Books 1 and 2*); SRO(I), C/5/1/4/1-4, *Tooley's Foundation Payrolls (1761-1794)*); SRO(I), FC25/L/3/2, *Seckford Alms House Accounts, Statutes and Ordinances for the Government of the Almshouses in Woodbridge, in the County of Suffolk 1719-1853* (Woodbridge: J. Loder, 1792); SRO(I), 334.7, *Article XI, Articles of Agreement to be observed by a*

Research findings form the basis of the following chapters which aim to provide an insight into the day to day realities of old age for elderly farm labourers, including continued work, home environment and community support, as well as revealing the pressures and constraints faced by elderly farm labourers due to the demographic, economic and social changes Suffolk experienced in this period.

Chapter two of the study commences with an exploration of perceptions of masculine old age in this period which is considered to be an essential step in understanding the experience of aged men in a rural community. The study conducted research of a number of key questions essential to the understanding of masculine old age: how old is old? When did one become old? Who determined it and on what basis? To what extent was old age gendered? Why and to what extent did the more traditional beliefs on ageing and old age endure?⁹⁷ The chapter explores the continuity in beliefs and attitudes towards old age from earlier periods and aims to assess their relevance to the perception of ageing and old age in the second half of the eighteenth century and in the early nineteenth century. Importantly, the chapter challenges the belief that the on-set of old age commenced at sixty years and suggests that for elderly men in rural Suffolk old age should be considered to start at forty. Finally, the chapter highlights the historical specificity of the complex interaction between social status, occupation and gender in the ageing process for farm labourers in rural Suffolk in this period.

How ageing and old age impacted the working lives of the poor is considered in chapter three and is based on the research findings of the age-related occupational constraints and difficulties faced by elderly farm labourers in rural Suffolk. It also explores the situation and the problems faced by elderly men as a result of the predominance of agriculture as a source of employment,

Friendly Society of Farmers and Tradesmen, Woodbridge, (Fressingfield: C. Barkway, 1836), p.7; SRO(I), 334.70941, *Article VI, Articles made and agreed to by a Friendly Society of Sailors at Southwold in Suffolk* (Halesworth: J. Alcock, 1805), p. 5.

⁹⁷ Botelho, Lynn, & Pat, Thane, eds. *Women and Ageing*, p. 4.

limited alternative employment opportunities, seasonal unemployment, an overstocked labour market and reduced functionality due to physiological decline. Using both national and local sources it contrasts the occupational constraints faced by elderly men in rural Suffolk to the situation in other regions of England to highlight the derogatory impact of the region's over reliance on agriculture as a source of employment. The chapter also considers the opportunities which existed for elderly farm labourers to alleviate the hardship of their situation through recreational and leisure activities and the extent to which these may have been gendered in order to arrive at a more nuanced view of the experience of masculine old age in a rural community at this time.

The expectation of self-sufficiency and achievement of residential independence in old age and the degree to which these were achieved by elderly agricultural workers in rural Suffolk is assessed in chapter four. The 'coping strategies' employed by aged male paupers in support of their achievement of sustenance and independence are evaluated together with the importance of self-help. Study research findings are utilised to highlight the importance of marriage to the achievement of residential independence and provide a telling insight into the domestic situation of aged farm labourers. While research of pauper inventories provide an insight into the accommodation commonly occupied by the elderly, their material lives and the home environment it provided. For those unable to maintain residential independence the role performed by charitable foundations, parishes and poor law authorities in providing residential welfare is also evaluated and in particular the possible loss of freedom and personal independence incurred by aged men as a result of being either almshouse residents or workhouse inmates.

The extent to which gender was an influential factor in the formulation and implementation of poor law policy by Suffolk's rural poor law incorporations is explored in chapter five. It charts the increasing pressure exerted on poor law authorities as a result of the demographic,

economic, and social changes experienced by the region in this period and assesses whether they initiated a change in attitudes and poor law policy towards old men which led to differential treatment being afforded between aged men and women when claiming or receiving relief.

The records that survive facilitated a longitudinal approach to the construction of biographies for a number of elderly farm labourers. Chapter six presents several case studies which provide rich detail on the circumstances, expectations, experience, problems and ‘coping strategies’ of elderly men and provides the means to gain a telling insight into the masculine experience of old age in rural Suffolk, not possible through quantitative analysis alone. The situation, and difficulty in finding work experienced by aged men is revealed in the case studies of a number of unskilled farm labourers. While other case studies reveal the difference in treatment afforded by the poor law authorities to elderly men compared to their female counterparts and the gendered nature of poor law provision in this period.

The study’s findings are summarised in chapter 7 which also highlights a number of areas which are considered to merit further research such as the economic and social impact of the rural incorporations established from mid-eighteenth century on their locality.

In contrast to that of the medieval and modern period the historiography of ageing and old age in this period is noticeably sparse and investigation into the situation faced by old poor men is a subject of almost total scholarly neglect. There is still much to know about the complex relationship between old age and masculinity for members of the lower orders. This study aims to fill some of the gaps in our understanding and arrive at a more nuanced view of masculine old age in a rural community in this period.

However, It is important to begin an exploration of the experience and situation of elderly farm labourers by an initial consideration of the perceptions, representations and definitions of old

age in this period, as well as the degree of continuity that existed to earlier periods. Consequently, the following chapter explores the societal attitudes and beliefs which existed towards ageing and old age in the second half of the eighteenth century and in the first half of the nineteenth century, prior to an investigation of the situation and experience of aged poor men in rural Suffolk, in the chapters that follow.

Chapter 2. Definitions : the body, old age and gender

Introduction

It was acknowledged at the outset that definition is of fundamental concern in the study of old age and the historiography of the subject has afforded it significant attention.⁹⁸ How old was old in this period? When did one become old? How was old age defined? To what extent was old age gendered?⁹⁹ All these questions remain only partially answered in current historical research.¹⁰⁰ This chapter seeks to address this deficiency in our understanding of the ageing process and the onset of old age, particularly for men of the lower orders, in the second half of the eighteenth century and in the first half of the nineteenth century. The chapter through an analysis of societal perceptions in this period aims to identify the degree of continuity in belief in the nature of the ageing process and old age with that of earlier periods. In particular, it aims to demonstrate the gendered nature of ageing and old age throughout the eighteenth century and early nineteenth century. Importantly it also aims to establish a definition of the onset of male old age which is appropriate for men in the lower orders of rural Suffolk.

How old was old?

The view that the eighteenth century witnessed, ‘all the changes that distinguish the breezy, elegant world of Jane Austen’s novels from the dark depths of the witch-burning of the seventeenth century’, obscures the degree of continuity with earlier times that existed.¹⁰¹ Caution must be exercised when assuming that such a sweeping representation provides a reliable picture of the degree of change which it suggests. In fact, there was a considerable degree of continuity in this period in social practices, perceptions and attitudes towards ageing

⁹⁸ Yallop, Helen, *Age and Identity*, p. 23.

⁹⁹ Botelho, Lynn & Thane, Pat, eds. *Women and Ageing*, p. 4.

¹⁰⁰ Lynn Botelho, ‘Old Age and menopause’, in *Women and Ageing*, ed. by Botelho and Thane, p. 43.

¹⁰¹ Ian Mortimer, *Centuries of Change* (London: Bodley Head, 2014), p. 199.

and old age to that of earlier periods. Despite a discernible change and the adoption of a more positive attitude towards old age by some contemporary social commentators there still existed a considerable degree of negativity in the beliefs and attitudes towards ageing and old age from earlier periods. Contemporary interest in old age focused on the physical symptoms apparent during the initial stage of ageing and how to manage those conditions. In contrast, advanced or decrepit old age as a distinct stage in the lifecycle attracted little contemporary comment. In common with earlier periods, old age continued to be perceived in a largely pessimistic and negative manner inevitably resulting in a stage of life characterized by uncompromising physical decline and personal misery. In the words of Samuel Hebdon, writing in 1739:

the Decays of Understanding, Memory, Sight, Hearing, Strength, and other various Disorders and Inconveniences that aged persons have ... Old Age is indeed consisting of evil or troublesome days, it brings an Old Person, as saying, in a fretful, morose, discontented way.¹⁰²

Advanced old age as a distinct stage in the lifecycle attracted little contemporary comment and prompted Thomas Bernard to observe:

Infancy conducts to youth, youth to mature life, and mature life to old age and immortality. In the first two of these periods, the preparation is regularly made for the succeeding state of action, and the systems of tuition are adopted to fit the traveller for the progressive stages of his journey. But the close of life is seldom made the subject of preparatory contemplation.¹⁰³

¹⁰² Samuel Hebdon, *The best way to provide against old age, and to prepare for death* (London: Oswald, 1739), p. 26.

¹⁰³ Thomas Bernard, *Spurinna or The Comforts of Old Age* (London: Longman & Co., 1816), p. 1.

The question of what constituted old age in this period, as King has pointed out, is ‘extraordinarily complex’.¹⁰⁴ In fact, the difficulty and reluctance to define the onset of old age can be traced back through history. Writing as early as 44BC Cicero drew attention to the difficulty which existed in attempting to define the entry point of male old age:

Old age alone has no precise and determinate boundary. It may well therefore be sustained to any period, how far so ever extended, provided a man is capable of performing those offices which are suited to this season of life.¹⁰⁵

Research conducted for this study of contemporary essays and texts clearly demonstrated the difficulty and indeed reluctance of social commentators to delineate the entry point of masculine old age. For instance, in his work on old age, originally published in 1688 and re-printed throughout the eighteenth century, the Nonconformist Minister Richard Steele avoided a precise definition of the onset of old age, preferring to describe it in the following rather vague terms, ‘a universal fixed period cannot be set herein; the diversity of men’s natural Constitutions, Employments, Diet, Exercise, causeth Old Age to come sooner to some, and slower to others.’¹⁰⁶ Likewise, John Smith whose pamphlet was published in 1752, despite endeavouring to provide a ‘portrait’ of old age and in the process identify many of its characteristics was unwilling to identify a specific entry point for this stage of life stating, ‘I shall not take upon me to limit the bounds of this decrepit state, forasmuch as they are various, in respect of the disposition of men’s bodies, of their course of lives, and also of the places and ages in which they live.’¹⁰⁷ In fact, Smith’s recognition of the problematic nature of defining a

¹⁰⁴ Steven King, *Writing the Lives of the English Poor 1750’s-1850’s* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2019), p. 284.

¹⁰⁵ Marcus Tullius Cicero, *Essays on Old Age and Friendship* (London: J. Dodsley, 1785), p. 113.

¹⁰⁶ Richard Steel, *Discourse Concerning Old Age* (London: J. Astwood, 1688), p. 10.

¹⁰⁷ John Smith, *The Portrait of Old Age: Wherein Is Contained a Sacred Anatomy Both of Soul and Body, and a perfect Account of the Infirmities of Age Incident to Both Being a Paraphrase upon the Six Former Verses of the XII Chapter of Ecclesiastes*. (London: E. Withers, 1752), p. 5.

specific chronological entry point into old age highlights the most challenging question for historians of old age in this period: At what age was a man (or woman) considered to have entered old age and on what basis?’¹⁰⁸

Unlike in the twentieth century there was no ‘retirement age’ for the majority of people nor were there any rites of passage or legal age related milestones to mark an individual’s entry into old age in this period.¹⁰⁹ Old age, as Pelling states, lacked ‘the legal, administrative and developmental milestones that marked childhood and early adulthood.’¹¹⁰ The Italian Renaissance scholar Francesco Petrarch aptly described the uncertainty surrounding the onset of old age for men, ‘In darkness and silence it hits the unwitting man, and when he thinks it is yet far off, there it is upon his threshold.’¹¹¹ In similar fashion, Maimonides remarked on female ageing, ‘Who is an old woman? One who is old and does not protest.’¹¹² For much of the eighteenth century the approach to the recording of age seems to have varied between a rather haphazard recording of chronological age similar to that of late medieval England and the modern-day preoccupation with accurate documentation.¹¹³ That the legal system of early modern England ‘had no recognition of a distinctive category of old age’ was identified by Lloyd Bonfield who established that under common law throughout the early modern period that apart from the legal status of minority to majority there were no other legally age specified lifecycle stages.¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁸ Ottaway, Susannah, *The Decline of Life*, p. 44.

¹⁰⁹ Janet Roebuck, ‘When Does Old Age Begin?’ Vol. 12, *Journal Of Social History* (1979), 416-428, (p. 417).

¹¹⁰ Pelling, Margaret & Smith Richard, eds. *Life, Death and The Elderly* p. 76.

¹¹¹ Francisco Petrarch, *Physicke Against Fortune*, (London, 1579), p.20.

¹¹² Moses be Maimon, *Mishneh Torah*, chap. 9, ver. 5.

¹¹³ Susannah Ottaway, ed. *The History of Old Age in England, 1700-1800, Vol 2* (London: Routledge, 2016), p. x.

¹¹⁴ Lloyd Bonfield, ‘Was There a Third Age in the Preindustrial Past? Some Evidence from the Law in an Ageing World’ in *Dilemmas and Challenges for Law and Social Policy*, ed. by J. Eekelaar and D. Pearl (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989).

The problematic nature of defining the onset of old age is further complicated by tension amongst historians as to what constitutes this stage in the lifecycle. As Thane points out, widespread agreement as to what distinguishes the onset of old age or when it might commence is lacking.¹¹⁵ Historians have explored a number of different approaches in an attempt to establish the on-set of old age, including the use of chronological, physiological and cultural criteria. Chronological old age is determined by a certain calendar age. Physiological or functional old age is reached when an individual was deemed unable to maintain their independence and achieve sustenance due to physical decline. Cultural old age combines elements of both chronological and physiological definitions and reflects a community's value system, its social attitudes and the behaviours considered appropriate at each stage of a person's life.¹¹⁶ While all three criteria can operate at the same time it should not be assumed that they are of equal importance nor that they all take place at the same speed. It is also necessary to assess their relevance with respect to any particular setting. While all three criteria used separately or a combination of criteria are useful in different contexts in defining the onset of old age, it is also necessary to recognise that the boundaries between chronological, physiological and cultural old age are themselves very porous.¹¹⁷ Marking the onset of old age in the second half of the eighteenth century and in the first half of the nineteenth century, prior to the adoption of a chronological definition of old age, can be regarded as a somewhat 'moveable feast', significantly influenced by status, occupation and gender. In consequence, historians of old age face the challenge of, 'accounting for the variations within the experience of old age on the one hand, while usefully pointing out the construction of old age that is particular to a time and a place on the other.'¹¹⁸

¹¹⁵ Botelho, Lynn and Thane, Pat, eds. *Women and Ageing*, p. 3.

¹¹⁶ Thane, 'Social Histories of Old Age and Ageing', 98.

¹¹⁷ Ottaway, Susannah, *The Decline of Life*, p.18.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

The old, as Paul Johnson states, have never been an homogenous group, ‘but rather an amalgam of individuals divided by generation, gender, class, wealth, power, religion and race, so what may be true for one person or group at any time may be quite unrepresentative for others.’¹¹⁹ Literary sources, for example, encompass a wide variety of older characters and descriptions of the various stages of old age and can be valuable in revealing societal attitudes and beliefs towards old age.¹²⁰ However, the conflicting and ambiguous representations of masculine old age in art, literature, drama and poetry which can be found at all times in the past, present a particular difficulty when attempting to assess their significance. Literary sources reveal that at any point in time there existed differing and competing representations of male old age from which individuals could fashion their own anticipation of the experiences they will face in old age, making it difficult to assess whether one representation of the onset of old age is particularly prevalent at any one time.¹²¹

As Ottaway notes, ‘both positive characterisations of the elderly and vicious ageism have been evident throughout English history.’¹²² However, while literature, poems and ballads demonstrate both negative and positive depictions of masculine old age in the second half of the eighteenth century and in the first half of the nineteenth century and, ‘although separated by tone, content and form... [they were]... united by their interest in age and ageing.’¹²³ Popular media portrayed a diverse and wide range of characters and the roles they played, however, old age was consistently portrayed as a distinct and recognizable phase of life. The many images of masculine old age which these sources portray demonstrate the, ‘fluidity of society’s conception of old age’ at this time and in doing so assists in our understanding of

¹¹⁹ Paul Johnson, ‘Historical readings of old age and ageing’, in *Old Age from Antiquity to Post-Modernity*, ed. by Johnson and Thane, 1-18 (p. 1).

¹²⁰ Ottaway, Susannah, ed. *The History of Old Age in England*, pp. 1-46.

¹²¹ Pat Thane, ‘The Cultural History of Old Age,’ *Australian Cultural History*, 14 (1995), pp. 23-29.

¹²² Ottaway, Susannah, *The Decline of Life*, p. 65.

¹²³ Yallop, Helen *Age and Identity*, p. 11.

the cultural values associated with old age.¹²⁴ The popular media of the day not only reflected common societal perceptions of masculine ageing and old age and accepted behavioural norms but also actively reinforced them within the lower orders of society. Perhaps the most shocking literary portrayal of old age was that presented by Jonathan Swift's book *Gulliver's Travels* (1726).¹²⁵ Swift began by describing the personality traits exhibited by the Struldbrugs at 'four-score years' as being 'Opinionative, Peevish, Covetous, Morose, Vain, Talkative, but un-capable of Friendship, and dead to all natural affection ... Envy and impotent Desires are their prevailing Passions.' On reaching eighty years the old were deemed to be at the 'extremity of living' and of no further relevance to the community. Swift concluded by describing the physical and mental characteristics of the Struldbrugs during advanced old age:

At Ninety they lose their Teeth and Hair ... The Diseases they are subject to still continue without increasing or diminishing. In talking they forget the common Appellations of things, and the Names of Persons, even their nearest Friends and Relations ... their Memory will not serve to carry them from the beginning of a Sentence to the end.¹²⁶

However, Swift's characterisation of the Struldbrugs while presenting a harsh and cruel view of old age was perhaps more of a critical response to the manner in which advanced old age was generally perceived by society than simply being a description of old age.

Likewise, Laurence Sterne's *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy* (1759-1767), also contains a number of reflections on old age, describing it in a manner consistent with eighteenth-century perceptions of advanced old age:

¹²⁴ Ottaway, Susannah, *The Decline of Life*, p. 56.

¹²⁵ Johnathan Swift, *Gulliver's Travels*, Introduction by R. Demaria (London: B. Mottee, 1726), p. x.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 197.

Dull organs ... in the first place. Second, slight and transient impressions made by objects when the said organs are not dull ... and thirdly a memory like a sieve, not able to retain what it has received.¹²⁷

Old age in this period was in reality, ‘a patchwork of experiences on many levels; a thing that was not led first and foremost by chronological or biological time.’¹²⁸ Old age was never defined simply by the reaching of a particular birthday, but was determined by a combination of physiological, chronological and cultural criteria.¹²⁹

Chronological Old Age

There is considerable evidence that the chronological age of 60 was regarded as being important in delineating the on-set of old age throughout the eighteenth century and in the early nineteenth century, especially for men. Numerous examples can be found in official administrative records and literary sources which identify inclusion or exemption from certain duties for men on reaching the age of 60. In fact, so many official administrative records used the age of 60, ‘as the gateway to old age’, that it has seldom been discussed or justified by historians.¹³⁰ As Johnson notes, ‘formal age thresholds of this sort have remarkably deep historical roots.’¹³¹ Peter Stearns, for example, pointed out that: ‘Classical wisdom held sixty to be the beginning of male old age.’¹³² Legislative texts denote 60 or 70 as the age of eligibility for exemption from military service, municipal duties and obligatory work although even here there was some flexibility. Typically, exemptions permitted those considered unfit to be excused at an earlier age and those physically able to continue to serve beyond a prescribed

¹²⁷ Sterne, Laurence, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 70.

¹²⁸ Yallop, Helen, *Age and Identity*, p. 141.

¹²⁹ Ottaway, Susannah, *The Decline of Life*, p. 17.

¹³⁰ Thane, Pat, *Old Age in English History*, p. 25.

¹³¹ Paul Johnson, ‘Historical readings of old age and ageing’, in ‘Historical readings of old age and ageing’, in *Old Age from Antiquity to Post-Modernity*, ed, by Johnson and Thane, p. 3.

¹³² Peter Stearns, *Old Age in Preindustrial Society* (London: Holmes and Meier Inc., 1982), p. 5.

age boundary. The Statute of Labourers which became law in England in 1551 exempted individuals over the age of 60 from service while the Elizabethan Statute of Artificers which became law in 1563 set out proposals for the regulation of the labour market by establishing conditions of employment which exempted men over 60 and women over 40 from compulsory agricultural service.¹³³ Men over 70 had been excluded from jury duty since 1698. Eden, in his study into the condition of the poor, cited Statutes concerning the employment of labour on highways which stated, ‘that every man inhabiting any parish ... and being of the age of eighteen, and under the age of sixty years ... work and labour in the amendment of said highways.’¹³⁴

It is indeed possible that the establishment of a specific age beyond which men were ineligible for military service, municipal duties or obligatory work may well have influenced societal perceptions about the commencement of masculine old age, as well as creating administrative precedents for retirement and pensions.¹³⁵ The evolution of pensions which originated in the Customs and Excise Office in 1712 and progressed to other parts of the Civil Service during the course of the eighteenth century provides an early example of the use of age based criteria to mark entry into old age. Initially, pensions for custom officers were given without reference to age, however, by 1761 an age based criterion was introduced for the first time and prevented officers from receiving benefits until aged 60 or more. That said, reaching the age of 60 did not automatically entitle a man to a pension. He also had to show evidence that he could no longer work and had no other means of financial support. It was not until 1803 that eligibility was

¹³³ Donald Woodward, ‘The Background to the Statute of Artificers: The Genesis of Labour Policy, 1558-63’, *The Economic History Review*, Vol 33, No. 1 (1980), 32-44 (p. 36).

¹³⁴ Eden, Sir Frederick, Morton. *The State of the Poor, Vol 1* (London: Davis, 1797), p. 357.

¹³⁵ Shulamith Shahar, ‘The Middle Ages and Renaissance’, in *The Long History of Old Age*, ed. by Pat Thane (London: Thames & Hudson, 2005), 71-112 (p. 71-72).

widened to include those aged 60 or more, regardless of their physical state or financial situation.¹³⁶

Further evidence of the growing significance of chronological criteria for defining old age in the eighteenth century is provided by my research findings of local charities in Suffolk. It seems those organisations which applied age criteria to the provision of charitable relief often regarded 60 as marking the onset of old age and eligibility for relief. The William Lee Charity (Occold), established in 1728, and the John Gibson Charity (Ipswich), established in 1777, both considered people to be eligible for charitable assistance once they were over 60 years of age but only if they were not in receipt of poor relief from the parish.¹³⁷

Evidence also suggests that it is also a mistake to assume that ordinary men and women in this period were unaware of their own chronological age and its significance. There is a common and persistent misconception among many historians that individuals in early modern England, especially those from the lower orders, were unaware of their exact age. Also that chronological age was of little significance to the lower orders and that people may well have entered into this final stage of life without any form of recognition from the community or even perhaps any personal acknowledgement.¹³⁸ These assumptions, however, overlook both the extent to which society at this time was cognizant with old age as well as the importance afforded to it as a distinct stage in the lifecycle. In the latter decades of the eighteenth century the likeliness of most people knowing their age increased and, in the opinion of Joel Rosenthal, ‘an awareness of one’s exact age was a possibility, if not always a reality, for most individuals.’¹³⁹ Thomas

¹³⁶ Ottaway, Susannah, *The Decline of Life*, p. 75.

¹³⁷ SRO(I), FB155/L1/1, *William Lee Charity Accounts (1720-1865)*; SRO(I), FB95/L/1, *John Gibson’s Charity, Vouchers (1777)*; SRO(I), GB427/A, *Alexander Alms-house of Pension Charity, Accounts (1771)*; SRO(I), FC25/L/3/4, *Seckford Charity, Account Book (1719-1853)*, SRO(I), FB159/L/1, 2, *Mendlesham Town Estate Charity, Title Deeds/Administration (1312-1873)*.

¹³⁸ David Cowgill, *Aging and Modernization* (New York: Appleton-Crofts, 1972), p. 308.

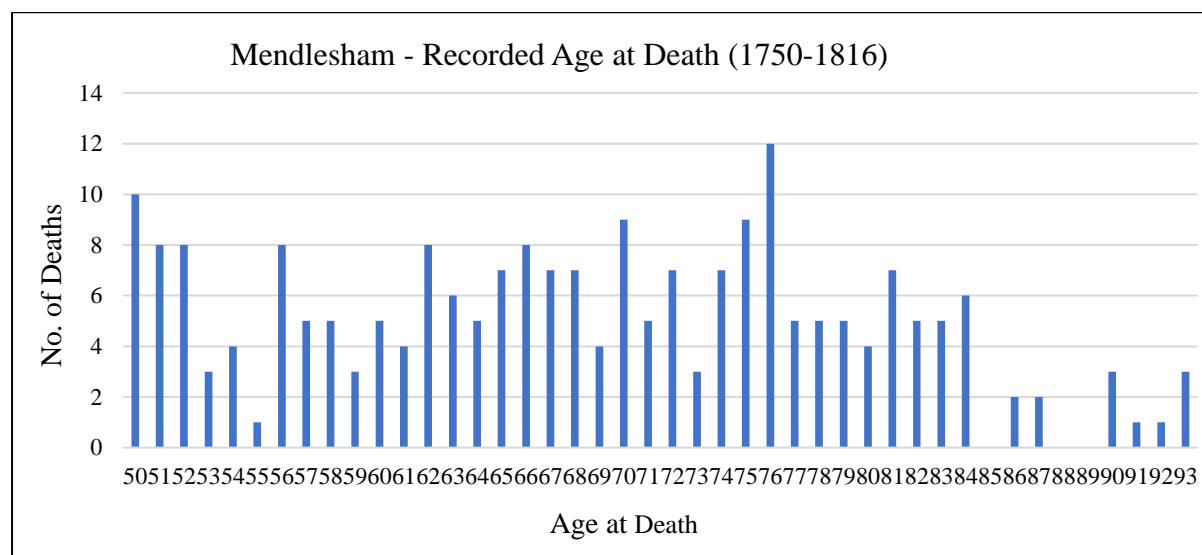
¹³⁹ Joel Rosenthal, *Old Age in Late Medieval England* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 1996), p. 14.

was also of the view that increasing levels of literacy and the compilation of parish baptism and burial registers in the final decades of the eighteenth century meant that, ‘a man who gave his age was much less likely to fall back on a number and even digit than he would have been earlier.’¹⁴⁰

However, the views of Rosenthal and Thomas are challenged by Brian A’Hearn who argued that most eighteenth-century people stated their age in a round figure (ending in 0 or 5), a practice known as ‘age heaping’, because people only had a vague awareness of their own age or that of others.¹⁴¹ To test this assumption research for this study was conducted on the baptism and burial records of the Suffolk parish of Mendlesham St Mary between 1750 and 1816.

The study’s research of the baptism and burial registers of Mendlesham between 1750 and 1816 identified the number of parishioner deaths and age at death, as shown in Figure 2.1.

Figure 2.1. Mendlesham – Recorded Age at Death (1750-1816)¹⁴²



¹⁴⁰ Thomas, ‘Age and Authority’, 3.

¹⁴¹ Brian A’Hearn, ‘Quantifying Quantitative Literacy: Age Heaping and the History of Human Capital’, *Journal of Economic History*, 69 (2009), pp. 783-808.

¹⁴² SRO(I), FD159/D/1/4. SRO(I), FD159/D/1/13.

Study findings revealed that parishioner age recorded at death was normally accurate in most instances when cross-referenced to the parish baptism records. Any occasional inaccuracies were of a minor nature, a matter perhaps of one to three years either under or over-recording of an individual's age. No significant evidence of age heaping was apparent. If age heaping had been prevalent the number of deaths recorded at the ages 50, 55, 60, 65 and so on would have been markedly higher.

Increasing levels of literacy within the population as the eighteenth-century progressed, coupled with a growing interest in the compilation of 'vital statistics,' fostered by Enlightenment thinking, undoubtedly led to greater public attention being paid to old age as defined by chronological years.¹⁴³ Motivated by Gregory King's statistical analysis of England's political economy, which he described as his, 'Scheme of the Income and Expense of the Several families of England,' both politicians and the elite of society, sought to gain a greater understanding of the nation's demographic structure.¹⁴⁴ An increased awareness and interest in chronological age was not confined to the upper orders and middling sorts of society but also extended to some extent to sections of the labouring classes. Increased interest in chronological age had an important corollary. By the closing decades of the eighteenth century the increased use of chronological age to define the onset of old age enabled both the size of the elderly population and proportion of the total population it represented to be determined. Increasingly defined by chronological age, the old became more easily definable as a distinct group, and for many of the aged of the labouring classes, recognizable as a dependent group within society.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴³ Robert Houston, *Literacy in Early Modern Europe, Culture and Education, 1500-1800* (London: Longman, 1988); Andrea Rusnock, *Vital Accounts: Quantifying Health and Population in Eighteenth-Century England and France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

¹⁴⁴ John Dodgson, 'Gregory King and the Economic Structure of Early Modern England', *The Economic History Review*, 66 (2013), p. 1.

¹⁴⁵ Ottaway, Susannah, *The Decline of Life*, p.12.

However, the study's research findings revealed, that the picture becomes more blurred once evidence from bodies such as Friendly Societies are taken into account. The late eighteenth-century witnessed a significant growth in the establishment of these bodies, occasionally called box clubs, with total membership increasing from 648,000 in 1801 to 704,000 by 1803, due to the *Act for the Encouragement and Relief of Friendly Societies* (1793), designed to regulate, survey and control Friendly Societies.¹⁴⁶ Friendly Societies consisted of a group of individuals in a particular location who paid an initial fee to join and then regular dues in return for receiving financial help in times of difficulty. For example, The Friendly Society of Farmers and Tradesmen founded in 1805 in Woodbridge, was established with the expressed purpose of relieving the needs of group members who were, 'sick, lame, blind, or aged and thereby rendered incapable of working.'¹⁴⁷ Similarly, the Friendly Society of Sailors at Southwold in Suffolk stated that it's, 'principal design is to relieve and support those of age, infirmity or lameness who stand in need of it.'¹⁴⁸

The Articles and Statutes of Friendly Societies established in Suffolk following the 1793 Act articulated well-defined rules regarding age of admission to the society, which usually ranged from 18 to 40 years, although the upper age for admission was in some instances as low as 30. For example, Article Two of The Friendly Society of Farmers and Tradesman specified, 'that every person entering the Society shall be in perfect health, and under the age of forty.'¹⁴⁹ Individuals older than the stated upper limit for admission could join on payment of additional dues, as was the case of John Keeble a carpenter from the parish of Great Glenham aged 46 years, who was admitted into the Society of Brotherly Love (Ipswich) in 1794. As well as age limits, admission was also dependent on 'professional status', for example 'tradesmen who

¹⁴⁶ Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace, 'An Act for the Encouragement and Relief of Friendly Societies', *Eighteenth-century Life*, 24.3 (2000), 53-72 (p. 53).

¹⁴⁷ SRO(I), 334.7, p.7.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p.4.

might make at least fifteen shillings a week.’¹⁵⁰ Friendly Societies restricted who could be admitted as members based on age criteria and also excluded those considered to work in dangerous or low paid occupations.

However, research of the documentation of Friendly Societies established in Suffolk during this period revealed that while these bodies demonstrated a significant degree of age awareness they did not define at what age members would be considered old. The rulebooks of the Society of Brotherly Love and the Ipswich Union Friendly Society who were both founded in 1794, simply state that it was a combination of old age and the inability to work which determined eligibility to receive benefits which usually amounted to a maximum of three shillings a week for up to three months.¹⁵¹ By providing benefits only when a member was considered both old and unable to work closely reflected the stance adopted by poor law authorities in the region when granting relief and that age criteria were applied with a degree of flexibility rather than fixed.

Such evidence warns against an uncritical application of the age of 60 to mark the threshold of old age for all men in every context. In the opinion of Thomas 60 has, ‘become stylized as the age of incipient decrepitude,’ amongst many historians.¹⁵² The application of 60 to mark the entry point into old age is in large measure also due to the influence of demographic history.¹⁵³ In particular, Wrigley and Schofield’s seminal study on the population of England and Wales between 1541 and 1871 reinforced the use of 60 years to mark the commencement of old age.¹⁵⁴ However, while Wrigley and Schofield’s demographic study has exerted considerable influence, the use of 60 to mark the on-set of old age has been increasingly questioned by a

¹⁵⁰ SRO(I), FB101/G5/1, *Statutes and Articles Society of Brotherly Love*.

¹⁵¹ SRO(I), FB98/N2/1, *Statutes and Articles Ipswich Union Friendly Society*.

¹⁵² Thomas, ‘Age, and Authority’, 237.

¹⁵³ Botelho, Lynn, ‘Old Age and menopause, in *Women and Ageing*’, ed. by Botelho and Thane 44.

¹⁵⁴ Wrigley, Edward & Schofield, Richard, eds. *The Population History of England*.

number of historians. Thane, amongst others, pointed out that due to the idiosyncratic and highly personal nature of ageing it is not possible to define, ‘a clear cut or universal boundary to delineate entry into old age.’¹⁵⁵ Botelho also contends that in pre-modern society, ‘with its degrees of wealth and status, its orders and hierarchies, a universal threshold of old age may not only be inappropriate but also inaccurate.’¹⁵⁶ Thomas has also argued that in early modern England an individual could be regarded as having entered old age by contemporaries anywhere between 40 to 50 years, while Botelho and Thane contend that entry into old age for women could begin around 50.¹⁵⁷ Eden’s surveys on the poor and the responses to the questionnaires of the 1832 Poor Law Enquiry Commission also revealed that the onset of old age might be experienced during a wide age range, from 40 to 50 to 70 years of age.¹⁵⁸ Eden’s parish surveys were conducted at an early stage of data collection and were somewhat lacking in rigour, compared to modern expectations, making it necessary to review the conclusions with some care. However, they do support the view that people could be referred to as entering into old age anywhere between 40 and 60 years, rather than the existence of a universal threshold of 60. In summary, the chronological boundary of 60 to mark the on-set of old age is not considered to be appropriate for men from the lower orders in rural Suffolk who are the focus of this study in the second half of the eighteenth century and in the first half of the nineteenth century. To adequately explain the complex interaction between social status, occupation, and gender on the ageing process and onset of old age it is argued here that a more varied and multi-faceted approach needs to be applied. This requires consideration of the differing demographic, economic, cultural and social contexts between regions and within

¹⁵⁵ Thane, ‘The Cultural History of Old Age’, 25.

¹⁵⁶ Botelho, Lynn, ‘Old age and menopause’, in *Women and Ageing*, ed. by Botelho and Thane, p. 44.

¹⁵⁷ Thomas, ‘Age and Authority’, 208. Botelho, Lynn, ‘Old Age and menopause’ in *Women and Ageing*, ed. by Botelho and Thane, p. 43; Thane, Pat, *Old Age in English History*, pp. 26-27.

¹⁵⁸ Eden, Sir Frederick, Morton, *The State of the Poor; PP, Royal Com. of Inquiry into Administration and Practical Operation of Poor Laws. Report, Index; Appendix (a) Reports of Assistant Coms. Part i-iii.; Appendix (b.1) Answers to Rural Queries, Part i-v.*

localities as well as between differences in the experience and situation of individuals according to social status, occupation and gender.¹⁵⁹

Cultural Old Age

Cultural ideas were as important as chronology in defining and representing the experience of old age in this period. As Botelho and Thane have argued, ‘old age is a highly nuanced process, and one that is culturally embedded and not merely biological.’¹⁶⁰ There is now widespread agreement amongst historians that, ‘conceptions of old age are more culturally relative than is the case for any other age group.’¹⁶¹ In fact, Leo Simmons, in his study of pre-industrial societies, suggests that:

the only reliable criteria for the onset of old age seemed to be the social and cultural one. The simplest and safest rule to follow was to consider a person as ‘old’ whenever he was so regarded and treated by his contemporaries.¹⁶²

Awareness and understanding of the ageing process and onset of old age in this period was founded on clearly delineated expectations and standards of behaviour at each stage of life, ‘from belle of the ball to old maid, from don to dotard.’¹⁶³ Old age was fashioned and defined based on prevalent cultural and moral traditions in order to either promote or condemn forms of behaviour regarded as being appropriate or inappropriate.¹⁶⁴

The late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century retained numerous approaches to determining the threshold of the onset of old age to earlier periods, some dating as far back as Ancient Greek medicine. Despite the abundance of scientific and medical initiatives in this

¹⁵⁹ Pat Hudson, *The Industrial Revolution* (London: Hodder Arnold, 1992), p. 139.

¹⁶⁰ Botelho, Lynn & Thane, Pat, *Women and Ageing*, p. 3.

¹⁶¹ Pelling, Margaret & Smith, Richard, *Life, Death and the Elderly*, p. 8.

¹⁶² Leo Simmons, *The Role of The Aged in Primitive Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1945), p. 15.

¹⁶³ Ottaway, Susannah, *The Decline of Life*, p. 16.

¹⁶⁴ Johnson, Paul, and Thane, Pat, eds. *Old Age from Antiquity to Post-Modernity*, p. 4.

period, traditional beliefs and attitudes towards old age were stubbornly resistant to change. Radical changes in philosophical and physiological thinking did not immediately displace the more ‘fundamental’ ideas derived from cosmology or the Western Christian tradition, particularly among members of the lower orders who represented the least receptive and most resistant group to change. As Yallop has identified:

Despite paradigm shifts in medical circles, the eighteenth-century body continued to occupy significance beyond the reach of medicine: a significance that was cosmological, historical, biblical. It remained a multi-dimensional object with import way beyond its own materiality.¹⁶⁵

Historians are familiar with the concept of ‘a good death’ and the consequent belief amongst many of the elderly of the need to prepare for the ‘after-life’. However, given the uncertainties and risks inherent in everyday life in this period, the significance of spirituality and religion in the lives of the elderly has not always been fully appreciated.¹⁶⁶ While religion and religious belief were mocked by the advocates of Enlightenment thinking, it was of great significance in the lives of many, at all levels of society. Piety and sobriety were not simply the means to achieving a good death and passage into the afterlife they were, ‘often an important source of comfort, softening the aches and pains of ageing.’¹⁶⁷ Ageing and old age were not regarded purely as secular matters. The authority of the Christian tradition was such that it continued to exert considerable influence on the thinking and perception of ageing and old age, linking moral correctness and physiological decay, while promoting the righteousness of piety, moderation and abstinence.

¹⁶⁵ Yallop, Helen, *Age and Identity*, p. 60.

¹⁶⁶ Thomas Cole, *The Journey of Life: A Cultural History of Ageing in America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. xxxi.

¹⁶⁷ Thane, Pat & Botelho, Lynn, *Women and Ageing*, p. 6

Contemporary works on ageing and old age cannot be classified as simply ‘medical’ or ‘spiritual’. Religious works often combined both spiritual and corporeal issues when addressing the physiological changes experienced during old age and portraying the cause of these changes to be the result of divine providence. Notable in this regard were the views of the Nonconformist Minister Richard Steele, whose work on old age became a seminal text in the eighteenth century and raised medical as well as religious issues. While Steele’s treatise was predominately of a spiritual nature, in common with a number of other similar works, it also contained aspects of physiology. Steele regarded a man’s life to be divided into three stages, which he described in the following manner, ‘His *Growing*, His *Ripe* or consistent and His *Decaying Age*’.¹⁶⁸ Steele described the final stage of old age in the following terms:

When a Man is arrived at the latter part of Old Age, to be impotent and decrepit, then he grows uneasy to himself, and unserviceable to others. These days may be called Evil days, and of these years it may be said, “I have no pleasure in them” ... The last Period of old age is Death.¹⁶⁹

Steele portrayed old age with a distinct degree of symbolism, embellishing what he regarded as the characteristics of old age in a rather unforgiving manner with the use of words and phrases such as, ‘impotent’, ‘decrepit’ and ‘evil days’. He went on to list the, ‘Sins of Old Age’, as comprising, ‘peevishness’, ‘loquacity’, ‘envy’, ‘conceitedness’ and ‘covetousness.’¹⁷⁰ What Steele termed the, ‘Inconveniences of Old Age’ were also portrayed in the same uncompromising manner and included the denial, ‘of many pleasures’, ‘weakened faculties’, ‘strength and beauty is deceased’, ‘senses decayed’, and ‘distemper and pain.’¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁸ Richard Steele, *A Discourse Concerning Old Age: Tending to the Instruction, Caution and Comfort of Aged Persons* (London, 1688), p. 4.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 41-57.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p133-186.

In Steele's view the primary cause of physical decline in old age was spiritual in nature and was the result of, 'Mans Sin and Defection from God.'¹⁷² The natural cause of old age being, 'the Dryness and Coldness of the Temperament of the Body.'¹⁷³ In this respect, Steele appears to have been influenced by earlier humoural theory dating back in antiquity to Galen in which changes in body temperature were considered to be an explanation of ageing. However, Steele considered spiritual and moral correctness could compensate for the physical decline experienced in old age with, 'Piety ... a Course of life in the Faith, and Fear of God', and, 'Temperance and Sobriety ... that gracious virtue, which retains the Sensitive Appetite within the bounds of reason and Religion', providing an antidote to alleviate the discomforts of old age.¹⁷⁴ The tendency to combine the spiritual with the physical nature of old age is also aptly illustrated by Thomas Tryon's work, which commenced with a detailed 'Anatomical Description of the Body of Man ... without which the knowledge of Man's-Self cannot be compleat.'¹⁷⁵

The connection between spirituality and physiology is also visible throughout the works of George Cheyne, regarded by many historians as the founder of geriatric medicine, who used contemporary 'scientific' theory to reinforce the spiritual dimension of an individual's physical existence. That a sound body was the result of a close relationship with God is a theme found throughout his publications and one which characterised societal perceptions and attitudes towards ageing and old age. The ascendancy of the Christian tradition was such that ageing and old age could never be regarded as purely secular issues. John Wesley's work, which relied on the writings of Cheyne, maintained that health and the achievement of

¹⁷² Ibid., p. 18.

¹⁷³ Ibid., p. 32.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 36.

¹⁷⁵ Thomas Tyron, *The Knowledge of a Man's Self, the Surest Guide to the True Worship of God*, (London: Tho. Bennet, 1704), p. 1.

longevity took place in a spiritual realm.¹⁷⁶ Wesley's work was one of the bestselling works throughout the eighteenth century, running to twenty-four editions by the end of the century and which brought Cheyne's beliefs to a wider audience.¹⁷⁷

The concept of the lifecycle, which can be traced back to the fourteenth century, continued to be fundamental to how ageing and old age was understood by many in late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century society and provides an important indicator of the continuity of belief to earlier periods. The lifecycle provided individuals with a conceptual map to enable them to interpret and understand life's experiences and importantly the vicissitudes of ageing and old age.¹⁷⁸ The lifecycle portrayed the process of ageing and ultimately old age as a series of ever-downward steps and decline into ultimate decrepitude and dependency. It was not merely an abstract interpretative framework, it presented individuals with a visualized image of childhood, youth, and old age and through its, 'very ordered and prescriptive nature offered solace and stability, a template of how to proceed and how to behave.'¹⁷⁹

The lifecycle formed the basis of Ages of Man Schema which were developed from a variety of different perspectives, 'scientific, medical, didactic, homiletic and literary and were related to various configurations of nature and time,' representing the characteristic identity of each stage in life, rather than being based on biological or social criteria.¹⁸⁰ From the fourteenth to the nineteenth century the stages in the lifecycle were represented visually as a stepladder representation of the life course, with a man ascending the stairs of life from birth to middle age before descending a number of stairs into old age, decrepitude and ultimately death.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁶ John Wesley, *Primitive Physick; or An Essay and Natural Method of Curing Diseases* (London: W. Strathan, 1761), p. xiii.

¹⁷⁷ Yallop, Helen, *Age and Identity*, p.18.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

¹⁷⁹ Cole, Thomas, *The Journey of Life*, p. 11.

¹⁸⁰ Shulamith Shahar, 'The Middle Ages and the Renaissance', in *The Long History of Old Age*, ed. by Thane, p. 71.

¹⁸¹ David Troyansky, 'The 18th Century', in *The Long History of Old Age*, ed by Thane, p. 199.

However, Shulamith Shahar's work on ageing in the middle ages noted the inconsistency with which various Ages of Man Schema portrayed the onset of male old age, beginning anywhere between the ages of 35 and 72 years, which limits their value as the means to establish the age at which male old age was perceived to begin.¹⁸² However, Ages of Man Schema produced in the eighteenth century do exhibit a more consistent approach to the onset of male old age. A typical example, from mid-eighteenth century, in which the lifecycle was divided into stages of seven years duration, is shown in Figure 2.2. Ages of Man Schema, also recognised that old age could be of a significant duration and in this example portrayed it as being comprised of a number of stages beginning with the onset of old age at 49 years, followed by a decline in stages to very old at 70 years.

Figure 2. 2. Lifecycle example (mid-eighteenth century) ¹⁸³

1st	7	Childhood.
2.	14	Youth.
3.	21	Betwixt Youth and Manhood.
4.	28	The most brisk and lively Part of life.
5.	35	The most strong, mature and manly Time of Life.
6.	42	A Continuence, very little Decay.
7.	49	Perceivable Decline to Age.
8.	56	More and More.
9.	63	Old Age Apparent.
10.	70	Very Old.

¹⁸² Shahar, Shulamith, *Growing Old in the Middle Ages: Winter Cloths Us in Shadow and Pain* (London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 14-18.

¹⁸³ *Extraneous Parochial Antiquities or An Account of Various Churches with the Funeral Monuments in them in Divers Counties of England*, Willian Cole Collection 1746, in *Woman and Ageing in British Society Since 1500*, ed. by Botelho & Thane, p. 46.

Importantly, however, as Mary Dove has identified, the lifecycle as well as the term ‘ages of man’ in this period, referred to the concept of life itself and by referring to ‘man’ was gender specific.¹⁸⁴

Gender also plays a part in complicating the definition of the on-set of old age. While contemporary writers were aware that old age was not a single stage in the lifecycle but comprised of a number of subdivisions their descriptions of the ageing process typically referred specifically to masculine old age. John Smith’s essay on old age, first published in 1676 but still in print in 1754, described the process of masculine ageing as consisting of three stages:

First, crude, green [old age], and while it is yet in the beginning, while men are able to do business ... the second is full mature, or ripe age; when men begin to leave off their employments and betake themselves to retiredness ... lastly, extreme sickly decrepit, overgrown old age ... when their breath is corrupt, when their days are extinct, and the grave is ready for them.¹⁸⁵

In contrast, Thomas Paine writing in 1791, divided masculine old age into two stages, defining the symptoms and onset of masculine old age beginning at 50 years:

First the approach of age beginning at fifty. At fifty though the mental faculties of man are in full vigour ... the bodily powers for laborious life are on the decline ... At sixty his labour ought to be over ... It is painful to see old age working itself to death ... for daily bread.¹⁸⁶

However, whether divided into two or three stages, it was a description of the ageing process and old age as experienced by men.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁴ Mary Dove, *The Perfect Age of a Man’s Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

¹⁸⁵ John Smith, *The Pourtract of Old Age*, p.18.

¹⁸⁶ Thomas Paine, *Rights of Man* (London: Penguin Books, 1985), p. 242.

¹⁸⁷ Botelho, Lynn, *Old Age and the Poor English Law*: Botelho, Lynn, ‘Old Age and menopause’, in *Women and Ageing*, ed. by Botelho and Thane, pp. 43-65.

Importantly, contemporary essayists such as Smith and Paine, failed to recognize and reflect on the differing experiences that the ageing process and old age precipitated according to social and economic status and gender.¹⁸⁸ An exception was Thomas Tusser's work, first published in 1557 and later reprinted in 1812, which apportioned the 'ages of woman' into fourteen-year periods.¹⁸⁹ But the most common depiction of a woman's lifecycle consisted of three stages: maid, wife, and widow, which were not linked to a chronological age.¹⁹⁰ Although old age for women still comprised of stages from 'young' to 'decrepitude', these did not always correspond to the progression assumed for men. There was a belief that women aged faster than men and so entered into old age earlier than their male counterparts. Shakespeare reflected the views of seventeenth-century writers when he wrote that the first six ages of the seven ages of a woman's life were much shorter than that of a man.¹⁹¹ While Henry Cuffe wrote in 1640, 'women for the most part are sooner perfected than men, being sooner fit for generation ... and finally soon older'.¹⁹²

Botelho in her study of the effects of the menopause and its relationship with ageing for women in early modern Suffolk argues that old age was determined according to, 'cultural considerations which were ... primarily visual in nature.'¹⁹³ She argues that the menopause resulted in a range of physical changes, both facially and bodily, which are characteristic of ageing and which gave the appearance of old age for women at around the age of 50. As Botelho notes, the following physical characteristics would have been common:

¹⁸⁸ Dove, Mary, *The Perfect Age*, p. 3, Sara Arbour & Jay Ginn, eds, *Connecting Ageing and Gender: A Sociological Approach* (Buckingham: Open University Press), p. 5.

¹⁸⁹ Thomas Tusser, *Five Hundred Points of Good Husbandry* (London: Morphew, 1770).

¹⁹⁰ Sara Mendelson & Patricia Crawford, *Woman in Early Modern England 1550-1720* (Oxford: OUP, 1998), pp. 76-77.

¹⁹¹ Ottaway, Susannah, *The Decline of Life*, p. 35.

¹⁹² Henry Cuffe, *The Differences of the Ages of Man's Life* (London, 1640):p. 129.

¹⁹³ Botelho, Lynn, 'Old Age and Menopause', in *Women and Ageing*, ed. by Botelho and Thane, p. 43.

women may grow facial hair and develop a stoop. Their skin can become loose and etched with wrinkles. Age spots tend to develop and spread on their faces and hands. The years of poor nutrition and calcium-draining pregnancies could culminate in a toothless mouth.¹⁹⁴

Contemporary woodcuts and engravings commonly depicted an old woman with, ‘a bent and broken back, often leaning on a stick to help support her crippled frame, and deeply shrunken mouth clearly without its teeth.’¹⁹⁵ This depiction of the physical characteristics of old women, was in the opinion of Botelho, ‘not merely an iconographic device but, in many critical ways, an accurate representation of the poverty-stricken menopausal woman.’¹⁹⁶ Ultimately, she asserts, the entry into old age for women was determined on the basis of, ‘visual clues and physical signifiers.’¹⁹⁷

Although old age for women still comprised of stages from ‘young old’ to decrepitude, these phases did not always correspond to the progression suggested by Cuffe and as typically described in Ages of Man schema. The menopause did not make women helpless, but it was regarded as a clear indication that the threshold into old age had been crossed. In contrast, ageing for men was usually of a more gentle and subtle nature, measured by a gradual physical deterioration and eventual inability to undertake all aspects of work and to provide for their households. Other than for the more affluent in society there was no abrupt end to work and no concept of retirement as we would understand it today. For the poor, physical decrepitude marked the end of an individual’s working life, however, men did not experience, ‘a collective and biologically triggered entry into green old age, as was the case with the female menopause.’¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 51.

¹⁹⁵ *Mother Shipton’s Prophecie* (London, 1685)

¹⁹⁶ Botelho, Lynn, ‘Old Age and Menopause’, in *Women and Ageing*, ed. by Botelho and Thane, p. 56.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 60.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 51.

Male ageing, even among the poor of society, closely resembled the overall views of Cuff and Smith. Yet, although men too would at some point start to display the physical signs of ageing, the characteristic features of old age in men, loose skin, stooping, baldness, seldom developed all at once, or at the same time for all, but advanced in a more unpredictable fashion. Ultimately, however, the differing ageing processes of men and women converged, until they both displayed the same physical characteristics and culturally defined features of old age.¹⁹⁹

The concept of climacteric years which continued to exert significant influence on the perception of ageing and old age throughout the eighteenth century and into the nineteenth century also failed to take account of gender differences. The notion of climacteric years was considered to be closely associated with other modes of thought, biblical, astrological and medical, which together seemed to validate and endorse its significance. The principles of climacterical years were founded on the belief that planetary activity, combining with certain key numbers, exercised significant influence on the process of ageing. The number seven was accorded particular importance due to the existence of seven planets in the universe and, ages which were divisible by seven were considered to be under threat from significant planetary activity.

Accordingly, every seventh year represented a ‘climacteric’ which can be viewed as being similar to a certain rites of passage.²⁰⁰ The climacteric years of 7, 14 and 21 signified maturity while the later ones were thought to herald periods of physical decline and a potential threat to an individual’s well-being. Two years, in particular, were thought to entail an increased threat to the physical welfare of the individual, 49 and of even greater threat 63, which was known as the ‘Grand Climacteric Year’. The belief in the importance of climacteric years is

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 52.

²⁰⁰ Robert Ralley, *Climacteric Years: Astrology and Ageing in Early Modern England*, Paper presented to the Early Modern Philosophy and Scientific Imagination Seminar (London, 2009).

aply illustrated by a diary entry made by Ralph Josselin, an Essex clergyman, who identified the climacteric year of 63 as one of potential danger. Josselin viewed his life as consisting of the ten ages of man, in common with a particular ages of man schema, and wrote on his 64th birthday, ‘I was sensible about it and affected with gods goodness, not troubled in sixty three as a critical and dangerous year, though I have often thought of it.’²⁰¹

References to climacteric years were common in both medical texts and works on old age throughout the eighteenth century and an appreciation of climacteric principles was influential in the manner masculine ageing and old age were perceived. In fact, climacteric years were, ‘accorded a special power to age and change the corporeal frame.’²⁰² Bernard Lynch, in his guide to health published in 1744, drew attention to the physical change attributed to climacteric years, stating:

We undergo remarkable Changes every seven Years, as well in regard to the Temperature of the Body, as the Qualities of the Soul; all of which must be referr’d to the Excellency and Perfection of the Number Seven.²⁰³

Cheyne, in his influential essay on regimen written in 1740, also made reference to climacteric principles and drew particular attention to the importance of the number seven:

Every *wise* Man, after *Fifty*, ought to begin to lessen at least the *Quantity* of his *Ailment*; and if he would continue free of great and dangerous Distempers, and preserve his *Senses* and *Faculties* clear to the last, he ought every seven years go on, abating gradually.²⁰⁴

²⁰¹ Ralph Josselin, *The Diary of Ralph Josselin* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), p. 626.

²⁰² Yallop, Helen, *Age and Identity*, p. 45.

²⁰³ Lynch, Bernard, *A Guide to Health Through the Various Stages of Life* (London 1774), p. 2.

²⁰⁴ George Cheyne, *An Essay on Regimen* (London: D. Browne, 1753), p. 56.

In his later work, *Diseases of the Body and Disorders of the Mind* (1742), he also referred to climacteric principles stating, ‘a Green Old Age, is to begin at least at the Age of Fifty ... that about this time the great Crise or Climacteric of Life generally happens.’²⁰⁵ Cheyne, in common with the earlier work of Lynch, believed that climacteric years exerted physical power over the body, and instigated the physical changes associated with old age.

The use of the climacteric multiple of seven years, to depict the physical signs of ageing and of decline in functionality and gradual descent into decrepitude, also provided a popular theme for the broadsheets and ballads of the day. The following verses from the ballad, *The Age of Man*, refer to a man’s age from 56 to 70 years:

At eight times seven I waxed old.
 And took myself unto my rest,
 My neighbours did my counsel crave,
 And I was held in great request
 But age did so abate my strength.
 That I was forced to yield at length.

At nine times seven I must take my leave
 Of all my former vain delight;
 And then full force it did me grieve
 I etched up many a heavy sigh
 To rise up early and sit so late
 I was no longer fit, my strength did abate.

At ten time seven my glass was run,
 And I poor silly man must die.²⁰⁶

Both positive and negative views of ageing are apparent in this ballad. The ballad not only charts the gradual failing of physical strength, it also identifies the association of ageing with

²⁰⁵ George Cheyne, *The Natural Method of Curing the Diseases of the Body and the Disorders of the Mind* (London: G. Strathan, 1742), p. 295.

²⁰⁶ *The Age of Man, Displayed in the Several Changes of Human Life* (London, 1775).

the acquisition of wisdom. However, only a small number of ballads at this time made a direct reference to old age. Alice Tobriner in her survey of 3,000 ballads written between the sixteenth and the eighteenth centuries identified only 83 which made a direct reference to old age. This, however, is perhaps not surprising as old age was regarded in early modern England as simply the final phase of life rather than a distinct phenomenon of nature.²⁰⁷

References to climacteric years also appeared in popular rhymes, such as that of Thomas Parr, a celebrated centenarian who supposedly died at the age of 152 years. Significantly, the rhyme suggests that not only were climacteric principles ‘learn’d but they were also ‘held in general.’²⁰⁸

Tom Parr hath liv’d, as by Records appears,
 Nine Months, one hundred fifty and two Years.
 Amongst the learn’d, tis held in general,
 That every seventh year’s climacterical,
 Most perilous, at th’age of sixty-three,
 Which is, nine climactericals, but this Man,
 Of whom I write (since first his life began)
 Hath liv’d Climactericals such plenty,
 That he hath almost out-liv’d two and twenty.²⁰⁹

It is perhaps difficult to understand from a modern-day standpoint the continued belief in the significance of the lifecycle and the influence exerted by climacteric years over the perception of the ageing process and old age. Yet, at all levels of society both concepts remained important in understanding the ageing process throughout the eighteenth century and into the nineteenth century.

²⁰⁷ Alice Tobriner, ‘Old Age in Tudor-Stuart Ballads’, *Folklore*, 102 (1991), 149-174 (p. 150).

²⁰⁸ Yallop, Helen, *Age and Identity*, p. 47.

²⁰⁹ John Taylor, *The Old, Old, Very Old Man: or the Age and Life of Thomas Parr* (London: J. Cooper, 1730?), p. 3.

Contemporary writers increasingly believed that ageing was largely a matter of personal choice and something that could be managed through the adoption of a positive mental attitude and social interaction. The belief that physical decline in old age was avoidable, promoted by Enlightenment thinking, resulted in an alternative vision of the process of ageing and old age, that of, ‘prolongevity ... the significant extension of life by human action.’²¹⁰ Immortality was even suggested as a possibility in the closing decades of the eighteenth century. As Marie Mulvey Roberts has commented, ‘in the spirit of Enlightenment Utopianism, death need no longer be obligatory but merely and optional extra.’²¹¹

The subject of longevity was undoubtedly one of fascination for the middling and upper levels of society. However, it was recognised that analysis of personal journals and diaries to establish attitudes to ageing and the onset of old age in this period is somewhat problematic. Diarists were almost exclusively members of the middling or upper orders of society and their attitudes and perceptions regarding ageing and old age cannot be regarded as also being characteristic of the lower orders. However, despite this reservation, my research of diaries of the period demonstrate the interest taken in the subject of longevity. William Goodwin, a surgeon from East Soham in Suffolk, kept a diary between 1746 and 1815 in which he made numerous references to the age of others and expressed an enduring optimism about the possibility of longevity. He recorded that, ‘Henry Jenkins died Decem’r 8 1670 in Yorkshire aged 169 years. In the last Century of his life he was a Fisherman and frequently Swam the Rivers after he was 100.’²¹² The subject of longevity also had a sensational appeal and it was

²¹⁰ Gerald Gruman, ‘Ideas about the Prolongation of Life: The Evolution of Prolongevity Hypothesis’, *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, Vol. 55, No. 9, (1966), 1-102 (p.75).

²¹¹ Marie Mulvey Roberts, ‘A Physic Against Death: Eternal Life and the Enlightenment’ in *Literature and Medicine During the Eighteenth Century*, ed. by Marie Mulvey Roberts & Roy Porter (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 152.

²¹² William Goodwin, *The Diary of William Goodwin*, 1785, URL: <https://bodliean.ox.ac.uk/index2>,

responsible for a range of bizarre theories, such as the medical satire written by Johann Heinrich Cohausen in 1760, in which he suggested:

that the Breath and insensible Perspiration of Virgins in a young and healthy state, might be very salutary for Old Men, and may probably be a means of protecting them from those Infirmities, which usually attend an advanced age.²¹³

The anxiety which existed in the wealthier sections of society on how to prolong life and at the same time prevent the diseases and unsightly effects of old age gave rise to a belief in the possibility of life extension. As Mulvey Roberts states, ‘prolongevity became a marketable commodity,’ which was promoted and distributed in affordable print and resulted in, ‘a cultural phenomenon: the commercialisation of life-extension.’²¹⁴ The promise of life-extension, to 60 years or more, and the belief that the physical deterioration associated with ageing could be managed resulted in a rapid growth in the availability and demand for supposedly life prolonging therapies, diets and cures. Advice on the management of old age was forthcoming from doctors and unscrupulous quacks alike.²¹⁵ As Yallop noted, a profusion of medical texts expressed optimism about the possibility of prolonging life and living to a very old age.²¹⁶ Medical texts put forward the view that there were many ways that individuals could undertake, ‘to make their old Age *green* and *indolent*, and to preserve the *Remains* of their *Senses* to the very last’.²¹⁷ Enlightenment beliefs on rationality and nature are evident in Thomas Wither’s work published in 1799, which also puts forward the view that those who

²¹³ Johanne Cohausen, *Hermippus Redivivus: or, the sages triumph over old age and the grave. Wherein, a method is laid down for prolonging life and the vigour of men* (Dublin: R Bell, 1760), p. 81.

²¹⁴ Mulvey Roberts, Marie, ‘A Physic Against Death’, 151.

²¹⁵ Yallop, Helen, *Age and Identity*, p.14

²¹⁶ Roy Porter, *Disease, Medicine and Society in England 1500-1860* (London: Macmillan, 1987), pp. 44-46.

²¹⁷ George Cheyne, *An Essay of Health*, pp. 205-207.

suffered from chronic illness did so because, ‘they wantonly deviated from the laws described by ... [Nature] ... for their welfare and happiness.’²¹⁸

The onus in many contemporary publications, appears not to have been on the experience of old age in itself, but rather how longevity could be achieved through the management of illness, decay, dependence and impotence. Cheyne went further by scandalizing those who failed to follow a strict regimen: ‘He that wantonly transgresseth the self-evident Rules of Health is guilty of a Degree of Self-Murder.’²¹⁹

Relatively cheaply produced medical texts undoubtedly made medical ideas and prescriptions more accessible to a wide range of readers.²²⁰ But their relevance to the day-to-day experience of a farm labourer in rural Suffolk is difficult to establish. For example, the cost of William Buchan’s best-selling medical text published in 1769 and which ran to 142 editions between 1769 and 1871 was 6 shillings, roughly two thirds of a labourer’s weekly wage.²²¹ Men of the lower orders may have had access to pamphlets or been able to listen to readings of such works, but it is tempting to assume, as some commentators have argued, that prolongevity was very much a ‘bourgeois vision.’²²²

The Body

The manner in which male labourers in rural Suffolk understood and experienced ageing and old age was through the physical deterioration inherent in the ageing process and its impact on their working lives. Physical appearance was also extremely important throughout this period in determining whether an individual was considered old, ‘in terms of both self-perception and the views of contemporaries.’²²³ Features commonly associated with old age such as, ‘stooped

²¹⁸ Thomas Withers, *Observations on Chronic Weakness* (York: A. Ward, 1777).

²¹⁹ Cheyne, George, *An Essay of Health*, pp. 4-5.

²²⁰ Roy Porter, *The Popularization of Medicine, 1650-1850* (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 72-96.

²²¹ Yallop, *Age and Identity*, p. 18

²²² *Ibid.*, 18.

²²³ Ottaway, Susannah, *The Decline of Life*, p. 7.

shoulders and physical frailty', were in the eyes of contemporaries the visual indicators of the onset of old age.²²⁴ They were often featured in ballads which mocked old men and their physical decline such as, *The Age and Life of a Manor a Short Description of his Nature, Rise and Fall, according to the Twelve Months of the Year* (1750) which describes old age for men in the following terms:

October's Blast comes in with Boasts,
 And makes the Flowers to fall
 Then Man appears to fifty Years
 Old Age doth on him call:
 ... And Man grows pale we see ...

November's Air makes Fields bare,
 Of Flowers of Grass and Corn,
 Then Man appears to fifty Years,
 And sick both Eve and Morn;
 Loins, Legs and Thighs, with disease ...

December fell, both sharp and snell,
 Then Flowers creep in the Ground,
 Then Man's threescore, both sick and sore,
 No Soundness in Him's found:
 His Ears and Eyes, and Teeth of Bone,
 All those now do him fail,
 That Death shall him assail.'²²⁵

As the findings of this study revealed, for men of the lower orders the application of cultural or chronological criteria were far less relevant to their experience of old age than their declining physical strength and prowess. Old age came about as a result of gradual physiological decline

²²⁴ Mary Abbott, *Life Cycles in England 1560-1700: Cradle to Grave* (London: Routledge, 1996) p.138.

²²⁵ *The Age and Life of a Manor a Short Description of his Nature, Rise and Fall, according to the twelve Months of the Year* (Newcastle upon Tyne: J. White), p. 2.

and subsequent gradual inability to perform the more strenuous occupational tasks. Reduction in functionality resulted in reduced earning capacity and ultimately the inability to achieve self-sufficiency and maintain residential independence. An old man's inability to remain independent due to physiological decline, 'unambiguously signalled entry into the last stage of life', in the eyes of his contemporaries.²²⁶

The study's research of the records of the rural incorporations, established within the region from mid-eighteenth century to administer the poor law, revealed the application of a somewhat nebulous definition of what the poor law authorities regarded constituted old age.²²⁷ This flexibility was in part a result of the terms of the 1598-1601 legislation, which while establishing an obligation on the part of parish authorities to provide relief for, 'the aged and impotent poor,' omitted to define the age at which a person was to be regarded as 'old'. Research of incorporation weekly and monthly meeting minutes revealed that old age was considered primarily in terms of functionality.²²⁸ Significantly, 'infirmity' would appear to have been regarded as synonymous with old age in the eyes of the poor law authorities. Naturally, the point at which advanced age and the inability to work intersected differed widely between individuals, which may to some degree account for the absence of a commonly formulated and agreed definition of 'old age' and the resultant inconsistent provision of poor relief by the poor law authorities to the aged.²²⁹

My research of poor law records revealed that while age was acknowledged as a factor in determining eligibility for relief, a significant variation existed in the age at which it was granted. The Loes and Wilford Poor Law Incorporation records demonstrate the application of

²²⁶ Ottaway, Susannah, *The Decline of Life*, p. 26.

²²⁷ SRO(I), ADA1/AB3, *Blything Poor Law Hundreds Incorporation*; SRO(I) ADA10/AB3, *Carlford and Colneis Poor Law Hundreds Incorporation*; SRO(I), ADA11/AB3, *Loes and Wilford Poor Law Hundreds Incorporation*; SRO(I), AD7/AB4, *Samford Poor Law Hundreds Incorporation*.

²²⁸ Janet Roebuck, 'When Does Old Age Begin?' Vol. 12, *Journal Of Social History* (1979), 416-429 (p. 417).

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, 419.

a rather loose and varied definition of old age as a factor in determining eligibility for poor relief and the nature of that relief, which was typical of other incorporations in the county. Rather than entering the age of relief recipients in the Weekly Minute Book they refer to the aged in the following manner, ‘John Garnage a poor old person being ill’, ‘Edward Cornish, a poor infirm person’, ‘Francis Foreman ... being old and infirm and incapable of maintaining himself’, ‘Henry Grayson being old and infirm.’²³⁰ Incorporation records also justified the provision of relief to elderly men due to their being ‘past work’ or ‘worn-out my work’.²³¹

Poor relief was only provided to elderly men when their age and decline in their functional abilities coincided, resulting in an inability to work. The study’s research findings were found to be consistent with those of Smith, who in his study of pension provision identified that pensions were not strictly an age-related benefit, nor were they provided as a right. In common with the findings of this study, he considers the provision of relief to be due to the combination of an inability to work due to deteriorating health and growing decrepitude in old age.²³² Older men, as argued by Edward Hunt, found it increasingly difficult to find employment in Suffolk’s overstocked agricultural labour market and it is within this context that relief was provided in time of unemployment or due to disability, rather than being a pension provided simply on the basis of age, as was argued by Thomson.²³³

As Williams notes, and the research findings of this study confirm the, ‘distinction between unemployment, disability, old age, and dependency was blurred and contingent’.²³⁴ Williams also suggests that men gradually withdrew from the labour market due to debility rather than

²³⁰ SRO(I), ADA11/A/B/3/2, *Loes and Wilford Weekly Committee Minutes 3rd May 1779*.

²³¹ Thompson, *Provision for the elderly*, 95-96.

²³² Richard Smith, ‘Ageing and well-being’, in *Old Age from Antiquity*, ed. by Johnson & Thane, pp. 64-95 (p. 78).

²³³ Edward Hunt, ‘Paupers and pensioners: past and present’, *Ageing and Society* 9 (1989), 407-430; Thomson, ‘The decline of social welfare: Falling State Support for the Elderly Since early Victorian Times’, *Ageing and Society*, 4 (1984), 451-482.

²³⁴ Samantha Williams, ‘The Crisis of the English Poor Law’ in *Population, Welfare and Economic Change in Britain 1290-1834*, ed. by Briggs, 150.

simply old age.²³⁵ However, research for this thesis has revealed, debility, loss of functionality and old age, were in the eyes of the poor law authorities often regarded as being synonymous. Although, as Ottaway points out, while the association of old age with increased incidences of sickness and disability was advantageous to the elderly when claiming poor relief, it also reinforced negative perceptions about, ‘the growing helplessness of ageing individuals’.²³⁶

Research for this study revealed, as discussed fully in the following chapter, many farm labourers entered into old age prematurely due to the arduous and strenuous nature of much agricultural work and the physiological decline it initiated. The premature entry into old age experienced by Richard Sage an unskilled agricultural labourer from East Bergholt was typical of many men employed in the more arduous and strenuous agricultural occupations. Research of the East Bergholt baptism, marriage and burial registers together with nominal linkage with the Samford Incorporation Poor Law records enabled a reconstitution of Richard Sage’s biography to be compiled. Sage was born in 1739 and married Elizabeth Askew in 1759 at the age of nineteen and together they had six children.²³⁷ Askew first received poor relief in his early thirties due to regular bouts of illness which prevented him from working. However, it was in his early forties that he began to experience more sustained periods of ‘illness’ and was in receipt of regular relief to tide him over in times of difficulty. This relief took the form of weekly financial payments of between 2 and 4 shillings a week on account of him being ‘ill,’ ‘very ill,’ ‘unable to work,’ ‘lame,’ or ‘infirm’ as shown in Table 2.1. As previously stated, ‘infirmity’ appears to have been regarded as being synonymous with old age by the poor law authorities and in the case of Sage would possibly suggest that he was regarded as having entered old age when only 43. Due to the strenuous nature of some agricultural occupations

²³⁵ Ibid, p. 136.

²³⁶ Ottaway, Susannah, *The Decline of Life*, p. 179.

²³⁷ SRO(I), FB191/D/1/10.

many labourers aged prematurely, some displaying the physical signs of old age as early as in their 40s.

Table 2.1. Richard Sage – Poor Relief²³⁸

Date		Age	Reason for relief
1780	13-Oct	41	Five shillings relief - very ill
1781	04-Oct	42	Four shillings relief - ill
1781	28-Feb	42	Seven shillings relief - 'unable to work, lame'
1781	07-Mar	42	Seven shillings relief - 'unable to work, lame'
1781	14-Mar	42	Six shillings relief - 'unable to work, lame'
1782	16-Oct	43	Three shillings relief – ill, infirm
1782	02-Jan	43	Died

Old age was perceived not only to involve physical but also mental decline, however, while the physiological aspects of ageing are well documented, the psychological effects of ageing have received far less attention. This may have been due to, ‘the effect that old age has on the mind - on mental capacity, intellectual tendencies, emotional health and character ... [being] ... more nebulous and harder to characterize’.²³⁹ Nicholas Robinson’s description of the failure of mental powers in old age in his work *An Essay on the Gout and all Gouty Affections Incident to Affect Mankind* (1756), provides a typical example of the language used when attempting to describe this aspect of ageing stating, ‘weakness of the Senses, all prognosticate, that silver cord begins to loosen, the Springs of Nature fail; and that life itself is drawing near to its Close.’²⁴⁰

The declining intellectual attributes of the aged were considered to result in unattractive behaviour. Often the subject in ballads and poems these negative characteristics included,

²³⁸ SRO(I), AD7/AB4, *Samford Poor Law Hundreds Incorporation, East Bergholt, 1766-1791*.

²³⁹ Susannah Ottaway, ed, *The Cultural Conception of Old Age in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Routledge, 2016), p. 70.

²⁴⁰ Nicholas Robinson, *An Essay on the Gout and all Gouty Affections Incident to affect Mankind* (London: J. Fuller, 1756), p. 95.

‘garrulity and peevishness, a tendency towards alcoholism, selfishness, covetousness’ ... general foolishness and susceptibility to superstition ... and a proclivity for self-deception about their waning powers.’²⁴¹ An anonymous writer listed what he considered to be the ‘Morrall infirmities’ of old age including the negative behavioural tendencies of aged men:

They are apt to be covetous and tenacious for the things of this world ... timorous and fearful ... touchy, peevish and angry ... unteachable ... hard to please ... full of complaints ... impertinent ... think and speak of the sins of their youth ... superstitious and suspicious.²⁴²

Study research findings of the situation and experience of many elderly men in rural Suffolk would appear to be consistent with the findings of Ella Sbarai. In her recent work on the incidence of suicide in Georgian England she suggests that old age is best understood by reference to the ‘ageing body’, and considers that the issues of physical decline, mental decline, social isolation and resultant reduced status, provide a telling insight into the struggles and emotions of the aged from the lower orders.²⁴³ Her research revealed that 61% of suicides in eighteenth-century Suffolk were of men aged 50 years and above and were due to perceived anxieties about occupational vulnerability and economic hardship.²⁴⁴

Defining the Threshold

Determining the onset of old age in the second half of the eighteenth century and in the first half of the nineteenth century is something of a ‘moveable feast’, significantly influenced by status, occupation and gender. Old age was never defined in this period by simply reaching a particular birthday, it was instead determined by a combination of physiological, chronological

²⁴¹ Ottaway, Susannah, *The Cultural Conception of Old Age*, p. 71.

²⁴² Anon, *A Word to the Aged* (London, 1667), p. 8.

²⁴³ Sbarai, ‘The Ageing Body’, 170–194.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, SRO(I), HB/10/9, 1792-1815

and cultural criteria which, ‘collectively defined old age in early modern England.’²⁴⁵ Although an individual may have been called old due to reaching an advanced age, others were considered old due to physical decline and reduced functionality at a much younger age. As research undertaken for this study revealed, because of the strenuous nature of their occupations, many agricultural labourers in Suffolk aged prematurely and displayed the tell-tale visual signs of ageing in their early 40s, while others were not considered old until into their 70s. The onset of old age among men employed as farm labourers was determined with a significant degree of flexibility and was aptly described, as previously noted, as representing a ‘patchwork of experiences’.²⁴⁶ However, it is necessary to establish a ‘loose’ working definition of the onset of old age for the remainder of this study to enable an estimate of the size and diversity of the elderly population and the proportion of the total population of the region it represented to be arrived at.

This thesis challenges the assumptions of many historians, including that of Ottaway in her study of old age in eighteenth-century England, which considered the onset of old age to take place at 60 years. It argues that social class, occupation and gender need to be more fully taken into account when establishing a working definition of the on-set of old age for agricultural labourers in this period in rural Suffolk. In fact, Ottaway herself acknowledges that certain occupations due to their strenuous nature and the environment in which they are performed often resulted in premature ageing.²⁴⁷ Significantly, the physician William Falconer, writing in 1789 stated, ‘the occupation of the labourer, as well as the nature of his being, subjects him to acute illness, to chronic disorders ... to old age, decrepitude, and impotence.’²⁴⁸

²⁴⁵ Ottaway, Susannah, *The Decline of Life*, p. 17.

²⁴⁶ Yallop, Helen, *Age and Identity*, p. 140.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

²⁴⁸ William Falconer, *Essay on the Preservation of Life of Persons Employed in Agriculture* (Bath: R. Crutwell, 1789), p. 6.

Based on research findings of this study and supported by the views of both contemporary social commentators as well as by a number of current historians it is argued that due to the strenuous and arduous nature of many agricultural occupations, often performed in adverse weather conditions, the on-set of old age for agricultural labourers in rural Suffolk can be more appropriately set at 50. 'Green old age', it is argued, commenced for most men at 50 years and who were still able to work during this stage of old age. However, the gradual physical deterioration inherent in the ageing process ultimately undermined their ability to undertake all aspects of agricultural employment. A significant number of men employed in agriculture exhibited the physical symptoms of premature ageing when only in their 40s and as a result the number of people who gave the impression of being old may well have been greater than is revealed by the statistical calculation of the size of the aged population.²⁴⁹

The contention that men generally entered 'green old age' in their 50s is supported by contemporary commentators such as Eden, and the belief of the 1832 Poor Law Commissioners whose contention that in a rural community such as Suffolk the commencement of old age began at 50 years is of particular importance.²⁵⁰ The application of 50 as marking the on-set of old age is also supported by the views of current historians such as Thomas, Thane, Botelho and Troyansky, who have all argued that 50 marked the threshold of the on-set of old age.²⁵¹

The study's research findings also revealed the very visible presence of the elderly within the adult population in Suffolk's rural parishes, consistent with the view of Botelho that, 'there was no rarity value in being old' in this period.²⁵² Over the duration of the eighteenth-century

²⁴⁹ David Troyansky, *Old Age in the Old Regime: Image and Experience in Eighteenth-Century France* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1989), p. 176.

²⁵⁰ Eden, Sir Frederick Morton, *The State of the Poor Vol 2; PP. 44, XXVII (1834), Report from His Majesty's Commissioners for Inquiry into the Poor Laws*.

²⁵¹ Thomas, 'Age and Authority', 240; Thane, Pat, *Old Age in English History*, p. 25; Botelho, Lynn, 'Old Age and menopause', in *Women and Ageing*, ed. by Botelho and Thane, p. 43; Troyansky, David, *Old Age in the Old Regime*, p. 176.

²⁵² Botelho, Lynn, *Old Age and the English Poor Law*.

life expectancy, as Wrigley as Schofield estimated, improved from about 35 to 40 years.²⁵³ However, this estimate of life expectancy is calculated on the basis of life expectancy at birth and so reflects high infant and child mortality rates. Although the misconception persists that there was a scarcity of old people in late early modern England a number of historians have drawn attention to the longevity of some men and women in this period. Thomas, for instance, has shown that individuals who survived childhood could live to old age, while Peter Stearns has also identified that life expectancy for an individual on reaching the age of twenty years was into their fifties in pre-industrial cities.²⁵⁴ Wrigley and Schofield's analysis of English population history has also revealed that life expectancy for an individual at age 20 was commonly in the region of a further 36 to 40 years.²⁵⁵ As Thanes states, 'those who made it to twenty had ... a good chance of living into their fifties or sixties, especially if they were female.'²⁵⁶

Conclusion

It is important to understand society's perception and attitude towards ageing and old age in this period in order to fully understand the situation and hardships faced by elderly men in rural Suffolk in this period. Attempting to define what constituted old age as well as the on-set of old age is extraordinarily complex and the difficulty and indeed reluctance of many eighteenth century social commentators to define the threshold of old age can be traced back to earlier periods. In fact, perceptions and attitudes towards old age in the eighteenth century and early nineteenth century display significant continuity in belief to earlier periods as witnessed by the continued belief in the lifecycle and climacteric years. Importantly, ageing and old age were

²⁵³ Wrigley, Edward and Scofield, Richard, *Population History of England*, p 236.

²⁵⁴ Thomas, 'Age and Authority', 205; Peter Stearns, *Old Age in Preindustrial Society* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1985), p. 5.

²⁵⁵ Wrigley, Edward and Scofield, Richard, *Population History of England*, p. 453.

²⁵⁶ Thane, Pat, *Old Age in English History*, p. 19

also gendered and considered by contemporary commentators almost solely from a masculine perspective throughout this period.

Despite the use of chronological, physiological and cultural criteria the definition of the commencement and the nature of old age remain the source of tension between historians of old age, largely due the idiosyncratic and highly personal nature of ageing. The definition of 60 years was commonly accepted throughout the eighteenth century to delineate the threshold of old age and its usage to define the on-set of old age has continued up to the present day, in part reinforced by the influence of historical demographic studies. However, the importance of the interaction between social status, occupation and gender on the ageing process and onset of old age have largely been neglected by previous studies. The physiological decline and loss of functionality, rather than chronological or cultural factors, were the key determinants of entry into old age for aged farm labourers.

For male agricultural labourers ageing and old age were experienced through physiological decline and resultant loss of functionality. It is considered here that due to the economic and social profile of rural Suffolk together with the arduous nature of many agricultural occupations, performed outdoors and often in adverse weather conditions, that the earlier age of 50 to mark the on-set of old age is more appropriate.

The view that the status of the elderly was determined by their rarity is not consistent with the study's findings. The study presents an alternative view and contends that the aged were, in fact, a very visible group within the population of rural parishes. The use of 50 years to mark the on-set of old age results in an estimate that those aged 50 or above would have comprised between 9% and 12% of the total population of Suffolk and in the case of some parishes up to 20% of the adult population.

The relationship between work, age and gender is the subject of the following chapter and the age-related occupational constraints and difficulties faced by elderly farm labourers are considered in order to reveal the detrimental impact of the demographic and economic changes experienced in Suffolk in this period on the well-being of aged men.

Chapter 3. Work, Leisure and Gender in Eighteenth-Century Suffolk

Introduction

On whatever estimate we employ the glaring fact is that the life of the labourer was a constant battle for survival.²⁵⁸

The aim of this chapter is to reveal the relationship between work, age and gender in the second half of the eighteenth century and in the first half of the nineteenth century in rural Suffolk. Through an analysis of the demographic and economic changes experienced by the region the chapter aims to reveal the impact of these changes on the working lives and identity of old labouring men. It undertakes an analysis of the impact of patterns of continuity and change in farming practices on the nature of employment in order to establish the extent to which aged men were able to achieve self-sufficiency and maintain their independence in the face of age-related occupational constraints and difficulties. The chapter also aims to provide a more nuanced insight into old age than has previously been the case through a consideration of the opportunities which existed for elderly farm labourers to alleviate the hardship of their situation through recreational and leisure activities.

There are a significant number of studies of rural England in this period and questions of the links between work, gender, age and experience have also been explored in later periods.²⁵⁹

Excellent work by Verdon has recovered aspects of the impact of economic change on the lives of working women in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, while Nigel Goose has

²⁵⁸ Frank O’Gorman, *The Long Eighteenth Century* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), p. 23.

²⁵⁹ Gordon Mingay, *A Social History of the English Countryside* (London: Routledge, 1990); Christopher Taylor, *Village and Farmstead: a history of rural settlement in England* (London: George Philip, 1960); Joan Thirsk, ed., *Agrarian History of England and Wales, 1640-1750, Vol. 3* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Jonathan Chambers and Gordon Mingay, *The Agricultural Revolution 1750-1850* (London: Batsford, 1969); Eric Kerridge, *The Agricultural Revolution* (London: Routledge, 2013); M. Overton, *Agricultural Revolution in England: The Transformation of the Agrarian Economy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Howard Newby, *Country Life: A Social History of Rural England* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1987).

investigated the plight of the older male labourer in nineteenth-century Hertfordshire.²⁶⁰ Pioneering research on the life and work of the farm worker in eighteenth-century England has also been undertaken by Alan Everitt. In addition, surveys on rural poverty in this period have been undertaken by Ian Gazeley and Verdon. Several studies have also focussed on women, work and ageing in a number of geographical and chronological contexts. However, the situation of the aged farm labourer in rural Suffolk in this period remains an under-researched topic.²⁶¹

This absence of historical interest in the situation and experiences of the elderly male farm labourer in rural Suffolk is surprising given the enormous interest in gender relations and identity in this period and, the fact that agricultural labour was the predominant male occupation in Suffolk in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Consequently, this chapter explores specifically the occupational situation and difficulties faced by elderly farm labouring men in rural Suffolk in order to explore questions of work, age and gender.

Demographic Profile

In order to fully understand the position of older men within the demographic structure of Suffolk some discussion of the demographic changes that took place in the period needs first to be set out. Suffolk was one of the largest English shires, with a population of 210,437 in 1801, bordered on the north by Norfolk, the west by Cambridgeshire, the south by Essex and

²⁶⁰ Nicola Verdon, 'The state of the rural poor : the agricultural labourer and the Royal Commission on Labour in 1890s England', in *The golden age of state enquiries : rural enquiries in the nineteenth century : from fact gathering to political instrument*, ed. by Nadine Vivier, Rural history in Europe, 14 (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2014); Nigel Goose, 'Poverty, old age and gender in nineteenth-century England, 351-84.

²⁶¹ Botelho, Lynn and Thane, Pat, eds. *Women and Ageing*; Sara Mendelson and Patricia Crawford, *Women in Early Modern England 1550-1720* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1998); Margaret Pelling, 'Who most needs to marry? Ageing and inequality among women and men in early modern Norwich', in *Women and Ageing* ed. by Lynn Botelho & Pat Thane (London: Routledge, 2001), pp. 31-24 (p. 3); Alan Everitt, 'Farm labourers', in *Agrarian History of England and Wales, IV, 1500-1640*, ed. by Joan Thirsk (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967; Ian Gazeley and Nicola Verdon, 'The first poverty line? Davies' and Eden's investigation of rural poverty in the late 18th-century England', *Explorations in Economic History*, 51. (2014) 94-108.

on the east by the North Sea.²⁶² In terms of local administration, the county was divided into Hundreds which dated back to the tenth century when the unit was devised as an administrative division and formed, ‘the basis of all public administration in medieval England, judicial, fiscal and military.’²⁶³ Suffolk comprised twenty-one Hundreds, fourteen of which were in the east of the county and seven in the west. Table 3.1. lists the Hundreds together with the number of parishes they comprised, which is also shown graphically in Figure 3.1.

Table 3.1. Suffolk Hundreds - Parishes²⁶⁴

East Suffolk Hundreds	No. of Parishes
Carlford	17
Colneis	10
Blything	46
Bosmere and Claydon	35
Samford	28
Mutford and Lothingland	24
Wangford	27
Lees	17
Wilford	17
Stow	14
Hartismere	32
Hoxne	26
Thredling	5
Plomesgate	23
West Suffolk Hundreds	
Babergh	33
Blackbourne	34
Cosford	17
Lackford	17
Risbridge	32

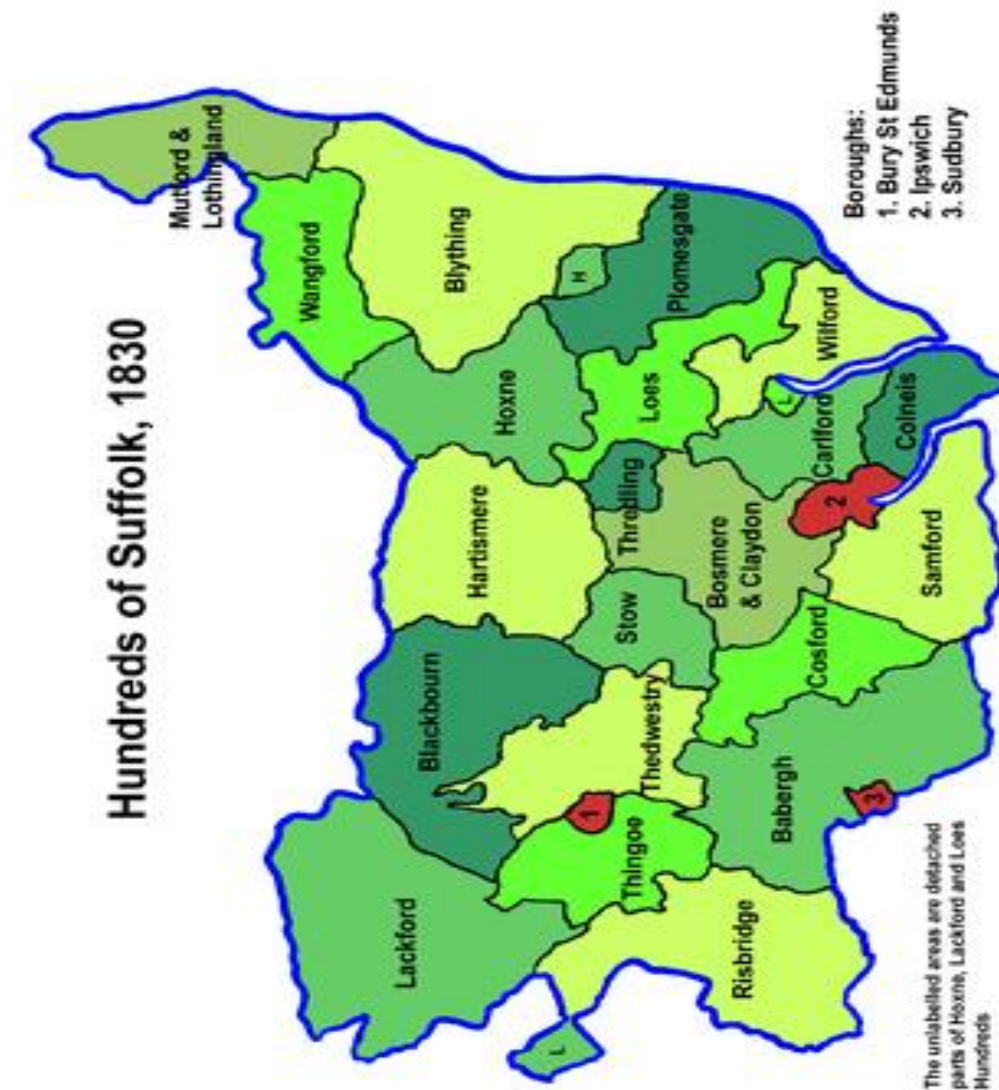
²⁶² SRO(I), HD2448/4/2/2/4, *1801 Census, Abstracts of the Answers and Returns: Enumeration Part 1, England and Wales*, vi(140) 813.

²⁶³ David Edwards, ‘Hundreds and Liberties’, in *An Historical Map of Suffolk*, ed. by David Dymond & Edward Martin (Lavenham: Suffolk County Council, 1998), p. 26.

²⁶⁴ Dorothy Marshall, *The English Poor in the Eighteenth Century* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007), p.27.

The Hundreds typically comprised a multitude of small, scarcely populated rural parishes as demonstrated by the demographic profile of the Carlford and Colneis Hundred, which was typical of other Hundreds in the region and was comprised of twenty-seven predominately rural parishes. The largest parishes included Grundisburgh (pop. 641), Nacton (pop. 461) and Otley (pop. 415). The smallest parishes included Brightwell (pop. 46), Hemley (pop. 66) and Culpho (pop. 73), as shown in Appendix 1.

Figure 3.1. Hundreds of Suffolk 1830²⁶⁵



²⁶⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hundreds_of_Suffolk

Suffolk's population increased from 183,373 in 1781 to 239,407 by 1821. This growth was particularly rapid at the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth century due to a combination of a natural excess of births over deaths and inward migration with most rural parishes experiencing significant population growth.²⁶⁶ Based on my research of the 1821 census reports, which recorded age structure at Hundred level and which were ninety-seven percent complete for Suffolk, the population of each Hundred together with the percentage population growth experienced between 1781 and 1821 is shown in Table 3.2. Suffolk's Hundreds comprised those which had incorporated from mid-eighteenth century for the purpose of administering the poor law and those Hundreds in which individual parishes continued to administer the poor law as envisaged by the 1598-1601 legislation.

The significant increase in population experienced by Suffolk in this period reflected the overall increase in England's population which took place in the eighteenth century. England's population which had stayed unchanged since 1650 began to grow rapidly in the 1730's, which together with wage patterns and inflation increased structural poverty from mid-eighteenth century, particularly in rural regions such as Suffolk.²⁶⁸ Wrigley and Schofield estimated the population of England in 1801 to be 8.6 million, some 3.4 million more than the 5.1 million estimated for 1695.²⁶⁹ The population continued to rise into the nineteenth century and was estimated by Wrigley and Schofield to have reached 11.5 million by 1820, a growth rate of 133% between 1680 and 1820.²⁷⁰

²⁶⁶ Francis Grace, 'Population Trends, 1811-1981', in *An Historical Map of Suffolk*, ed by, Dymond & Martin, p. 106.

²⁶⁸ Fideler, Paul, *Social Welfare*, p. 142.

²⁶⁹ Wrigley, Edward and Schofield, Richard, *English Population History*, p. 175.

²⁷⁰ Edward Wrigley, 'The Growth of Population in Eighteenth-Century England: A Conundrum Resolved', *Past and Present*, 98 (1983), 121-150 (p. 122).

Table 3.2 Suffolk - Population 1781 and 1821²⁷¹

Suffolk - Population 1781 – 1821			
	Pop. (1781)	Pop. (1821)	Pop. Growth, 1781 - 1821 (%)
<u>Incorporated Hundreds</u>			
Blything	17,834	22,903	28.4
Bosmere and Claydon	10,446	12,100	15.8
Carlford	4,222	5,966	41.3
Colneis	2,874	4,169	45.1
Cosford	6,897	9,478	37.4
Loes	8,132	12,208	50.1
Mutford and Lothingland	7,774	13,565	74.5
Samford	8,366	10,629	27.0
Stow	5,395	7,536	39.7
Wangford	9,602	12,594	31.2
Wilford	4,486	6,718	49.9
<u>Unincorporated Hundreds</u>			
Babergh	19,001	21,784	14.6
Blackbourne	9,930	13,089	31.8
Hartismere	13,608	16,186	18.9
Hoxne	13,012	15,458	18.8
Laxford	7,679	11,521	50.0
Plomesgate	7,647	10,616	38.8
Risbridge	12,396	14,719	18.7
Thedwestry	7,106	9,278	30.6
Thingoe	4,591	5,724	24.7
Thredling	2,375	3,166	33.3
Total	<u>183,373</u>	<u>239,407</u>	<u>34%</u>

*excl. Ipswich, Bury St Edmunds and Sudbury

While the county experienced an overall 34% growth in population between 1781 and 1821, the study's findings revealed that population growth was greater in Suffolk's more densely populated incorporated Hundreds located in the east of the county. The average population increase in the incorporated Hundreds was 40% between 1781 and 1821 with a number of Hundreds experiencing even greater growth. For example, the population of the Colneis

²⁷¹Stephen Thompson, 'Population Growth', in *Population, Welfare and Economic Change in Britain 1290-1834*. ed by Briggs, 218-219; SRO(I), HD2448/4/2/24/3, PP, 1822 X, 1821, *Census Enumeration Abstract*.

Hundred grew by 45%, Loes by 50%, Mutford and Lothingland by 74% and the Wilford Hundred by 50%. These changes compared to an average population increase of 28% across the unincorporated Hundreds in the west of the county in the same period, findings which are consistent with those of Wrigley and Schofield's study of England's population history.²⁷² A detailed analysis of Suffolk's population growth between 1781 and 1821 is shown in Appendix 2.

The demographic age profile of the region, based on my research of early English census returns and supplemented by the work of Wrigley and Stephen Thompson, for 1781 is shown in Table 3.3 and for 1821 in Table 3.4.²⁷³ The region's population in 1781 comprised 38% of those aged 0-14 years and 52% aged 15-49 years. The elderly, calculated here as those being 50 years or above, represented nearly 10% of the total population but significantly up to nearly 20% of the adult population in certain parishes. Throughout this period children aged 0-14 years represented a significant proportion of the region's population, representing nearly 40% of the overall population in 1781 and 1821, as shown in Tables 3.3. and 3.4. For example, in the Thredling Hundred children represented 38.3% of the total population of the Hundred, while in the Stow Hundred they represented 39.5% of the Hundred's total population. However, while the population of the region increased by 34% between 178 and 1821, the overall demographic age profile of the region remained little changed. Suffolk was a county with a growing population full of young people.

²⁷² Wrigley, Edward and Schofield, Richard, *English Population History*, pp. 157-179

²⁷³ SRO(I),HD2448/4/2/2/4, 1801 Census; Stephen Thompson, 'Population Growth' in *Population, Welfare and Economic Change*, ed by Briggs, pp. 218-19; Wrigley, 'The Growth of Population', 121-150.

Table 3.3 Suffolk Demographic Age Profile – All Age Groups (1781)²⁷⁴

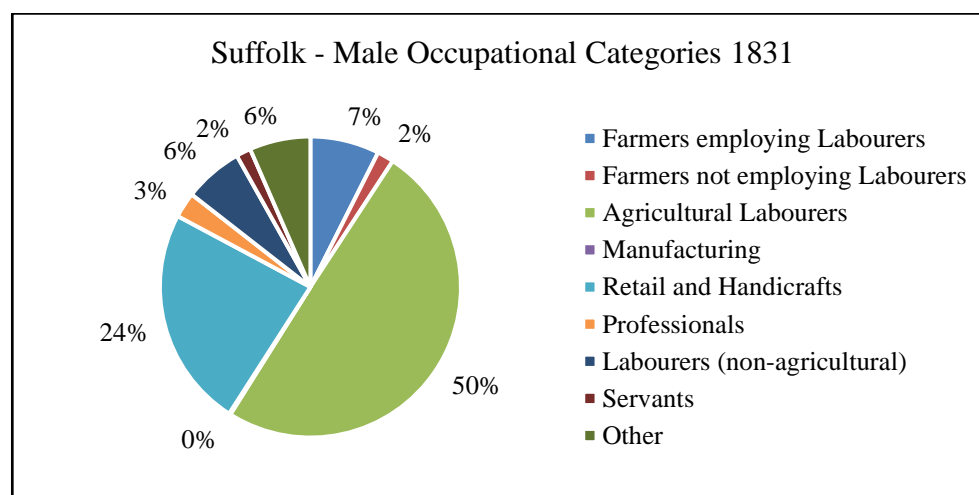
Demographic Profile - All Age Groups (1781)						
Pop	0-14 yrs.	%	15-49 yrs.	%	50+ yrs.	%
183,373	68,765	38%	96,087	52%	18,521	10%

Table 3.4 Suffolk Demographic Age Profile – All Age Groups (1821)²⁷⁵

Demographic Profile - All Age Groups (1821)						
Pop	0-14 yrs.	%	15-49 yrs.	%	50+ yrs.	%
239,407	92,172	39%	122,097	51%	25,138	11%

Occupational Structure

Throughout the eighteenth century and in the first half of the nineteenth century agriculture provided the principal means of male employment in Suffolk, as shown in Figure 3.2 and detailed in Table 3.5.

Figure 3.2. Suffolk – Male Occupational Categories 1831²⁷⁶

²⁷⁴ Stephen Thompson, 'Population, Growth', in *Population, Welfare and Economic Change*, ed. by Briggs, pp. 153-189 (p. 218); Edward Wrigley, *The early English censuses* (Oxford: University of Oxford, 2011);

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 218.

²⁷⁶ URL: <http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/unit/10063504/cube/SOC1831>

In 1831, 59% of the employable male population of Suffolk (aged 20 years and over) was employed in agricultural occupations. This comprised 50% who were employed as farm labourers, 7% farmers employing labourers, and 2% of farmers not employing labourers. Occupations classified as ‘retail and handicrafts’ comprised 24% of the employable male population, many of which were related directly or indirectly to agricultural production. However, research conducted for this study also revealed that most men working in agriculture were unskilled casual labourers hired and paid by the day.

Table 3.5 Suffolk – Male Occupational Categories 1831²⁷⁷

Male Occupational Categories (1831)	Emp's	%
Farmers employing Labourers	2992	7
Farmers not employing Labourers	721	2
Agricultural Labourers	20031	50
Manufacturing	64	<1
Retail and Handicrafts	9557	24
Professionals	1102	3
Labourers (non-agricultural)	2549	6
Servants	634	2
Other	2642	7

The prevalence in Suffolk of agriculture as a source of employment is further underlined when the local situation is contrasted with that of the national picture in this period. Unpublished work by Sebastiaan Keibek on the occupational structure of England and Wales between 1601 and 1841 revealed the extent of the decline of agriculture as a source of employment nationally, falling from 64% of England’s employable male population in 1601 to 34% of the employable male population by 1841. In the same period, men employed in manufacturing activities

²⁷⁷ Ibid.

increased from 28% of the male population in 1601 to 44% of the male population by 1841, as shown in Table 3.6.

Table 3.6. England – Male Occupational Structure 1601-1841.²⁷⁸

England – Male Occupational Structure 1601-1841					
	1601	1701	1801	1817	1841
Agriculture	63.8%	45.3%	39.4%	37.4%	34.3%
Manufacturing	28.0%	41.7%	42.0%	42.7%	44.1%

Importantly, the reduction in the national agricultural labour force and associated increase of those employed in manufacturing was generally concentrated in the north and north-west of England. In most southern and eastern regions over 40% of the male labour force continued to be employed as agricultural labourers. Manufacturing activity across eastern and southern counties was negligible, only accounting for between 1% and 5% of the male workforce by 1831.

In summary, by the first half of the nineteenth century, 59% of employable men in Suffolk continued to work in agriculture compared to 20% in the North-West, 26% in the North, and 30% in the Midlands. In stark contrast to regions in the north of England, study findings highlighted the absence of manufacturing occupations in Suffolk, employing less than 1% of the employable male population in Suffolk.²⁷⁹

²⁷⁸ Sebastiaan Keibek, *The Male Occupational Structure of England and Wales 1600-1850* (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Cambridge, 2016), p. 152.

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 152-164

Economic Environment

The economic profile of Suffolk changed significantly during the second half of the eighteenth century and in the first half of the nineteenth century but as my research showed, unfortunately not for the better. Indeed, as Evans has argued, it was during this period that the region declined from being ‘one of the most economically advanced to one of the most backward regions in England.’²⁸⁰ Suffolk had been an important centre for woollen cloth production throughout the seventeenth century and in the first half of the eighteenth century. Daniel Defoe’s journey throughout Britain between 1724 and 1726 frequently referred to the prosperity of the region, noting that in the county’s rural villages individuals were, ‘employed, and in part maintained by the spinning of wool.’²⁸¹ The textile industry in Suffolk was based on the putting out system. Merchants purchased wool and distributed it to female spinners based at home. The finished yarn was then given to male weavers who also worked mainly in their own homes. The textile industry and agriculture within the region were complimentary, enabling farm labourers who were underemployed or unemployed in the winter months to supplement their income by working as weavers at home. However, by the middle of the eighteenth century Suffolk’s textile industry was in protracted decline and unable to compete with the faster and cheaper machine manufacture of cloth that developed rapidly in the north and north-west of England.²⁸² The decline of the textile industry experienced in Suffolk, also took place in Norfolk, as revealed by the studies of Keith Sugden, who analysed male occupational data to trace the decline of the Norwich worsted industry between 1700 and 1820.²⁸³

²⁸⁰ Nicola Evans, *The East Anglian Linen Industry: Rural Industry and Local Economy 1500-1850* (Guildford: Gower, 1985), p. 10.

²⁸¹ Daniel Defoe, *Tour Through the Whole Island of Great Britain 1724-5*, (reprint: London: Viking Penguin, 1989). p. 1, 17, 37, 61-2.

²⁸² Evans, Nicola, *The East Anglian Linen Industry*, p. 11.

²⁸³ Keith Sugden, ‘Clapham revisited: the decline of the Norwich worsted industry’, *Continuity and Change*, 33 (2018); Keith Sugden, ‘The Location of the Textile Industry in England and Wales 1813-1820’, *Textile History*, 47 (2016), 208-226.

While the expansion of urban and non-agricultural occupations which accompanied industrialisation and urbanisation in the north and north west of England absorbed the growth of population being experienced, in East Anglia there were few such opportunities. Limited urbanisation did develop in the county in centres such as Ipswich, but the process was slow, and Suffolk remained a primarily agricultural region. The Poor Law Commissioner Henry Stuart stated in his report on the administration of the poor law in Suffolk in the early 1830s that:

The county of Suffolk is exclusively agricultural, there being no trade or manufacture carried on within it, beyond the ordinary handicraft trades required for the purposes of husbandry, and to supply the daily wants of inhabitants.²⁸⁴

He noted that:

There is, indeed, a small Silk manufactory in Sudbury, which forms ... the only exception to the general character of the county, but it is on a limited scale, that it does not affect the general character of the population even in its immediate neighbourhood.²⁸⁵

The decline of the cloth industry had a particularly adverse impact on family income in Suffolk's rural parishes, resulting in increased underemployment or unemployment for men and women in an area where farming was increasingly geared to wheat production and characterised by extreme seasonality in the demand for agricultural labour.²⁸⁶ The woollen cloth industry had formally been an important source of employment for women, whose income constituted a significant safety net that helped maintain the overall family domestic budget. However, unlike in other regions such as Hertfordshire, where industries such as

²⁸⁴ Henry Stuart, *Report on the Administration and practical operation of the Poor Laws in the counties of Suffolk and Norfolk*, p. 337.

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 337.

²⁸⁶ Keith Snell, *Annals of the Labouring Poor*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 70

straw plaiting replaced spinning as a source of income, Suffolk did not develop alternative proto-industrial employment opportunities as the textile industry declined. My research of the Poor Law Report of 1834 identified frequent references to the reduction in employment opportunities in cottage industry:

Formerly they used to be employed in spinning; and it was not unusual for the Wife and Children to earn as much as the Husband. The descendants of those who were master clothiers formerly in this village are now paupers. It is supposed that at least, 40,000 people were employed in spinning and weaving in Suffolk about 40 or 50 years ago. Places most noted for manufactures then are now noted for a pauperised and degraded population.²⁸⁷

The report concluded that the textile industry in the county had, ‘been entirely given up since the general employment of machinery’ and which had resulted in the, ‘finality of the collapse of the spinning industry in the countryside.’²⁸⁸

Agriculture

The study’s findings revealed alongside the loss of employment opportunities in the textile industry, labouring families also had to contend with the negative impact on their livelihoods of the rise in wheat prices from the 1760s till the end of the Napoleonic Wars.²⁸⁹ It was during this period that much of east Suffolk moved from systems of mixed farming to become primarily a wheat producing region in response to rising wheat prices. This shift had significant and largely negative consequences for labouring families and in particular for elderly farm workers. The replacement of pastoral by arable farming in response to the high prices commanded by grain from mid-eighteenth century and during the Napoleonic wars

²⁸⁷ *PP. 1834, XXX*, p. 320.

²⁸⁸ Verdon, ‘The Rural Labour Market’, 306.

²⁸⁹ George Boyer, *An Economic History of the English Poor Law 1750-1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990). p. 31

further reduced opportunities for employment, particularly for elderly farm workers. Even after 1815 when grain prices began to fall, farmers in Suffolk were reluctant to revert back to the types of mixed agriculture which had proved successful in the past and as Arthur Young suggests, ‘Over-specialisation by farmers ... [in Suffolk] ... limited their opportunities, and their failure to react to changed circumstances led them into a downward spiral.’²⁹⁰

The trend to revert from pastoral to grain production which had begun in the seventeenth century in Suffolk continued throughout the eighteenth century and had a series of negative effects on labouring family income. Development of arable production was accelerated by the adoption of new husbandry techniques, one consequence of which was to reduce the need for female labour. From mid-eighteenth century there was an observable, ‘sexual specialization of agricultural work.’²⁹¹ The scythe tended to be used more by men and as it became the tool of choice for cutting corn, women had to start looking elsewhere for employment’.²⁹² Instead of well-paid harvest work women were relegated to lower paid activities such as weeding and planting in the spring and haymaking in early summer.²⁹³

Another important consequence of the move towards arable farming was that there was only ever a need for a small number of workers to be employed on a farm on a permanent or regular basis. However, it is also important to recognise, as Pamela Sharpe and Joanne McEwan have shown, that farm labourers were not an homogeneous group.²⁹⁴ While the vast majority were casual ‘day waged’ unskilled agricultural labourers, there was always a minority of highly

²⁹⁰ Arthur Young, *A General View of the Agriculture of the County of Suffolk* (Plymouth: David and Charles, 1813), p. 13.

²⁹¹ Snell, Keith, *Annals of the Labouring Poor* p. 50.

²⁹² Michael Roberts, ‘Sickles and Scythes: Woman’s Work and Men’s Work at Harvest Time’, *Historical Journal*, IV, 1979, 3-38.

²⁹³ Snell, Keith, *Annals of the Labouring Poor*, p. 309.

²⁹⁴ Pamela Sharpe and Joanne McEwan, ‘Introduction’, in *Accommodating Poverty: The Housing and Living Arrangements of the English Poor, c. 1600-1850*, ed by, Pamela Sharpe and Joanne McEwan (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 1-24 (p. 4).

skilled men who were employed on better terms.²⁹⁵ These were the ‘elite’ of Suffolk’s rural labour force and who had specialist experience and skills such as ploughmen, waggoners or ‘horseboys’. This group could live more comfortably with a greater degree of employment security than the casual unskilled ‘day waged’ labourers. The majority of farm workers, however, were casual unskilled agricultural labourers who were employed by the day and vulnerable to seasonal underemployment and insecurity.²⁹⁶ The study’s research findings confirmed the view of Sharpe and McEwan and revealed that the population of most rural parishes in the region comprised of a combination of a small number of regularly employed farm workers and a larger number of labourers who were employed on a casual basis during periods of peak activity. My research findings of the Accounts of the Henniker Estate in Suffolk, together with those of a number of other large estates in the region, revealed a dual reliance on a small core of regularly employed farm workers and a large pool of unskilled farm labourers employed on a daily basis.²⁹⁷ The Henniker Estate Ledger (1795-1823) recorded that three farm workers were employed on a regular basis on the estate based at Thornham Hall. Two labourers were employed for 46 weeks of the year and were paid £28 annually, while one labourer was employed for 52 weeks and paid £31 annually. In contrast, those hired and paid on a daily basis received between 9 and 11 shillings a day, with the daily rate varying significantly between the winter and summer months.

²⁹⁵ Alexandra Shepard, ‘Poverty, Labour and the Language of Social description in Early Modern England’, *Past and Present* 202, (2008), 51-95 (p. 52).

²⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

²⁹⁷ SRO(I), HA/24/3/27, *Bacon Longe Family Archive – Tunstall Estate Accounts (1790-1798)*; SRO(I), HA/24/3/26, *Bacon Longe Family Archive – Rev Longe, Coddenham Estate Accounts (1797-1801)*; SRO(I), HC/406/4/1, *Henniker Family Papers – Coddenham labour accounts (1816-1886)*; SRO(I), HA116/5/1/10/1, *Henniker Family Papers – Coddenham estate ledgers/accounts (1705-1823)*; SRO(I), HA116/5/1/10/2, *Henniker Family Papers – Coddenham estate ledgers/accounts (1795-1823)*; SRO(I), HA247/3/1, *Edger Family Papers (1482-1893), Estate Account Books (1690-1755)*.

Seasonality in the demand for agricultural labour was pronounced in the east of the county but was less marked in the pasture farming areas of west Suffolk where employment was spread comparatively evenly over the year for both males and females. Livestock farmers recruited more labour during haymaking and calving, but these seasonal peaks were minor compared to those associated with grain production.²⁹⁸ In the east of the county with its emphasis on arable farming, the impact of the seasonal variation in demand for labour was severe. In common with the findings of Snell, research conducted for this study revealed that the pronounced seasonality of arable agriculture meant that many labouring families experienced unemployment and under-employment for significant periods of the year and were likely to have to resort to poor relief with elderly farm workers being particularly vulnerable.²⁹⁹

My research findings from the Henniker estate accounts revealed the seasonality of agricultural employment in this region. Analysis of the accounts revealed the significant in the number of labourers hired on a daily basis during the winter and summer months on the Henniker Estate in 1815, as shown in Table 3.7. The reduction in the number of labourers hired in the winter months, inevitably leading to high levels of unemployment amongst the farm labouring population of the locality. Only 12 ‘day waged’ labourers were hired in January and only 9 in February compared to 27 in June, 39 in July and 28 in August.

²⁹⁸ Snell, Keith, *Annals of the Labouring Poor*, p. 22.

²⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 17-28.

Table 3.7 Henniker Estate - Labourers hired – winter and summer months (1815)³⁰⁰

1815		No. of labourers hired	1815		No. of labourers hired per day
January	3rd	3	June	1st	5
	12th	3		8th	6
	16th	3		15th	6
	22nd	3		22nd	5
		12		29th	5
February	5th	6			27
	26th	3	July	4th	5
		9		4th	8
				11th	10
				18th	11
				25th	5
					39
			August	5th	5
				11th	5
				18th	2
				20th	2
				21st	4
				25th	10
					28

Winter and summer unemployment rates for agricultural labourers in Suffolk are shown in Table 3.8. This evidence is drawn from my research of the responses to the Rural Queries Questionnaire of the Royal Poor Law Commission Report (1832) which required parishes to provide, ‘the number of labourers generally out of employment, and how maintained in Summer and Winter’. The unemployment statistics refer specifically to labourers employed in arable farming in east Suffolk and while they reveal the substantial levels of surplus labour in the winter months also worthy of note is the significant incidence of unemployment in the summer months.

³⁰⁰ SRO(I), HA116/5/1/10/2, *Henniker Estate Ledger B (1795-1824)*, pp. 217-220.

Table 3.8 Suffolk – Agricultural Unemployment³⁰¹

Suffolk – Unemployment 1832			
Winter unemployment rate (%)		Summer unemployment rate (%)	
(a)	(b)	(a)	(b)
11.1	18.1	8.8	12.1

The statistics in column (a) show the percentage of agricultural labourers within the total labour force. Column (b) shows the percentage of unemployed agricultural labourers within the total workforce of agricultural labourers. As a consequence of these fluctuations in employment a labourer's level of income usually varied significantly at different times of the year, the difference in earnings between winter and harvest time was considerable. Study findings also revealed that as a result of seasonal patterns of underemployment or unemployment, combined with a lack of alternative sources of income that agricultural workers in Suffolk had a lower standard of living than their contemporaries in other eastern counties.³⁰²

The dominance of arable farming in the county had other negative economic consequences. In the earlier period, when systems of mixed farming predominated and land values were not so high, labouring families could rely on a variety of common rights that supplemented subsistence and income through gleaning of corn at certain times of the year and perhaps the grazing of a cow on common land. However, care must be taken when assessing the degree of support this provided. Leigh Shaw Taylor, in particular, has questioned whether parliamentary enclosure increased the wage dependency of agricultural labourers by reducing their rights to use common land. His study on parliamentary enclosure revealed that most labourers did not

³⁰¹ *PP. 44, XXVII (1834), Report from His Majesty's Commissioners for Inquiry into the Poor Laws; Rural Queries, Question 6.*

³⁰² Joan Thirsk, *Suffolk Farming in the Nineteenth Century*, (Ipswich: Suffolk Records Society, 1958), p. 31.

enjoy access to common land prior to enclosure and could not therefore have been proletarianized by their loss, which appears to have been the case in Suffolk.³⁰³

Many families also rented small gardens of less than four acres to grow vegetables. Jeremy Burchardt points to the importance of allotments to families and the allotment movement which first commenced shortly after the outbreak of war with France in 1793 and lasted into the beginning of the nineteenth century. Burchardt's study revealed that allotment yields were often remarkably high and sometimes perhaps even double those obtained by farmers. His study concluded that allotments made a much larger contribution to living standards than previously acknowledged, 'far from being a marginal phenomenon, they played a crucial part in the family economies of those of the labouring poor who had them'.³⁰⁴ But as wheat prices increased land became more and more valuable and even small garden plots became less affordable for labouring families in Suffolk to rent. Wages did not rise sufficiently to compensate for the loss of garden plots and allotments and incomes frequently fell below subsistence level, inevitably leading to a rise in applications for poor relief.³⁰⁵

The study's findings of the responses given to Question 14 of the Rural Queries of the Poor Law Commissioners Report revealed the stark realities of life for many labouring families. Asked whether farm labourers could subsist on their typical wages, responses to the questionnaire interestingly revealed a significant difference between attitudes in Suffolk to that of other southern and eastern counties. While a small number of Suffolk parishes answered that subsistence was possible, their responses were usually caveated with comments such as, 'with regular employment', and 'with man and wife in constant employment.' Far more typical were

³⁰³ Taylor, 'Parliamentary Enclosure', 640-662.

³⁰⁴ Jeremy Burchardt, *The allotment movement in England 1793-1873*, (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2002). p. 4.

³⁰⁵ George Boyer, *An Economic History of the English Poor Law*, p. 38; Joan Thirsk, *Suffolk Farming in the Nineteenth Century*, p. 31.

negative comments on a labourer's ability to subsist such as, 'Many do subsist, God knows how', 'Not on such food as the Labourer ought to live on', 'could not subsist even on the meanest fare', 'only if any children were taken away', and on a 'wretched subsistence on bread and potatoes'. Many responses highlighted the importance of marriage and the potential a second income provided in achieving subsistence and that 'much depends on the management of his wife.'³⁰⁶

Responses to the same question from other southern and eastern counties were far more positive than those for Suffolk, as shown in Table 3.9.

Table 3.9. Typical responses to Rural Queries – Question 14³⁰⁷

County	Typical response(s) to Question 14.
Bedfordshire	'Certainly, on bread, potatoes, butter and tea'. 'A family can subsist comfortably'. 'Can subsist on almost any earnings'
Berkshire	'A family, so circumstanced, with sober habits, lives comfortably, creditably and sufficiently.' 'Yes, certainly'. 'They do subsist'. 'Yes, on bread, meat, small beer.'
Hertfordshire	'Hundreds ... do subsist'. 'Certainly, on good meat and bread.'
Cambridgeshire	'An old labourer told me ... that the poor were never better off than at this time.' 'Yes you could live well ...' 'They do subsist and are robust.' 'Yes, very well indeed ...' 'They may subsist well'.

³⁰⁶ *PP. 44, XXVII (1834), Report from His Majesty's Commissioners for Inquiry into the Poor Laws; Rural Queries, Question 14 – Suffolk.*

³⁰⁷ *Ibid., Question 14 – Suffolk*

Fifteen parishes out of the eighteen parishes who responded to the Rural Queries Questionnaire in Bedfordshire were of the opinion that farm labourers were able to subsist on their wages. In Berkshire, twenty-six parishes out of the thirty parishes which responded to the questionnaire were of the same opinion. In Hertfordshire, twelve out of seventeen parishes regarded labourers wages sufficient to subsist on, while in Cambridgeshire thirty out of thirty-six parishes were of the same opinion.

The negative economic impact on labouring families of changes in farming systems and practices in Suffolk were combined with social and spatial shifts that changed the relationship between farm labourers and their employers, leaving farm labourers in a more vulnerable position. Few workers were employed on an annual basis and combined with fluctuations in the demand for labour due to the seasonality of agricultural production many casual daily paid labourers were not needed for significant stretches of the year. Consequently, the relationship between employer and employee became more transient and arguably less supportive.³⁰⁸ Employer and employee also became more physically distant.³⁰⁹ For example, Holderness has shown, that in closed parishes dominated by single landowners the access to cottages for day wage dependent families was strictly controlled to avoid potential cost to the parish poor law authorities.³¹⁰ Many day labourers also lived in parishes some distance from their employers and without a single dominant landlord. Known as open parishes these villages formed a reservoir of labour for supplying neighbouring farms. They were often, 'overcrowded, insanitary, ill regulated, with numerous small proprietors who let tumble down cottages at exorbitant rents.'³¹¹ Tradesmen and small holders became petty landlords, buying up derelict cottages and letting them to labourers. Fifty pounds bought a cottage that yielded

³⁰⁸ Thirsk, Joan, *Suffolk Farming in the Nineteenth Century* p. 31

³⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 31

³¹⁰ Brian Holderness, 'Open' and 'Close' Parishes in England in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries', *The Agricultural History Review*, 20, 1972),126-139 (p. 126).

³¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 126.

a rent of between three and five guineas a year and purchase was profitable and popular for those with a small amount of capital.³¹² Conditions were often terrible. Charles Kingsley in his novel *Alton Locke* described the typical open parish as, ‘a knot of thatched hovels, all stinking and leaning everyway but right, the windows patched with paper, the doorway stopped with filth.’³¹³ The growth of these settlements also meant that many labourers often had to walk long distances to and from work each day.

The issue of open and closed parishes was also considered by Byung Khun Song’s study of the impact of parish typography and differing economic circumstances on parish poor law policies.³¹⁴ The research findings for this thesis confirmed the conclusions of Song’s study and that consideration of the inter-relationship between parish typography and economic circumstances is necessary in order to understand the differences between localities in the implementation of poor law policies, a subject explored in greater detail in the following chapter.

Changing social and spatial relations in rural regions made a significant impression on contemporary social commentators who identified the difference in living arrangements between farm workers in Suffolk and those in the northern counties of England. In the northern counties single labourers still frequently lived in the homes of their employers, married workers were provided with cottages on the farm, and workers were provided with meals by their employer during the working day. This relationship did not exist in the southern and eastern counties. It was observed by Pehr Kalm, a Finnish scientist who visited England in 1748, that in East Anglia it is the, ‘custom that every farmer employs day labourers who work for daily wages ... both in the arable field, in the meadow, in the lathe, trashing ... a

³¹² Thirsk Joan *Suffolk Farming in the Nineteenth Century*, p. 31.

³¹³ Charles Kingsley, *Alton Locke* (London: Cassell, 1969).

³¹⁴ Song, ‘Parish Typology and the Operation of the Poor Laws, 203-224.

labouring man gets 8/6d to 10 shillings a day'.³¹⁵ Kalm and other foreign visitors also observed that there seemed to be no permanent relationship, no ties of mutual obligation and responsibility, between the landowner and those he employed, 'landowners extracted service from their 'churls', a word which Kalm applied to every labouring man he met.³¹⁶

Old Men and Agricultural Labour

The changing nature of agricultural work in Suffolk had a significant impact on elderly farm labourers. A young and growing population, low wages, seasonality of employment, together with a lack of alternative sources of work outside of agriculture had serious implications for older male labourers. However, in order to fully understand the damaging impact of Suffolk's dependence on agriculture and absence of alternative sources of employment on elderly men it is necessary to contrast the county's occupational opportunities with that of other regions. For example, the occupational structure of north east England was in stark contrast to that of Suffolk. The north east region was one of the earliest to experience the majority of its population being employed in non-agricultural occupations which was fundamental to the region's industrial development. Compared to the predominance of agricultural occupations in Suffolk, many of which were of a physically arduous nature, the north east provided a wide range of diverse alternative occupational opportunities. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, as Adrian Green's study of commercial agriculture in the north east revealed, a wide range of alternative roles existed in industry and manufacturing to traditional agricultural occupations, including:

³¹⁵ Pehr Kalm, *Kalm's account of his visit to England on his way to America*, trans, J. Lucas (London: Macmillan and Co, 1820), p. 206.

³¹⁶ Derek Jarrett, *England in the Age of Hogarth* (London: Hart-Davis, MacGibbon, 1974), p. 79.

In mining, glass making, salt panning, pottery and paper, rowing keels on the Tyne and Wear, plying the east coast as mariners. Working in fisheries, or in household-based crafts and service trades.³¹⁷

Yet, despite the greater number and diversity of employment opportunities in the north and north west of England, research findings for this study revealed little evidence of the ‘excess’ labour in Suffolk migrating to these regions. For aged farm labourers, as well as the mismatching of skills and the strong social and cultural resistance to industry which existed in the traditional rural areas, migration was also deterred by the Settlement Laws and the manner in which the poor law was often administered to retain farm labour during slack periods of the year so as to ensure an adequate workforce at harvest time. Most surplus agricultural labour appears to have remained in Suffolk’s rural parishes, supplementing their income and achieving a subsistence level existence through a combination of undertaking multi-occupational work, support from family and neighbours together with relief from the poor law authorities. Rural workers in Suffolk were a very static group socially, with young men usually following their father’s into unskilled agricultural work and marrying women from the same social background. The majority of women from labouring households married farm labourers and, ‘the majority of young labouring men who stood before the alter were the sons of labourers and farm workers.’³¹⁸

Agricultural work, like most manual labour at this time, was extremely demanding physically and older men found it difficult to compete for work in a labour market dominated by younger men. The plight of the old is vividly demonstrated by a letter written by John Berry from Colchester to his wife in 1818, in which he stated that, ‘I had Ben in the trade too long.

³¹⁷ Adrian Green, ‘Durham Ox: Commercial Agriculture in the North East’ in *Economy and Culture of North East England 1500-1800*, ed. by A. Green (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2018), pp, 44-67, p.46.

³¹⁸ Barry Reay, *Rural Englands*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), p. 39.

Meaning that I was not young enough to satisfy him with Respect to work which is the case with every Master where I apply for work. As they will not Employ an Old Hand. While they can get Plenty of young ones.’³¹⁹

The fact that men often had to walk some distance to work also caused problems. William James, an unskilled farm labourer, whose experience and situation is explored in greater depth in a following chapter, wrote to the overseer at Colchester St. Peter in 1822, highlighting the difficulties he faced as an old man. He explained that he had to walk twelve miles to and from work on a daily basis which had made him sick:

Walking into the country five or six Miles in a morning, working the Day, and returning home at Night ... and it have been the Occasion, of my being ill ... I attribute this, in a great, to the want, of constant Nourishment, to keep up my strength, and Age added there too, being now within one Year of Seventy.³²⁰

He wrote to the overseers again in 1825, stating, ‘Yesterday I walked Four miles only ... and with much difficulty got home.’³²¹

Study research findings also revealed that seasonal patterns of work also impacted in a negative manner on older farm workers. Older men were less able to perform the more strenuous and better paid tasks associated with arable farming in winter, such as ploughing, hedging and ditching and they were relegated to less arduous work such as tedding (turning hay to help it dry) and cocking (gathering the windrows into piles in summer). This work was less well paid, usually two-thirds of the full daily rate.³²² The rates of pay for day labour which relate to both

³¹⁹ ERO, D/P 178/18/23, *Overseers' Correspondence, J. Berry, Letter, 19th July 1818.*

³²⁰ ERO(C), D/P 178/18/23, *Overseers' Correspondence, William James, Letter, 29th July 1822*

³²¹ *Ibid.*, 30th November 1825.

³²² Edward Collins, ‘Harvest Technology and Labour Supply in Britain 1790-1870’, *Economic History Review*, 22, (1969), 453-473

the full daily rate for males together with the reduced daily rate commonly paid to older agricultural labourers in Suffolk are shown in Table 3.10.

Table 3.10 Agricultural Wages - Seasonal Rates (Average) – Day Labour 1790³²³

	Day Labour (per week)			
	Price in winter 1790		Price in summer 1790	Price in harvest 1790
Full adult male rate	6s 10d		8s 4d	15s 4½d
Aged adult rate	4s 6d		5s 0d	9s 2d

Research finding revealed a significant difference between agricultural wages in the winter months and summer months. Day labourers in 1790 typically received 6 shillings a day in winter, and 8 shillings a day in the summer months, while at harvest time this could rise to over 15 shillings a day. But there was a reduced daily rate paid for the less strenuous tasks, commonly performed by older workers, of two thirds the full adult rate amounting to only 4s 6d a day in winter and 9s 2d at harvest time.

Unemployment resulting from structural problems were exacerbated by the fact that many labourers suffered from injuries resulting from farm work, such as lacerations, fractures, and amputations that developed into disability. Problems were especially acute for older men with less strength and agility. Undertaking tasks such as, ‘repairing hedges, building fences, digging and scouring ditches and felling trees,’ was dangerous.³²⁴ As Gordon Mingay observed:

the employment of children and elderly men, working in unlit barns and yards in the winter light of early morning and evening ... workers fell from ladders, haystacks and wagons and were kicked by horses or fell

³²³ Arthur Young, *General View of the County of Suffolk* (Bury St. Edmunds: Rackham, 1813), p. 412.

³²⁴ Gordon Mingay, *A Social History of the English Countryside* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1990), p. 36.

under carriage wheels ... they were crushed by overturned carts, or by falling trees.³²⁵

My research of poor law records provided numerous examples of the injuries commonly suffered by older farm labourers, as shown in Table 3.11.

Table 3.11. Examples of relief provided for occupational injuries³²⁶

Parish	Name/Age	Date	Relief	Reason
Culpho	James Alexander (44)	1814	18s.	'Broken leg at Woodbridge'
Hatcheston	John Keeble (42)	1771	3s.	'He having put out his collar bone'
	John Scruton (60)	1798	2s	'Lame'
Trimley St. Martin	John Marham (43)	1783	10s.	'Broken leg'
East Bergholt	Thomas Askew (55)	1788	4s	'Broken leg'
	James Bird (75)	1783	4s.	'Lame and unable to work'
	Stephen Grimsey (73)	1771	6s.	'Hurt knee in a fall'
	Thomas Howe	1783	4s.	'Hurt in accident'
	John Lambert (70)	1790	10s.	'Very lame with sore leg'
	Daniel Mann (42)	1792	3s.	'Hurt not able to work'
	- -	1792	6s.	'Hurt knee'
	Tom Nethergate (49)	1782	5s.	'Broken arm'
	John Pyat (51)	1792	4s.	'Kicked by a horse'
	John Rolf (62)	1791	3s.	'He having bad rheumatism'
Daniel Stollery	1792	5s.	'Inflamed hand'	
Holbrook	James Howlett (45)	1791	7s.	'Received a hurt'
Butley	William Caley (?)	1769	6s.	'He having broke one of his ribs'
Kenton	Thomas Pettit (58)	1774	4s. 6d	'Having broke his leg'
Melton	Thomas Fuller (66)	1776	Inhouse	'Having broke his arm and leg'
Dallingho	John Amis (46)	1783	Inhouse	'Ill with rheumatism'
Kettleburgh	John Cook (47)	1768	6s.	'Having fracture his arm'
Rendlesham	Henry Mays (52)	1770	2s. 6d	His having broke his arm and otherwise bruised

³²⁵ Ibid., p. 71.

³²⁶ SRO(I), ADA1/AB3, *Blything Poor Law Hundreds Incorporation*; SRO(I) ADA10/AB3, *Carlford and Colneis Poor Law Hundreds Incorporation*; SRO(I), ADA11/AB3, *Loes and Wilford Poor Law Hundreds Incorporation*; SRO(I), AD7/AB4, *Samford Poor Law Hundreds Incorporation*.

Study research findings of the poor law records, however, revealed few work related injuries being recorded as the reason for the provision of poor relief for men under the age of 40, and only very rarely was work-related injury cited as the need for the provision of poor relief.

The agricultural labourer, as medical historian D'Arcy Power noted, 'rarely comes to the end of his career a hale and hearty man.'³²⁷ As a result of working outdoors in cold and wet weather in the winter months and the physically demanding nature of many agricultural occupations labourers commonly experienced inflammation of the eyes, coughs, fever and disorders such as rheumatic pains of both the acute and chronic kind.³²⁸ Power concluded that, 'Rheumatic afflictions are foremost among the bodily ills of field workers including osteoarthritis, sciatica, lumbago.'³²⁹ Many agricultural labourers in their early forties commonly exhibited the rheumatic afflictions of old age namely, that of stooping and looking downwards towards the ground, a condition known as senile kyphosis, a curvature of the spine caused through lifting and carrying heavy objects. Hard manual labour in confined spaces and during poor weather produced a range of other rheumatic conditions, pains in limbs, aching in bones and stiffness in the joints. Indeed, it has been said that it was the common practice of many older men to use opium to keep off ague.³³⁰ While working during hot weather at harvest time farm labourers were especially prone to inflammatory disorders such as, pleurisy, peripneumonia, and bowel inflammation.³³¹ The work also led to chronic conditions such as arthritis as workers got older. Threshing, for example, was considered to be particularly debilitating, causing physical breakdown after a few years.³³² My examination of the poor law

³²⁷ D'Arcy Power, 'Agricultural Occupations' in *Dangerous Trades*, ed. by T. Oliver (London: J. Murray, 1902), pp. 232-249, (p. 232).

³²⁸ William Falconer, *Essay on the Preservation of Life of Persons Employed in Agriculture* (Bath: R. Crutwell, 1789), p. 6.

³²⁹ D'Arcy Power, 'Agricultural Occupations' in *Dangerous Trades*, p. 232

³³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 233.

³³¹ Falconer, William, *Essay on the Preservation of Life*, p. 6.

³³² Mingay, Gordon, *A Social History of the English Countryside*, p. 36.

records of the Carlford and Colneis, Blything, Loes and Wilford and Samford Poor Law Incorporations, who together administered poor relief for a total of 135 formerly autonomous parishes, revealed a significant number of farm labourers in receipt of regular poor relief while in their forties, or even earlier, due to work-related injuries, reduced functionality and the consequent inability to work.³³³ For example, in the parish of East Bergholt, between 1767 and 1793 a total of 45 males with an average age of 55 years were in receipt of outdoor relief, of which the records state, 31 were ‘lame’, ‘ill’, ‘continuing ill’ or ‘too ill to work’.³³⁴

The work undertaken by agricultural labourers of all ages was crushingly hard. It was performed in all weathers, in ‘bitter winds, snow showers, rain storms ... spending most of the long day in the open, half frozen in wet clothes.’³³⁵ The effect on older men was recorded by contemporary social commentators and observers such as Penelope Hind. Writing in her diary in 1787 she described the physical condition of an aged agricultural labourer who worked for her father in the following terms:

Though some years turned seventy, with his poor hands so drawn by rheumatism as to make it painful to hold the flail, yet thrashing is his employment when he can get work – and dire necessity makes him so thankful when he is allowed to engage in the toil; one of his legs at the same time so swelling with standing at his work that by the middle of the day he is obliged to sit on the straw and rest it for some time to recover life to it again and to abate the swelling.³³⁶

Thomas Ruggles, writing in 1797, similarly described the strenuous nature of agricultural work and its physical effect on farm labourers:

³³³ SRO(I), ADA1/AB3, SRO(I) ADA10/AB3; SRO(I), ADA11/AB3; SRO(I), AD7/AB4.

³³⁴ SRO(I), AD7/AB4/1-4, *East Bergholt Poor Law Records 1766-1793*.

³³⁵ Mingay, Gordan, *A Social History of the English Countryside* (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 102.

³³⁶ Sarah Markham, *A Testimony of Her Times, Based on Penelope Hind's Diaries and Correspondence, 1787-1838* (Salisbury: M. Russell Publishing Ltd, 1990), p. 47.

day after day to pass through a life of hard labour and constant fatigue; a degree of labour which the strongest of us, whose muscles have not been trained for the purpose, would shrink from in the experiment of a day, perhaps an hour.³³⁷

He observed that:

There are disorders to which agricultural persons are subject from the nature of their employment. The nature of employment often exposes them to the vicissitudes of the weather, heat, cold and moisture.³³⁸

Ruggles concluded that:

the occupation of the labourer, as well as the nature of his being, subjects him to acute illness, to chronic disorders, and at length to old age, decrepitude, and impotence; the instant of any of these unavoidable misfortunes of life attack him the source of every comfort is stopped.³³⁹

Old men themselves often cited disability in letters to overseers when pleading for support. For example, John Seowen aged fifty-nine, wrote in 1815 to the authorities, stating that, ‘Gentlemen, I am sorey to say what I ham Goin to you that I am very bad of my old Complaint of my feet and hands So that I Canot Work at hard work.’³⁴⁰

Moving testimonies, such that of Seowen, highlight the impact of reduced functionality experienced by elderly men which inevitably resulted in reduced work opportunities and income. The combination of the long-term debilitating effect of many laborious agricultural occupations and of injuries suffered at work resulted in many agricultural labourers experiencing premature ageing and having a physiological age and appearance far in advance of their actual chronological age.³⁴¹ As previously noted, for men employed as agricultural

³³⁷ Thomas Ruggles, *The History of the Poor: Their Rights, Duties and the Law Respecting Them* p, 5.

³³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

³³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

³⁴⁰ ERO, D/P 203/12/4, *Overseers' Correspondence, John Seowen, Letter*, 18th October 1815

³⁴¹ Yallop, Hellen, *Age and Identity*, p. 4.

labourers in the second half of the eighteenth century and first half of the nineteenth century in rural Suffolk, ‘whose earning capacity depended on their physical strength, old age had little to commend it.’³⁴²

Yet, despite the age related work constraints faced by elderly men the expectation in this period was that the elderly should continue to work and support themselves until prevented from doing so by physical debility and was integral to society’s attitude to work, financial independence and ageing. The view of Cicero was widely accepted, ‘Old age will only be respected if it fights for itself, maintains its own rights and avoids dependence on anyone, and asserts control over its own last breath.’³⁴³ In addition to the deeply held conviction that the lower orders should maintain self-sufficiency and residential independence it was also widely believed that they should work for the benefit of others, as well as themselves.³⁴⁴ The physical decline experienced in old age was not considered as reason in itself to stop work.³⁴⁵ Industriousness was considered to have a moral dimension which endowed the individual with dignity and social inclusivity. The theologian Isaac Barrow, writing in 1741, considered work to be, ‘an ingenious and generous disposition of the soul.’³⁴⁶ As Ottaway states, ‘the goal of older people ... was to preserve their independence until their last days.’³⁴⁷ Of course, the ability and desire of the elderly to achieve self-sufficiency and maintain their independence varied significantly according to social class and gender. However, as Ottaway states, ‘the experience of work and age change little over the century.’³⁴⁸ However, regular scepticism was expressed by commentators such as Defoe on the work ethic of the lower orders. He wrote in 1707 that,

³⁴² Thomas, ‘Age and Authority’, 248.

³⁴³ Cicero, Marcus Tullius, *On Old Age and Friendship*, pp. xvi-115.

³⁴⁴ Bernard Mandeville, *The True Meaning of the Fable of the Bees* (London: Inny’s, 1726), p. 14.

³⁴⁵ Margaret Pelling, ed, *The Common Lot: Sickness, Medical Occupations and the Urban Poor in Early Modern England* (London: Longman, 1998), p. 160.

³⁴⁶ Isaac Barrow, *The Works of the Learned Isaac Barrow Vol. III* (London: A. Millar, 1741), p. 179.

³⁴⁷ Ottaway, Susannah, *The Decline of Life*, p 1.

³⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p, 67.

‘there’s nothing more frequent than for an Englishman to work till he has got his pocket full of money, and then go and be idle, or perhaps drunk till ‘tis all gone.’³⁴⁹

Importantly, as Ottaway has argued, the principal of self-help played an essential role in the lives of elderly people and that there was an, ‘expectation that older individuals would continue to work until they were absolutely unable to do so ...[and was] ... a fundamental duty even for very elderly individuals.’³⁵⁰ Elderly labouring women as well as men worked during their old age. In her study of elderly widows in Abingdon, Barbara Todd noted that, ‘most poor widows, unless they were completely incapacitated, were expected to work to supplement what charity and statutory relief provided.’³⁵¹ Evidence gained from research of pauper letters submitted by the elderly to poor law authorities petitioning for financial support illustrate the expectations of older women and their desire to continue to work for as long as they could. For example, Elizabeth Munns of Huntingdon wrote to the overseers on 24th May 1825, explaining that she needed help: ‘Gentlemen, I shall take it a great favour if you would be so kind has to allow me a trifle per week ... for I cannot get any kind of employment ... too old ... my age is great I am getting on towards 70 years.’³⁵²

Women typically performed paid domestic work that provided a small but regular income. Nursing was a common source of employment which could pay 2 shillings a day.³⁵³ It was also common for women to be employed by parish overseers of the poor in some form of caring capacity, performing work such as, washing, mending, nursing the sick and caring for the dying.

³⁴⁹ Daniel Defoe, *Giving Alms No Charity and Employing The Poor* (London: Booksellers of London and Westminster, 1704), p. 27.

³⁵⁰ Ottaway, Susannah, *The Decline of Life*, p. 9.

³⁵¹ Barbara Todd, ‘Widowhood in a Market Town: Abingdon, 1540-1720’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Oxford 1983), pp. 243-244.

³⁵² Northampton Record Office (NRO), 325/193/69, *Overseers’ Correspondence*.

³⁵³ Arthur Young, *General View of the County of Suffolk*, (Plymouth: David and Charles, 1813), p. 20.

For example, research of the Loes and Wilford Incorporation records revealed that it was:

Ordered that the Governor do pay Elizabeth Hawes, Nurse in the Pesthouse, one guinea, to Richard Turtle, Nurse in the Sick Wards, one guinea, to Eunice Crane, Nurse in the Nursey, half a guinea to Elizabeth Welham, Judith Pizzey, and Sarah Wright ... five shillings each as a gratuity for their particular care and trouble.³⁵⁴

The textile industry in Suffolk, even to an extent during its protracted decline, also offered opportunities for women to do spinning work at home. Sewing and child minding could also be undertaken at home or in the houses of other women. Work of this nature could provide a valuable source of income, sometimes as much as 4 shillings a week and up to £10 a year.³⁵⁵

But gender did have a part to play in all of this. As research for this study revealed there was a greater variety of less physically challenging forms of work available to older women than to men, which allowed women some means of earning a living in old age.³⁵⁶ The patriarchal notion of women as dependents also had some impact on poor law policy. As a later chapter will show, despite the expectation that women would continue to work into old age, my research of the poor law records of both the rural incorporations and autonomous parishes of Suffolk suggest that women more often began to receive regular poor relief before they had reached complete decrepitude, in contrast to their male counterparts. Inability to work may also have meant something different for women than men in terms of their sense of identity and self-worth. Admittedly, it is extremely hard to recover the perspective of individuals who did not leave much in the way of written records on the meaning of their work. Yet, as Thomas suggests, in terms of social meaning, the picture might not have been so completely

³⁵⁴ SRO(I), ADA11/1/1.

³⁵⁵ *PP. Royal Commission of Inquiry into the Administration and Practical Operation of the Poor Laws 1832 – Answers to Rural Queries, Suffolk, Question 8-10.*

³⁵⁶ See for example, Goose, Nigel, *Gender, Age and Poverty*

bleak for elderly men who managed to continue to work. Labour provided social connection as well as sustenance and some status as well as dignity for men of all ages.³⁵⁷ There is also some indication that lack of work impacted negatively on old labouring men's sense of identity, particularly in terms of its significance for the maintenance of masculine status and self-worth. Work was a principal element of masculine self-hood.³⁵⁸ Interestingly, Begiato's recent work on manliness in Britain presents the view that historians have underestimated the extent that middle-class men's perceptions about masculinity were influenced by their contact with the working-class. In addition, Begiato also notes, that the question of masculinity and the experience of the elderly and disabled is a subject which has generally been overlooked by previous studies and is worthy of further investigation.³⁵⁹

My research of pauper correspondence revealed the determination of individuals to achieve independent sustenance as well as, 'a deeply rooted pride in the ability to work and in exerting their physical powers as long as possible'³⁶⁰ Evidence based on findings from the analysis of pauper correspondence suggests that a high priority was placed by older men themselves on maintaining their financial independence and masculine identity through work. For example, when William James, wrote letters to the overseers to ask for financial help in 1821 and again 1822, he made frequent references to his desire to continue working and his frustration at the lack of work opportunities. In fact, nearly all pauper letters make reference to work or perhaps the lack of work. A common theme in pauper letters is also the relationship between that of work and subsistence and many letters, such as that from James, reveal that although the elderly person is still working their earnings are insufficient to enable them to subsist without

³⁵⁷ Keith Thomas, *Ends of Life: Roads to Fulfilment in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 100.

³⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 109.

³⁵⁹ Begiato, Joanne, *Manliness in Britain*, p. 17.

³⁶⁰ Thomas Sokoll, 'Old Age in Poverty: The Record of the Essex Pauper Letters, 1780-1834', in *Chronicling Poverty, The Voices and Strategies of the English Poor, 1640-1840*, ed. by Tim Hitchcock, Peter King and Pamela Sharpe (London: Macmillan, 1970), 127-154 (147)

poor relief. Of course expressing the desire to continue working may well have been to an extent a strategic ploy, as the recent study by King has emphasised, poor petitioners understood that they needed to present themselves in the best possible light to authority, as honest and industrious and, not as one of the 'idle' poor.³⁶¹

The form of expressions and the language used in pauper letters owed much to cultural ideals of eighteenth-century masculinity and male status based on patriarchal notions of self-sufficiency and autonomy and were likely to appeal to the men who received this correspondence and to what Sokoll refers to, 'as a rhetorical concession to middle-class values.'³⁶² But, as Sokoll has also argued, these letters were also deeply personal, and highly revealing of personal concerns and identity. They were, even if written on behalf of a person by someone else, also largely true.³⁶³ James wrote repeatedly of 'work having been so Slack for me for some weeks.'³⁶⁴ While his correspondence with the poor law authorities make clear his need for help, they also hint that occupation was not simply a means by which James needed to subsist. Work also remained a sign of respectability, dignity and manliness.³⁶⁵

Leisure

While it would be undoubtedly callous to make light of the many hardships experienced by aged farm labourers it would require an equal lack of empathy not to recognize the support, friendships and relationships provided within the community as well as the leisure opportunities which existed to alleviate and give some respite from their hardship. Rather than accepting the notion that the situation faced by many farm labourers in old age condemned them to living in anything other than abject misery it is argued that it is necessary to consider

³⁶¹ King Steven, *Writing the Lives of the English Poor*, pp. 167-170

³⁶² Thomas Sokoll, 'Old Age in Poverty', in *Chronicling Poverty*, ed. by Hitchcock, King and Sharpe, p. 145.

³⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 145.

³⁶⁴ ERO(C), D/P 178/18/23, *Overseers' Correspondence*, William James Letter 5th April 1821.

³⁶⁵ Thomas, Keith, 'Ends of Life'. p. 102.

the experience of elderly men from a wider perspective. By simply focusing on the desire and difficulties faced by poor old men in the achievement of self-sufficiency and the maintenance of residential independence previous studies have neglected to consider other important aspects of their life, particularly the opportunities for social interaction and leisure. The aged, as Botelho notes, ‘were not uniformly assigned to the fringes of the physical community and the extremities of its affection.’³⁶⁶

Leisure provided elderly farm labourers an escape from the supervision of employers and provided what Raymond Williams calls, ‘a breathing space, a fortunate distance from the immediate and visible controls of employment.’³⁶⁷ While leisure activities in Suffolk’s rural parishes were dictated by the agricultural calendar they, ‘were not simply ephemera in a play-world of little consequence: they were fundamental social activities inseparable from the full range of social reality.’³⁶⁸ For the lower orders, ‘recreation was woven into and derived its meaning from the total social fabric.’³⁶⁹ For elderly men, leisure activities, festivities and holidays provided:

psychological counterweights to the burdens of sustained labour – liberties for personal indulgence, excitement and spectacle, temporary distractions from care – they were also critical social suspensions which helped to create a patterned conception of time.³⁷⁰

The importance of leisure activities and pastimes for elderly farm workers was not only due to the opportunity they provided for relaxation and in so doing provided respite from often repetitive and arduous daily routines but also for the opportunity they provided for elderly men

³⁶⁶ Botelho, Lynn, *Old Age and the English Poor Law*, p. 151.

³⁶⁷ Theresa Adams, ‘Representing Rural Leisure: John Clare and the Politics of Popular Culture’, *Studies in Romanticism*, 47 (2008), pp. 371-392 (p. 372).

³⁶⁸ Geraint Jenkins, ‘Folk-life’, *Journal of the Society for Folk Life Studies*, 8 (1970), p. 5.

³⁶⁹ Robert Malcolmson, *Popular Recreations in English Society* (Cambridge: University Of Cambridge Press, 1973), p. 8.

³⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

to maintain a visible presence within the community. The irregularity of a farm labourer's working life, dictated by the agricultural annual cycle and variations during the week, often provided opportunities for recreational activity. Throughout the eighteenth century and in the first half of the nineteenth century, 'traditional modes of recreation persisted ... church festivals, together with fairs and markets still punctuated the year with frequent occasions for play and pleasure.'³⁷¹

This section draws on research findings of the various leisure activities commonly attended by older men in this period in rural Suffolk. My research of archival sources included the comments and views of contemporary social observers such as Henry Bourne, John Brand and Joseph Strutt on common sports and pastimes in eighteenth-century England. Specifically, research conducted on local archival sources also revealed the views of contemporary local Suffolk historians such as Walter. A. Copinger, Rev. Sir. John Cullum and Edward Moor, and was supplemented by the study's research of the local press, including editions of the *Ipswich Journal* and the *Bury and Norwich Post* published between 1740 and 1830.³⁷² Although the views of labouring men are hard to find in these mainly middle class interpretations, however, with careful handling and reading against the grain where necessary, it is argued here that they can provide an insight of the experiences of those who left few records of their own.

John Strype writing in 1720, described the common sports and recreations pursued in London, which as research revealed, were also commonly enjoyed in Suffolk's rural parishes:

³⁷¹ Dennis Brailsford, 'Sporting Days in Eighteenth-Century England', *Journal of Sport History*, 9, (1982), pp. 41-54 (41).

³⁷² Henry Bourne, *Antiquities of the Common People* (Newcastle: J. White, 1725); John Brand, *Observations on Popular Antiquities* (Newcastle: T. Saint, 1777); Joseph Strutt, *Sports and Pastimes of the People of England* (London: T. Tegg, 1831); Rev. Sir. John Cullum, *The History of Antiquities of Hawstead* (London, J. Nichols, 1784); Walter Copinger, *History of the Parish of Buxhall in the County of Suffolk* (London: H. Sotheran, 1902); Edward Moor, *Suffolk Words and Phrases: or an attempt to collect the lingual localism of that county* (Woodbridge: J. Loder, 1823).

the more common sort divert themselves at Football, Wrestling, Cudgels, Ninepins, Shovel-board, Cricket, Stow-ball, Ringing of Bells, Quoits, pitching the Bar, Bull and Bear baiting, throwing at Cocks, and lying at Alehouses.³⁷³

While many of the festivities staged by rural communities included sports and activities, principally participated in by the young, the old were still able to enjoy the festivities in a spectator capacity. In his history of Warton, local Suffolk historian John Lucas described how, ‘the Old People after Supper smoke their Pipes, and with great Pleasure and Delight behold the younger spending the Evening in Singing, Dancing.’³⁷⁴

While leisure activities in rural Suffolk continued to be largely determined by social status, age and gender, research revealed that the belief of some historians and anthropologists that leisure activities in this period merely replicated existing social behaviours and hierarchies is open to question. My research findings revealed that in some instances social hierarchies in rural Suffolk were transcended in certain leisure activities, such as cock-fighting, bull-baiting and horse racing, by the attendance of spectators from across a wide spectrum of social status and age. While advertisements for organised events in the *Ipswich Journal* commonly referred to the gentry, such as the notice in April 1815, for a cock-fighting event:

Cocking at the King’s Arms ... between the Gentlemen of Sudbury and the Gentlemen of Boxford ... to show eleven Mains a-side for 5 Guineas a battle ... A pair of cocks to be on the Pitt by 12 o’clock.³⁷⁵

But men from the lower orders of all ages were enthusiastic spectators. The *Ipswich Journal* reported on one such event in September 1815:

³⁷³ Joseph Strype, *A Survey of the Cities of London and Westminster* (London, 1720), p.257.

³⁷⁴ John Lucas, *History of Warton Parish* (London, 1931), p. 126.

³⁷⁵ *Ipswich Journal*, 29th April 1815.

On Tuesday last a match of cricket was played at the Camping Ground, Needham Market between the Gentlemen of Hintlesham and Needham, which was won by the latter. A great many persons were assembled to see the match.³⁷⁶

In a similar fashion, although the organisation of horse racing was largely under the control of the gentry, spectators were drawn from all social levels. Indeed, the crowds which attended some of the major meetings, as Malcolmson notes, ‘could hardly have been so substantial without a considerable inclusion of plebian spectators.’³⁷⁷ Leisure events organised by and for the benefit of the gentry also attracted a good deal of popular support from a wide section of society and for older men unable to actively participate in sporting events provided a valuable source of entertainment as well as the opportunity to socialise with others in the local community. This was particularly the case with horse racing whose, ‘followers were drawn from all social levels’, and which according to Malcolmson, accounted for the size of the crowds at race meetings.³⁷⁸

Parson Woodforde’s servants from neighbouring Norfolk regularly attended race meetings at Lenwade and an entry in his diary in 1795 referred to, ‘a vast Concourse of people attended, both gentle and simple.’³⁷⁹ Horse racing was the most popular spectator sport throughout this period with provincial race meetings based on local custom and established into the cycle of the year. The *Ipswich Journal* featured advertisements of organised race meetings on a regular basis throughout the period:

³⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 2nd September 1815.

³⁷⁷ Robert Malcolmson, ‘Popular Recreations in English Society 1700-1850’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Warwick, 1970), 76.

³⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

³⁷⁹ Rev. James Woodforde, *The Diary of a Country Parson, 1758-1802* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 1999), p. 267.

RACES, on Tuesday 25th March there will be a MATCH for Fifty Pounds run upon Beccles race-ground, and on the same day several other matches.³⁸⁰

Ipswich Races, Will be on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday, 1st, 2nd, 3rd days of July next.³⁸¹

Ipswich Races will be on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday the 7th, 8th, and 9th July (the week preceding the Newmarket Meetings).³⁸²

The popular sports and pastimes discussed by Emma Griffin in her study of the sports and pastimes in eighteenth-century England were also prevalent in rural Suffolk.³⁸³ According to Henry Bourne, a contemporary observer, bull-baiting and bear-baiting were popular pastimes in Suffolk and despite being, ‘highly relished by the nobility in former ages ... is [now] attended only by the lowest and most despicable of people.’³⁸⁴ However, despite Bourne’s derogatory view, bull-baiting was a very popular pastime in Suffolk and regularly reported on in the *Ipswich Journal*, such as the bull-baiting event which took place at Bury St. Edmunds on November 5th 1801.³⁸⁵ An article in the *Bury and Norwich Post* in 1842 also described how bull-baiting had been annually practiced at Lavenham, ‘from time immemorial’, with spectators from other parts of the close vicinity taking part. Describing many of the spectators as, ‘the idle and dissolute’, the article then described the scenes following the event:

The crowd after witnessing and delighting in the agonies of the noble animal, adjourning to the public houses, and spending the remainder of the evening amidst scenes of the most disgusting drunkenness and disorder.³⁸⁶

³⁸⁰ *Ipswich Journal*, 15th March 1800.

³⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 22nd May 1800.

³⁸² *Ibid.*, 22nd June 1801.

³⁸³ Griffin, Emma, *England’s Revelry: A History of Popular Sports and Pastimes*.

³⁸⁴ Bourne, Henry, *Antiquities of the Common People*, p. 257.

³⁸⁵ *Ipswich Journal*, 18th November 1801.

³⁸⁶ *Bury and Norwich Post*, 16th November 1842.

Recreational activities were a keystone in the building of relationships between members of a parish of all age groups but were particularly important for old men, providing them the opportunity for the social interaction necessary to maintain their identity, status and a presence in the community.³⁸⁷ Most rural parishes in Suffolk were small and tightly knit, ‘unified by the common experiences of daily and yearly routine and shared oral culture.’³⁸⁸ The houses of the lower orders were typically small, often consisting of only two small rooms, which made socialising or leisure activities difficult. Consequently, elderly men spent much of their time out of the home, either working, socializing with others in the streets of the village or in the village public house.³⁸⁹

The cycles of the year were replicated in a more limited fashion by the cycles of the week. Village life and work were integrated in a small scale communal way of life, whose recreations were heavily ritualised and bound by the seasons.³⁹⁰ Sunday was a day of rest and often provided the opportunity to engage in leisure and pastime activities. However, the leisure activities which were pursued were likely to be fairly limited in nature and with the elderly involved in family activities or socializing with friends and neighbours at the village public house. Evening entertainment was usually limited to story-telling or singing.³⁹¹

Celebrations, such as the end of the Napoleonic War, also provided the opportunity for play and pleasure, such as the Peace Festival at Wangford, reported in the *Ipswich Journal* in 1814:

the return of peace was celebrated at Wangford ... about 400 people ... repaired to the race ground to witness the divers, rural sports, such as

³⁸⁷ Catriona Parratt, ‘Popular Recreations in English Society’, An Appreciation’, *Journal of Sports History*, 29 (2002), p. 315.

³⁸⁸ Malcolmson, Robert, ‘Popular Recreations in English Society 1700-1850’, 105

³⁸⁹ Pamela Sharpe & Joanne McEwan, eds., *Accommodating Poverty* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 2.

³⁹⁰ Malcolmson, Robert, ‘Popular Recreations in English Society 1700-1850’, 33.

³⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 60

poney, donkey and foot racing, with jumping in sacks, jingling matches
 ... the amusement of numerous spectators.³⁹²

The parishes of Benacre, Covehithe, Easton, Wrentham and South Cove also celebrated with, 'A dinner of beef and plum puddings ... after which rustic sports were prepared ... a poney race and a pig hunt, a jingling match and a camping match.'³⁹³ Attendance at celebrations and leisure activities were particularly important for old men whose status within a parish almost certainly declined with age and enabled them to either participate or spectate and in so doing maintain their sense of being part of the community.

John Strutt believed that the sports and pastimes in which individuals indulged were significant in the establishment of a community's social and cultural identity as well as providing an insight into the character of village residents.³⁹⁴

In order to form a just estimation of the character of any particular people, it is absolutely necessary to investigate the sports and pastimes most generally prevalent among them ... when we follow them into retirement ... we are most likely to see them in their true state, and we may best judge of their true disposition.³⁹⁵

Leisure activities in rural communities were mediated by both age and gender. Women had their own games. Older men watched younger men and boys playing football, known as 'camping' in Suffolk, talking and apparently 'reminiscing about their own experiences and nostalgia.'³⁹⁶ Contemporary local Suffolk historian Edward Moor, noted that at camping matches, 'The eagerness and emulation excited and displayed in by the competitors and

³⁹² *Ipswich Journal*, 30th July 1814.

³⁹³ *Ibid.*, 15th June 1814.

³⁹⁴ Darryl Domingo, 'Sports and Pastimes in Eighteenth-Century Britain', *Eighteen-Century Life*, 42 (2108), 81-88 (p. 81).

³⁹⁵ Joseph Strutt, *The Sports and Pastimes of the People of England* (London: W. Reeves, 1830), p. xvii.

³⁹⁶ Malcolmson, 'Popular Recreations in English Society 1700-1850', 113.

townsmen, are surprising ... amid the shouting and roaring of half the population of the contiguous villages.³⁹⁷ Of course exceptions can be found. A clergyman voiced his criticism of bull running in Stamford because, ‘Aged men also, hardly able to walk, were to be seen moving towards this scene of riot, anxious to witness a repetition of such exploits as they, when young, had often performed.’³⁹⁸

Other sporting events which attracted spectator support were of a more ad hoc nature, such as the challenge between a local shoemaker and a well-known prize-fighter. The contest and the support it attracted was reported in the *Ipswich Journal* in May 1803, ‘One Grindley, a shoemaker, having betted with Bourke that he would best him in boxing, running and leaping for 20 guineas each ... before a great concourse of people.’³⁹⁹

Local public houses also organised events in order to encourage custom, such as the staging of an ass race at the Lion and Castle in the parish of Theberton, which was advertised in the local press in September 1743.⁴⁰⁰ That old men participated in the leisure activities of the day is further supported by local observer John Denson writing in 1830, claiming that ‘both old and young participated ... and those whom age and infirmity prevented, appeared to enjoy our sports as they sat at their cottage doors.’⁴⁰¹ There were a significant number of activities which elderly men of the lower orders commonly enjoyed, including:

Hand-Ball, Foot-Ball, Skittles, or Nine Pins, Shovel-board, stow Ball, Goffe, Trol Madam, Cudgels, Bear-baiting, Bull-baiting, Bow and Arrow, Throwing at Cocks, Shuttle-cock, Bowling, Quoits, Leaping, Wrestling, Pitching the Barre, and Ringing of Bells.⁴⁰²

³⁹⁷ Moor, Edward, *Suffolk Words and Phrases*, p. 65.

³⁹⁸ Malcolmson, ‘Popular Recreations in English Society 1700-1850’, p. 115.

³⁹⁹ *Ipswich Journal*, 7th May 1803.

⁴⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 17th September 1743.

⁴⁰¹ John Denson, *A Peasant's Voice to Landowners, on the Best Means of Benefiting Agricultural Labourer and of Reducing the Poor's Rates* (Cambridge, 1830), pp. 17-1.

⁴⁰² Edward Chamberlayne, *The Present State of England* (London, 1669), p. 46.

Popular recreations usually took place on the village green or courtyard, public thoroughfares or in open fields and little physical evidence remains. The public house would have been the only permanent feature. As Barry Reay has identified, ‘given the cramped, cold and dark conditions of many labouring homes, it was natural for rural workers to gravitate towards the warmth, light and conviviality of the alehouse.’⁴⁰³

For elderly men, when not working, the public house was the usual meeting place and for socializing. It was the most important social centre within a rural community and acted as a focal point for all organized leisure pursuits. The village public house was a natural meeting place for men of all ages, for conversation and socializing as well as for the passing and dissemination of news and gossip. However, the public house served a wider function than simply providing refreshment for men. As was noted in the report from the Select Committee for the Sale of Beer in 1833, ‘The beer-house is an attractive thing to him, it is not altogether the beer, but the fellowship they meet with, and the conversation they get into.’⁴⁰⁴ As Malcolmson suggests, ‘drink brought people together and provided a crucial underpinning to their recreational culture.’⁴⁰⁵ The public house offered, ‘a refuge from the harshness of labour and the drabness and confinement of domestic life.’⁴⁰⁶ The village public house was a social environment primarily prevailed over by men and as Hugh Cunningham noted in his study of culture and leisure, ‘drinking was the main way in which most men spent their leisure.’⁴⁰⁷ Even on occasions when women visited the public house in the company of their husband it was usual for the two sexes to sit separately when drinking.⁴⁰⁸

⁴⁰³ Reay, Barry, *Rural England's*, p. 123.

⁴⁰⁴ P.P. *Report from the Select Committee on the Sale of Beer*, (1833), xv., p. 9.

⁴⁰⁵ Robert Malcolmson, *Life and Labour in England 1700-1780* (London: Hutchinson, 1981), p. 97.

⁴⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 98.

⁴⁰⁷ Hugh Cunningham, ‘Leisure and Culture’, in *The Cambridge Social History of Britain 1750-1950*, vol. 2, ed. by Hugh Cunningham (Cambridge: University of Cambridge, 1990), pp. 279-339 (p. 303).

⁴⁰⁸ Shoemaker, Robert, *Gender in English Society 1650-1850*, p. 274.

Yet, despite the positive attributes of the public house in rural communities, their impact on the well-being of labourers and their families could also be detrimental. It is worth taking note of the comments of John Clare who initially worked as an agricultural labourer. Clare complained of his fellow labourers that their, ‘whole study was continual striving how to get beer and the bottle was the general theme from week-end to week-end.’⁴⁰⁹ Malcolmson was also of the belief that, ‘drunkenness was a common recourse to induce temporary forgetfulness of the bitter realities of life’, and which included for many, ‘very long hours in the most dreary and degrading of occupations’.⁴¹⁰ While John Rivington, writing in 1769, observed that ‘labourers ... not only misspend their time ... (drinking) ... but are often reduced to poverty and great distress.’⁴¹¹

Patrick Colquhoun, writing in 1796, supported the earlier view of Rivington and stated that, ‘many of the labouring people, who unhappily for themselves and society have got into the habit of resorting to public houses, where their little earnings are spent ... in drinking beer and spirits ... who exhibit in their appearance an unnecessary poverty and misery.’⁴¹² Colquhoun went on to comment:

In place of affording the labourer a decent meal and warm fire when he returns from his work ... the whole family resorts to the alehouse, where they waste in one day as much of their earnings that would be sufficient to sustain them for, perhaps a week.⁴¹³

However, despite these misgivings, in parish society, ‘the alehouse was the focal point for male fellowship and the approval of friends.’⁴¹⁴ It was also of particular importance to aged men in

⁴⁰⁹ Malcolmson, Robert, *Life and Labour*, p. 182.

⁴¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 183.

⁴¹¹ John Rivington, *The public-housekeepers monitor – being a serious admonition to the masters and mistresses of those commonly called public houses* (London, 1769), p. 52.

⁴¹² Patrick Colquhoun, *Observations and facts relative to public houses*, (London: C. Dilly, 1796), p.24.

⁴¹³ *Ibid.*, p.25

⁴¹⁴ Foyster, Elizabeth, *Manhood in Early Modern England*, p. 168.

that it facilitated involvement with others and in so doing maintained their visibility and presence, as well as reinforcing their identity and standing within the community.⁴¹⁵

There were also a number of other important annual occasions which afforded the opportunity for feasting and relaxation. According to Bourne:

Tis usual, in Country Places and Villages, where the Politeness of the Age hath made no great Conquest, to observe some particular Times with some Ceremonies, which were customary in the Days of our Forefathers: Such are the great Festivals of Christmas, Easter, and several others, which they observe with Rites and Customs appropriated to them.⁴¹⁶

As well as the recreational opportunity provided by important traditional festive occasions (Christmas, Easter, Whitsuntide), fairs were also an important source of recreational and leisure activities for all age groups. Fairs were of particular significance in Suffolk as a source of leisure and recreation and were integrated into the agricultural cycle, typically after the completion of one set of tasks and prior to the commencement of new ones, such as between spring sowing and the summer harvest in September. There was in East Anglia a bias towards pleasure fairs, known as ‘Toy Fairs’, rather than the parish feasts more common in other parts of England. ‘Toys’ referred to the amusements which could commonly be found at fairs. Fairs functioned as holiday substitutes and advertisements for twenty fairs in Suffolk appeared in editions of the *Ipswich Journal* between September and October 1757.⁴¹⁷

It is often hard to establish the exact nature of particular fairs. Contemporary sources published primarily for merchants and traders tended to emphasize the commercial function of the fair and ignore the recreational dimension. While the majority of fairs were of a commercial nature

⁴¹⁵ Botelho, Lynn, *Old Age and the English Poor Law*, p. 151.

⁴¹⁶ Bourne, Henry, *Antiquities of the Common People*, p. 115.

⁴¹⁷ *Ipswich Journal*, October – September 1757.

it is likely that a substantial minority mixed trade with recreational activities.⁴¹⁸ East Anglian fairs were most commonly held in late spring and early summer, as shown in Table 3.12.

Table 3.12. – Annual Distribution of Fairs in East Anglia⁴¹⁹

	Recreational – 'Toy' Fairs	Merchant – with 'Toys'	Total
Jan/March	6	6	12
Easter	9	1	10
April	6	4	10
May	7	4	11
Whitsuntide	20	8	28
June	19	3	22
July	17	8	25
August	8	4	12
September	13	7	20
October	5	7	12
Nov/December	6	5	11
Total	116	57	173

There were a large number of pleasure fairs in East Anglia and of the fairs held in Suffolk in 1756 ninety-two were predominantly pleasure fairs while a further twenty-three included 'toys'. A 'Toy' fair was held annually on the Wednesday following St. Swithins Day in the parish of East Bergholt.

Conclusion

Research for this study revealed that the elderly male labourer in rural Suffolk endured many hardships in the second half of the eighteenth century and in the first half of the nineteenth century. As study findings demonstrated employment opportunities were limited and

⁴¹⁸ John Ogilby, *The Travellers Pocket Book* (London, 1759).

⁴¹⁹ William Owen, *An Authentic Account of all the Fairs in England and Wales*, p. 119-140.

constrained still further by the processes of demographic, economic and social change. Physical surroundings were sometimes uncomfortable and in winter extremely cold. The onset of old age for male agricultural labourers also led to a loss of personal identity and status in the eyes of their peers. However, as research findings revealed there was some respect and dignity to be gained by working and which also allowed an individual to maintain some self-respect.

Study findings also revealed that leisure and recreational opportunities also offered the opportunity for friendship and some happiness at least for a short time and that activities were particularly important for elderly men within parish communities. For elderly men they not only provided a respite from arduous and monotonous work but also opportunities for social interaction that maintained their visibility, identity and sense of belonging to the local community.

A high priority was placed on the achievement of self-sufficiency and the maintenance of residential independence in old age throughout the second half of the eighteenth century and in the first half of the nineteenth century. The following chapter explores the degree to which these goals were attainable by elderly men, as well as the 'coping strategies' which they could call upon for support. The importance of marriage in achieving self-sufficiency and maintaining residential independence is also explored. The chapter concludes with an examination of the accommodation options open to those men unable to achieve the goal of residential independence and the loss of personal independence they may have experienced.

Chapter 4. Men, Marriage and Home

Introduction

Notions of individualism and independence in the second half of the eighteenth century and in the first half of the nineteenth century, 'decreed that individuals placed a high priority on maintaining household autonomy in later life.'⁴²⁰ The goals of self-sufficiency and maintenance of residential independence were pursued with almost obsessive fervour by men of the lower orders.⁴²¹

This chapter aims to establish the degree to which the goals of self-sufficiency and residential independence were achieved by elderly agricultural workers in rural Suffolk in this period. In order to determine the extent to which these goals were achievable research for this study explored a number of aspects of the lives of elderly men in order to reveal their importance to the achievement of sustenance. The chapter explores the 'coping strategies' employed by elderly men in order to evaluate the importance of self-help in the achievement of residential independence. In particular, the chapter seeks to demonstrate the importance of marriage and remarriage in the achievement of residential independence for men of the lower orders. The chapter also aims to reveal the degree of diversity and stratification which existed in the lower orders based on my research of the material lives of the elderly poor and the quality of home environment they experienced in this period. The chapter concludes with an assessment of the role of charitable foundations, parishes and poor law authorities in providing residential welfare for men unable to achieve residential independence and seeks to demonstrate the loss of

⁴²⁰ Susannah Ottaway, 'The old woman's home', in *Women and Ageing*, ed. by, Botelho, pp. 111-138 (p. 113).

⁴²¹ Mary, Dove, *The Perfect Age of a Man's Life*.

freedom and personal independence which elderly men may have experienced in institutional accommodation.⁴²²

Methodology

The methodological approach in this chapter combines quantitative and qualitative analysis, drawing on a wide range of national and local archival source material. Quantitative analysis was based on the identification and interrogation of archival sources such as, census returns, parish registers, poor law documentation and farm accounts. While qualitative analysis utilised archival sources such as Parliamentary Papers, workhouse rules and regulations and almshouse statutes, supplemented by research of the essays, diaries and views of contemporary local social commentators.⁴²³

⁴²² Broad, 'Housing the Rural Poor in Southern England, 1650-1850', 151-170; Jeremy Boulton, 'Inhouse or Outdoors? Welfare Priorities and Pauper Choices in the Metropolis under the Old Poor Law, 1718-1824' in *Population, Welfare and Economic Change in Britain 1290-1834*, ed. by Chris Briggs, pp. 153-188; Anne Digby, *Pauper Palaces* (London, Routledge, 1978); Simon Fowler, *Workhouse: the people, the place, the life behind doors* (Kew: The National Archives, 2007); Nigel Goose, 'The English almshouse and the mixed economy of welfare: medieval to modern', *Local Historian*, 40 (2010), 3-19; Nigel Goose, 'Accommodating the elderly poor: almshouses and the mixed economy of welfare in the second millennium', *Scandinavian History Review* 62 (2014), 35-57; Harley, 'Material lives of the poor, 71-103; Holderness, 'Open' and 'Close' Parishes, 126-139; Peter King, 'Pauper Inventories and the Material Lives of the Poor in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries', in *Chronicling Poverty: The Voices and Strategies of the English Poor, 1640-1840*, ed. by Tim Hitchcock, Paul Slack and Pamela Sharpe, 155-191; Beatrice Mooring, ed. *Poor Women's Economic Strategies* (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2012); Nicholls, Alannah, *Almshouses in early modern England: charitable housing in the mixed economy of welfare 1550-1725*; Alannah Nicholls, 'Almshouse versus Workhouse: Residential Welfare in the Eighteenth-Century Oxford', *Family and Community History*, 7 (2004), 45-58; Alannah Tomkins, 'Retirement from the Noise and Hurry of the World? The Experience of Almshouse Life', in *Accommodating Poverty* ed. by, McEwan and Sharpe, 263-283; Susannah Ottaway, 'The old woman's home', ed. by, Botelho, pp. 111-138; Susannah Ottaway, 'The Elderly in the Eighteenth-Century Workhouse', in *Medicine and the Workhouse*, ed. by, Reinartz & Laslett, p. 40-57; Susannah Ottaway, 'Reconsidering Poor Law Institutions by Virtually Constructing and Reviewing an Eighteenth-Century Workhouse', p. 557-582; Pamela Sharpe and Joanne McEwan, *Poverty: The Housing and Living Arrangements of the English Poor, c. 1600-1850*; James Taylor, 'The Unreformed Workhouse 1776-1834', in *Comparative Development in Social Welfare*, Ernest Martin (London: George Allen, 1972).

⁴²³ Suffolk Archives (Ipswich and Bury St. Edmunds), <https://www.suffolkarchives.co.uk>.

The mining of sources was based on multiple-source linkage, a process which enables records from one data source to be joined to another that refer to the same entity or individual. The process enabled parish or incorporation poor law accounts to be joined with parish baptism, marriage and burial registers and then interrogated with reference to a particular individual. It did, however, necessitate the conduct of in-depth and time-consuming archival research to identify, download, and analyse relevant archival source material.⁴²⁴ This task focused on the archival collections held by the Suffolk Record Office Archives located in Ipswich and Bury St. Edmunds. Once downloaded the relevant parish registers and poor law records were analysed by computer based analysis using the Microsoft Excel Spreadsheet Software (Microsoft 365). Using this computer programme, parish register and poor law data were downloaded onto an Excel spreadsheet which enabled it to be manipulated and analysed by placing parish register and poor law data sets alongside each other and through nominal linkage identify relationships or causal relationships. For example, this facilitated the compilation pauper biographies by the linkage of relevant parish registers with parish or incorporation poor law records to identify an individual's personal records, family and kin network and the nature and duration of any poor relief they may have received.

This approach made it possible to handle a large amount of information in a systematic manner. The downloading of parish registers from a number of the region's parishes onto an Excel spreadsheet was greatly assisted due to registers having been transcribed recently from microfiche of the original registers located in the Ipswich Record Office into a pdf format. However, not all relevant parish registers nor any of the region's poor law records could be downloaded in this manner and which necessitated a significant amount of time-consuming manual data entry.

⁴²⁴ King, 'Multi-Source Record Linkage', *History and Computing*, 6 (2010), 133-142.

Spreadsheet analysis was supplemented by the use of a number of web-based databases which were interrogated in order to identify additional relevant source material including, the FreeReg database of births, marriages and deaths, the Vision of Britain database, which was interrogated for relevant quantitative economic data relating to Suffolk and to individual parishes and the Historical Texts database of eighteenth and nineteenth century texts which provided a valuable source of relevant contemporary views, essays and texts.⁴²⁵

While my research based on quantitative sources provided the means to identify issues such as the size of the aged population and its representation within the total population, I recognised it does not provide the means to investigate the ‘coping strategies’ employed by aged farm workers and their likely impact on the experience of old age. To address this shortfall, my research also focused on the lifecycle options and choices available to the aged, what Charles Rosenberg terms, ‘the reconstruction of social options’, to determine the likely degree of support they provided in supporting the achievement of self-sufficiency and the maintenance of residential independence which were identified through the analysis of pauper correspondence and contemporary diaries.⁴²⁶

Expectations and Experience

The significant change to the working lives many agricultural labourers experienced as they aged, being unable to undertake the physical demands of traditional forms of male employment and necessitating having to seek alternative forms of employment of which there were few opportunities. Elderly men not only faced having to seek alternative forms of work but also re-

⁴²⁵ <https://www.freereg.org.uk>; <https://www.visionofbritain.org.uk>; <https://www.historicaltexts.jisc.ac.uk>.

⁴²⁶ Charles Rosenberg, *The Family in History* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1975), p. 3.

define their role and status in the community, as well as coping with the insecurity that these changes created.

The personal achievement of self-sufficiency and residential independence, as historian Mathew McCormack has noted, was of particular importance to men throughout the eighteenth century and into the nineteenth century. The desire to remain independent throughout life and into old age was adhered to by all levels of society with what McCormack refers to as almost, 'fanatical zeal'.⁴²⁷ However, it is important at the outset to contrast the difference in the expectation and likely experiences of old age between men of the upper and middling orders of society and those from the lower orders, such as farm labourers in rural Suffolk. Status and financial well-being naturally shaped an individual's expectation and experiences of old age, as revealed by my research of the diaries and correspondence of members of the upper orders in this period. While care must be taken in the analysis of these sources, for as Elaine McKay comments, 'diaries ... [in the eighteenth century] ... were developing a genre and were not always the essentially private or spontaneous daily records which might be assumed,' however, they do reveal the expectation for continued self-sufficiency and residential independence in old age for members of the middling and upper orders.⁴²⁸

My findings suggest that the expectation of an agreeable and independent old age for members of the upper orders was high.⁴²⁹ Men from the upper and middle orders usually had access to a wide range of lifecycle options and choices that was otherwise denied members of the lower orders. Elite men could draw upon those sources to achieve their expectation of old age, examples of which are shown in Figure 4.1. The same lifecycle options were not available to all men. As part of their independent old age, wealthy men also expected that they would

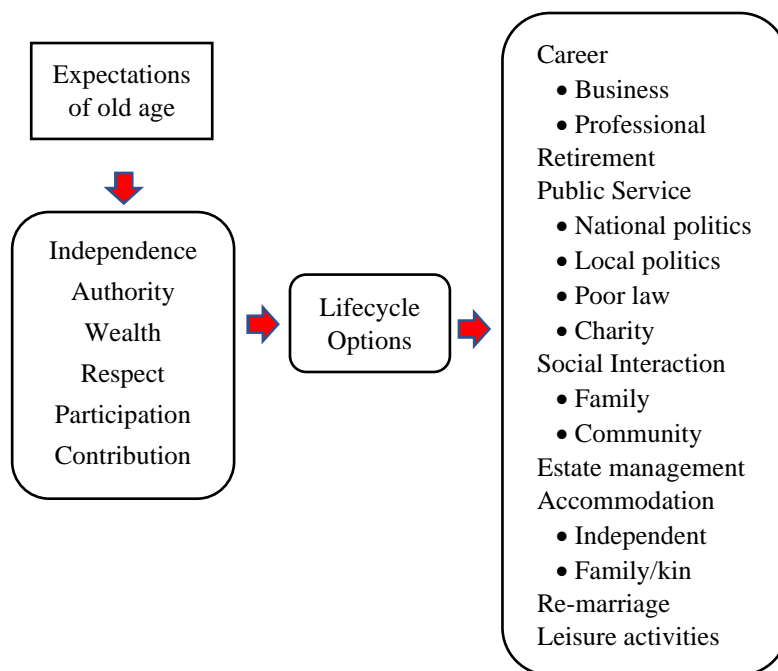
⁴²⁷ Mark McCormack, *The Independent Man* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), p. 1.

⁴²⁸ Elaine McKay, 'English Diarists: Gender, Geography and Occupation, 1500-1700', *History*, 90:2, (2005), 191-212 (p. 193).

⁴²⁹ Sokoll, Thomas, *Essex Pauper Letters*, p. 10.

continue to participate and contribute to both family and wider society and to maintain their authority over and respect from members of the lower orders.

Figure 4.1. Expectations and Lifecycle Options – Upper Orders and Wealthy⁴³⁰



It is important to recognise the significance of the cultural expectation of independence in old age which permeated throughout society in this period and that even the wealthy worried about the downward pull of poverty in old age and the associated loss of social and financial status.

⁴³⁰ Christopher Handley, *An Annotated Bibliography of Diaries* (London: Hanover Press, 1997); Arthur Ponsonby, *More English Dictionaries: Further Reviews of Sixteenth to Nineteenth Century Dictionaries, Two East Anglian Diaries: Isaac Archer/William Coe, ed. by M. Storey* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1994); James Harris, *Diaries and Correspondence of James Harris* (London: R. Bentley, 1884); Robert Malthus, *The Travel diaries of Thomas Robert Malthus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966); William Johnston, *Diaries of William Johnston Temple* (London: Clarendon Press, 1920); *The Diary of Ralph Josselin 1616-1683* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976); *The Diary of John Evelyn, Vols 1-7* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955); Jane Fiske, *The Oakes Diaries, Vol 1*, (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1990); John Longe, *The Diary of John Longe*, Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2008); Richard Cobbold, *Richard Cobbold, Parson and People*, Ipswich: Henleys Printers, 2007); James Woodforde, *Diary of a Country Parson, Vol. 5*, (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1968); *The Diary of William Goodwin*, URL: <https://bodliean.ox.ac.uk/index2>; Thomas Turner, *The Diary of Thomas Turner 1754-1765*, ed. by David Vaisey (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985); Elizabeth Freke, *The Remembrances of Elizabeth Freke 1671-1714*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); William Falconer, *A Family History Begun by James Fretwell* (London: Surtees Society. 1877); Thomas Wilson, *The Diaries of Thomas Wilson*, (London; SPCK, 1964).

Downward mobility was commonly associated with the ageing process even for men from the middling sorts. While most of the aged poor were members of the lower orders the possibility of poverty in old age also worried the middling orders of society, as illustrated by the following extract from the *Ipswich Journal* in September 1790:

Mr William Manley formerly an attorney of great practice died recently. The mutability of human affairs was strongly exemplified in the fate of the deceased. His practice for several years as a solicitor was extensive, lucrative and honourable: and he was esteemed, visited and employed by many of the first families in the neighbourhood: but he departed this life in the Parish Workhouse.⁴³¹

My research of pauper correspondence was of particular value in revealing the expectation of old age for men from the labouring classes. Pauper correspondence was the result of individuals living outside their parish of settlement and having to write to the overseer when seeking relief and resulted in a significant volume of correspondence being generated from paupers no longer living in their parish of settlement. Pauper correspondence provided a rich source not only to investigate claimants' reasons for seeking assistance but also of their expectation and experiences of old age and the hardships they faced daily. In addition, it also revealed the process of negotiation that often took place between the pauper and poor law authorities and the rhetorical devices employed by the poor to substantiate their claim for relief. As Sokoll argues, pauper correspondence provides, 'the record of the poor law from below' and is essential for understanding how the Old Poor Law operated and experiences of the poor.⁴³²

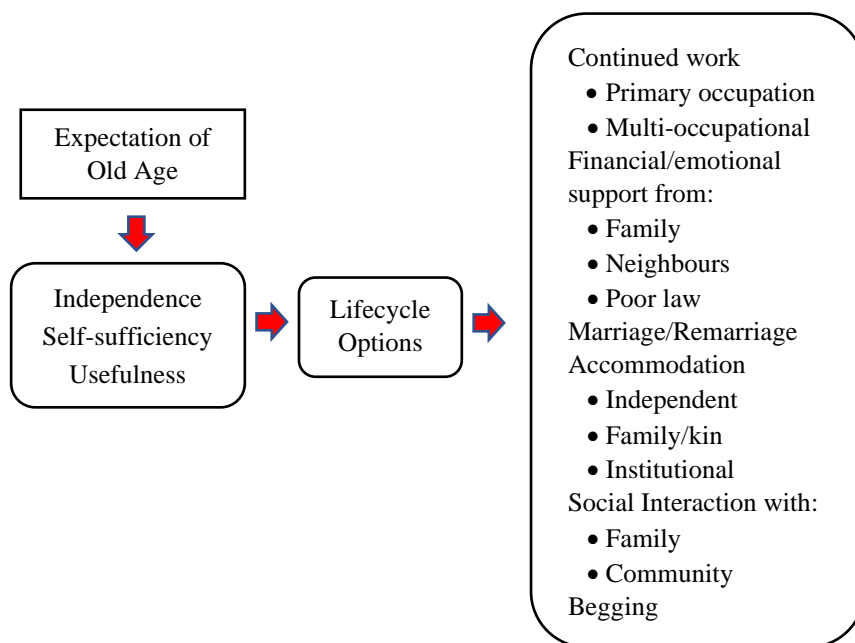
As pauper correspondence reveals, however, independence in old age meant something different for labourers: to be self-sufficient and to maintain their residential independence, while remaining useful to family and neighbours. In rural Suffolk aging male labourers, had a

⁴³¹ *Ipswich Journal*, September 12th 1790.

⁴³² Sokoll, Thomas, *Essex Pauper Letters*, p. 10

limited range of options to support self-sufficiency and residential independence in old age. By linking names found in pauper correspondence and poor law records, it is possible to identify choices commonly available, as shown in Figure 4.2.

Figure 4.2. Expectations and Lifecycle Options - Lower Orders⁴³⁵



Options varied according to a number of factors including health, marital status and support from kin, but the only real option for many aged men was to continue working. As men grew older and declined physically, the range of options open to them upon which they could draw in order to maintain their independence narrowed further and for many this would have inevitably resulted in having to seek poor relief.⁴³⁶

There were other occupations among the lower orders such as minor shopkeepers or skilled artisans. While most men in this section of the population were able to remain independent of poor relief the potential of succumbing to the downward gravitational pull of poverty in old

⁴³⁵ SRO(I), AD7/AB4/1-5; SRO(I). SRO(I), ADA10/AB3/1-6; SRO(I), ADA10/CB5/1; SRO(I), AB3/1-3; SRO(I), ADA11/AB3/1-10; SRO(I), AD7/AB4/1-4; SRO(I); FB191/D/1-3; SRO(I), FL600/4/2/3/4; SRO(I), FC58/D/1-4; SRO(I), FC21/D/1-2; SRO(I), FB159/C/1; SRO(I), FL522/1-3; SRO(I), FC111/D/4-6; SRO(I), FB187/D/1-7.

⁴³⁶ King, Steven, *Poverty and Welfare in England*, p. 171.

age was also ever present for members of this group, as analysis of pauper inventories demonstrated, as discussed later.

Historians often refer to the term ‘strategy’ when describing elderly men’s attempts to exercise their (limited) lifecycle options to achieve self-sufficiency and residential independence. In fact, as Richard Wall has noted, it has become commonplace for historians to view this in terms of a ‘survival strategy.’⁴³⁷ In part, this may be due to what sociologist David Crow identified as the belief on the part of some historians that ‘strategy’ confers a degree of agency while also recognizing the economic and social constraints experienced by the poor.⁴³⁸ Care, however, must be taken when applying the term strategy to the actions of elderly poor men in rural Suffolk and it is questionable whether the term ‘survival strategies’ is entirely an appropriate description of the actions taken by elderly farm labourers in their attempt to maintain independence. The term strategy implies both the undertaking of a considered course of action within a defined time frame and the need (and opportunity) to make a choice. Yet, for elderly Suffolk labourers, there was no real choice that meant they could be strategic. For instance, those unable to live with or be supported by their children had to continue to work into old age.

It is perhaps more appropriate to view the attempts of aged poor men to maintain their independence and achieve sustenance as being through the application of short-term ‘coping tactics’ with the goal of merely ‘getting by’, rather than as the result of a deliberate long-term strategy.⁴³⁹ The application of short term ‘coping tactics’ was characterized by Michel de Certeau as that of taking a calculated action.⁴⁴⁰ Individuals tried to ‘get by’ and maintain their residential independence by achieving a subsistence level existence through a combination of

⁴³⁷ Richard Wall, ‘Work, welfare and the family: an illustration of an adaptive family economy’, in, *The World We Have Gained*, ed. by Lloyd Bonfield, Richard Smith and Keith Wrightson (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986).

⁴³⁸ David Morgan, ‘A reply to Crow: The Use of the Concept of Strategy in Recent Sociological Literature’, Vol. 23, *Sociology*, (1989), p. 25.

⁴³⁹ Ray Pahl, *Divisions of Labour* (London: Blackwell, 1984), p.129.

⁴⁴⁰ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

multi-occupational work, support from family and neighbours and occasional relief from the poor law authorities. It was through a combination of careful planning, economising and sporadic occasional support from neighbours that many of the aged poor were able to maintain their independence.

Despite the expectation that the old should strive to be independent until prevented by physical decrepitude this did not mean that the elderly became isolated from family or the community. Old people in this period did not simply assess the quality of their lives from the perspective of 'dependence versus autonomy,' rather they sought to retain a close relationship with their family and community.⁴⁴¹ That said, the extent to which old people were an integral part of society or were in some way excluded from full participation depended on the degree of capability of the individual.⁴⁴² Even so, as Botelho notes, 'the indigent elderly were very much part of the village's mental world, as within its physical bounds.'⁴⁴³

My findings revealed the particular importance of festivities in reinforcing the bonds of kinship, friendship and neighbourly support, as previously discussed. Bourne, for example, described mid-summer festivities in the following terms and while identifying the active part played by the young also noted the participation of the 'old Ones':

it is usual in the most of Country Places ... for both young and Old to meet together, and be Merry over a large Fire, which is made in the open Street. Over this they frequently leap and play at various Games, such as Running, Wrestling, Dancing ... But this is generally the Exercise of the younger Sort; for the old Ones, for the most Part, sit by as Spectators, and enjoy themselves and their Bottle.⁴⁴⁵

⁴⁴¹ Ottaway, Susannah, *The Decline of Life*, p. 115.

⁴⁴² Johnson, Paul, *Old Age from Antiquity to Post Modernity*, p. 6.

⁴⁴³ Botelho, Lynn, *Old Age and the English Poor Law*, p. 153.

⁴⁴⁵ Bourne, Henry, *Antiquities of the Common People*, p. 210.

The Importance of Marriage

The concept of survival strategy only applies to men of the lower orders in one context – marriage (or remarriage after a spouse’s death). Recent research of the domestic division of labour in early modern and eighteenth century households in England as well as across Europe has established the central importance of marriage as an economic partnership that enabled households of varying social and economic status to survive and thrive.⁴⁴⁶

Research findings for this study underlined the importance of marriage in the achievement of self-sufficiency and residential independence, particularly for the elderly in rural Suffolk. Marriage provided elderly men with the potential of a second income which was particularly important as other sources of income declined in old age. A wife also provided domestic and emotional support. The findings for this study are consistent with Pelling’s analysis of seventeenth-century Norwich which suggested that the ability of an aged man to maintain self-sufficiency and achieve residential independence relied to a significant degree on a wife’s continued employment, as well as all the associated tasks that were classified under the general term of ‘housewifery’ such as cooking, cleaning and if a small plot was available, some gardening.⁴⁴⁷ Although recent research has demonstrated a degree of flexibility in the gender division of labour in this period, my research does seem to indicate that in the majority of households, most day-to-day domestic tasks continued to be performed by women.

Men struggled not only because of lack of time to both work and undertake domestic tasks, but also because of lack of skill and knowledge.⁴⁴⁸ The loss of a wife’s income and contribution to the domestic budget on her death was highly significant. Most labouring households needed a

⁴⁴⁶ Maria Ågren, ed. *Making a Living, Making a Difference: Gender and Work in Early Modern European Society* (Oxford, 2017); Sheila Ogilvie, *A bitter living: women, markets and social capital in early modern Germany* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2003).

⁴⁴⁷ Pelling, Margaret, *The Common Lot*, p. 143.

⁴⁴⁸ Jane Whittle and Mark Hailwood, ‘The gender division of labour in early modern England’ *The Economic History Review*, 73 (2020), pp. 3-32.

wife's wages to balance the domestic budget and remain independent. Moreover, my findings revealed that in the households of older people in rural areas, a wife's contribution to the family budget was even more significant. Older women were more likely to bring in a regular wage and for longer than would elderly men, although usually of much lower amounts. Research for this study revealed that women fared better than men in the rural economy of Suffolk in this period in terms of continuity of employment into old age. This was in part because of the nature of women's skills and the greater variety of work available for older women. It was also because the nature of the work undertaken by women meant that it was possible for older women to continue to work for longer because it was not so physically demanding.⁴⁴⁹ Unlike for most men, whose physical strength and lack of alternative employment opportunities other than agriculture meant that they found it difficult to find work as they aged, older women retained a more positive value in the labour market for much longer.⁴⁵⁰

In many cases findings show that the income of a wife often made the difference between maintaining an independent household or becoming dependent on poor relief. Accordingly, most men decided to marry and then, if necessary, re-marry on the death of a wife, motivated in part by the need for emotional and domestic support but also due to the benefit a second source of income provided. As Sandra Cavallo and Lyndan Warne observed:

The widower took the experience of the first marriage into the next, because he knew how important a role the wife played in the running of the household. At the death of his wife he lost her expertise and manifold capabilities.⁴⁵¹

⁴⁴⁹ Snell, Keith, *Annals of the Labouring Poor*, pp. 40-50

⁴⁵⁰ Pelling, Margaret, *The Common Lot*, p. 143.

⁴⁵¹ Sandra Cavallo and Lyndon Warner, eds. *Widowhood in Medieval and Early Modern England* (London: Longman, 1999), p. 10.

In Suffolk, for many lower order families marriage was probably ‘the deciding factor in the ability to survive’.⁴⁵² My findings of the responses of Suffolk parishes to Questions 8 to 12 of the Rural Queries Questionnaire of the Commissioners Report of the Poor Law (1832) revealed the significance of a wife’s contribution to a labouring household income in this period, admittedly without details of age. The study’s research of the responses to the Rural Queries identified an estimate of a farm labourer’s annual income together with the contribution made by a wife’s income to the overall household budget in a number of Suffolk parishes, as shown in Table 4.1. According to the Commissioners the estimated average annual income for a farm labourer in regular employment in Suffolk was in the region of £25 to £30 annually. The additional income contributed by a wife in parishes such as Beccles, where female employment was relatively plentiful, was in the region of £11 annually, comprising an annual joint income with that of a husband of up to £41. In contrast, in parishes such as Halesworth where little or no work was available for women a couple’s joint income could fall to as low as £25 a year. Unfortunately, no information is provided within the responses to the Rural Queries to explain the lack of work for women in Halesworth, Laxfield or Seminar in comparison to parishes such as Beccles. The income which a wife could contribute became increasingly important for elderly men whose own earning capacity declined in the face of reduced employment opportunities.

⁴⁵² Susannah Ottaway, ‘Elderly in the Eighteenth Century’, in *Medicine and the Workhouse*, ed. by, Reinartz & Laslett, p. 395

Table 4.1. Weekly and Average Annual Income from Agriculture⁴⁵³

Parish	Men daily wages	Average annual income	Women daily wages	Average annual income	Average total annual income
All Saints (Ipswich)	Summer 10s Winter 9s Piecework 12s	£28-£30	Summer 8d (No winter work)	£10 p.a.	£38-£40
Barningham	Summer 9s	£30	Summer 7d-8d	£10	£40
Beccles	Summer and Winter 10s	£30	Summer 3s 6d (No winter work)	£11	£41.
Halesworth	Summer 10s Winter 9s	£30	No work available	n/a	£30
Laxfield	Summer 10s Winter 9s	£30	Little work available	n/a	£28-£30
Semer	Summer Winter 9/10s (with beer)	£25-£30	No regular employment	n/a	£25-£30

The loss of a wife's income undermined an elderly man's ability to achieve self-sufficiency and maintain residential independence and often resulted in them becoming dependent on poor relief, as in the example below, or in the most severe cases of hardship in old age, being admitted to the workhouse.⁴⁵⁴ This situation is aptly illustrated in the letter Thomas Elsegood wrote on behalf of his father-in-law Solomon Spooner, an elderly widowed pauper, to the overseers on 22nd May 1826:

Gentlemen, I am sorrow to think that I am Obliged to trouble you for a Greater Relief of Solomon Spooner ... for I am obliged to get a Woman to do for him has he is so infirmed with age that he is not capable of doing anything for himself for his age is 78.⁴⁵⁵

The significant incidence of maternal death in this period, which a number of historians including Cavallo and Warne have drawn attention to, resulted in widowhood for farm

⁴⁵³ PP. *Royal Poor Law Commissioners Report 1832, Rural Queries, Questions 8-12.*

⁴⁵⁴ Botelho, Lynn, *Old Age and the English Poor Law*, p. 156.

⁴⁵⁵ ERO(C), D/P21/18/1, *Overseers' Correspondence 1685-1835, Thomas Elsegood Letter, 22nd May 1826.*

labourers being commonplace.⁴⁵⁶ In the period prior to 1800 according to Wrigley and Schofield the maternal death rate was between twelve to fourteen per one thousand births.⁴⁵⁷ However, this statistic is somewhat misleading because as Wrightson suggests the incidence of maternal death should be assessed cumulatively and in doing so indicates that ‘one woman in every twenty who had given birth to five children would possibly have died in childbirth or due to complications.’⁴⁵⁸ Due to the high incidence of maternal death throughout the early modern period it was common for farm labourers to remarry, usually within a short interval of the death of a wife, and to continue to remarry later as they aged.⁴⁵⁹ As Pelling suggests, ‘marriage and remarriage ... involving both a calculus of disabilities and disparities, may have been one recourse by which men in particular avoided dependency.’⁴⁶⁰

My research of the East Bergholt parish records revealed the short interval which often took place between the death of a wife and a man remarrying. For example, Thomas Newman married four times between 1728 and 1750, the interval between each marriage being less than a year in each case, presumably in order to maintain the benefit of a second income and for the domestic and physical support a wife would provide for him as he aged, as shown in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2. Thomas Newman - Marriages 1728-1750⁴⁶¹

Groom	Bride	
Thomas Newman (age 25 yrs.)	Sarah Rattle (age 23 yrs.)	Married 1728 – Died 1734
(age 31 yrs.)	Sarah Girling (age ?)	Married 1733 – Died 1743
(age 41 yrs.)	Anne Davey (age 24 yrs.)	Married 1744 – Died 1750
(age 55 yrs.)	Mary Jarminge (age 21 yrs.)	Married 1750 – Died (?)
Died 1758 (age 65 yrs.)		

⁴⁵⁶ Cavallo, Sandra and Warne, Lyndon, eds., *Widowhood*, p.122.

⁴⁵⁷ Wrigley, Edward, and Schofield, Richard, *English Population History*, p. 172-177.

⁴⁵⁸ Wrightson, Keith. and Schofield, Richard, eds. *The world we have gained: histories of population and Social structure* (London: Blackwell, 1989).

⁴⁵⁹ Cavallo, Sandra and Warne, Lyndon, eds., *Widowhood*, p.122.

⁴⁶⁰ Pelling, Margaret, *Life, Death and the Elderly*, p 13.

⁴⁶¹ SRO(I) FB191/D/1-3.

My findings of Suffolk parish marriage registers confirmed the findings of Cavallo, Warne and that of other historians, of the high incidence of remarriage of farm labourers and the short interval of it taking place after the death of a spouse.⁴⁶² Research conducted for this study of a number of parish marriage registers between 1682 and 1812 revealed the average interval of male remarriage to be 13.2 months while for females the average interval was 20.6 months.⁴⁶³ These findings are consistent with the earlier study of Wrigley and Schofield who found between 1600 and 1799 the average interval of male remarriage to be 12.6 months compared to an average interval of 19.4 months for women.⁴⁶⁴ In the Suffolk parishes I surveyed between 1682 and 1812 it appears an average of 24% of the total number of marriages conducted comprised widowers remarrying as opposed to only 12% of widows in the same period. For example, in the parish of East Bergholt widowers remarrying appear to have accounted for 28% of all marriages between 1682 and 1804 compared to 17% of widows re-marrying in the same period, as shown in Table 4.3. While parish records do not provide information on the age of widowers who remarried it is important to note that men continued to remarry as they aged, and it is probable that a significant number of remarriages involved men in the early stages of old age.

⁴⁶² A. Macfarlane, *Marriage and Love in England* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986); Wrigley, Edward and Schofield, Richard, eds, *Population History*, pp. 258-259; Peter Laslett, *Family Life and Illicit love in Earlier Generations* (Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 1977); Richard Smith, Fertility, 'Economy and Household Formation in England over Three Centuries', *Population and Development Review*, 7 (1981); Jacques Dupaquier, ed, *Marriage and Remarriage in Populations of the Past* (London: Academic Press, 1981); Bonfield, Lloyd, Smith, Richard, and Wrightson, Keith, eds. *The World We have Gained*; Richard Smith, 'Marriage processes in the English past: some continuities', in *The World We Have Gained*, ed. by Bonfield, Smith and Wrightson, p. 43; Margaret Pelling, 'Who needs to marry? Ageing and inequality among men and women in early modern Norwich, in *Women and Ageing*, ed. by Botelho and Thane, pp. 43-65.

⁴⁶³ SRO(I),FB191/D/1-4; SRO(I), FB/59/D/1-2; SRO(I), FL/600/4/1; SRO(I), FB187/D/1-3; ERO(C), D/P200/1-8; ERO(C), D/P88/1-4; ERO(C), D/P171/1-5; ERO(C), D/P59/1-5.

⁴⁶⁴ Wrigley, Edward, and Schofield, Ricard, eds. *English Population* pp. 172-177.

Table 4.3. Number of Remarriages 1682-1812⁴⁶⁵

Parish	Period	Total marriages	Status recorded	No. of Widowers	No. of Widows	Widower remarriages %	Widow remarriages %
East Bergholt	1682-1804	420	375	130	107	28	17
Mendlesham	1750-1819	492	480	79	20	16	4
Lawshall	1682-1762	289	137	39	15	28	11
Holbrook	1754-1812	316	264	61	46	23	17
Average						24%	12%

Who Did Older Men Marry?

Marriage and remarriage, as my findings show, were an essential element in the achievement of self-sufficiency and residential independence for men of the lower orders. However, what is also very interesting is who older men married. The consensus in eighteenth-century society was that parity was essential for a successful marriage. Parity of status, religion and age were recommended by advice literature and popular culture. ‘Age’ and ‘Youth’ were regarded as profoundly and naturally unlike. ‘Age’ signified a state of physical decay, in direct contrast to the vitality and beauty of ‘Youth’. Consequently, the marriage of individuals of unequal ages, youth and age, was considered to be the union of conflicting conditions and inevitably ill-fated, as described by Thomas Tryon in his work on health, long life and happiness:

When Young and Old intermarry there is an inward, natural and therefore unappeasable contrariety, loathing, and dislike between them, whence ariseth Aversion, Hatred, Jealousie and Irreconcilable Discords.⁴⁶⁶

Unequal marriage was also warned against in popular song:

Before you engage
To wed with old Age

⁴⁶⁵ SRO(I)FB/191/D/1-4; SRO(I)FB/159/D/1-2; SRO(I)FL/600/4/1; SRO(I)FB187/D/1-3 H.

⁴⁶⁶ Thomas Tyron, *The Way to Health, Long Life and Happiness: or a Discourse of Temperance* (London: R. Baldwin, 1691), p. 454.

So ancient a fruit
 For Want of Root
 Is doomed to seedy Decay
 But old age in young Arms
 Is like frosty weather in May.⁴⁶⁷

Unequal age marriages were a subject which attracted condemnation from moralizers and Jeremiah's alike. Samuel Bufford argued against unequal marriages and was of the opinion that it was:

a subject which will ... afford matter enough for Ridicule; for to tye Old Age and Youth together in the Matrimonial Noose, is a thing that may well be ranked among the greater sorts of Extravagancies; and which neither Nature, Justice, or the World can justify them in.⁴⁶⁸

While Nicholas Ling, writing in 1722, expressed a similar viewpoint:

that he which married, after he had passed fifty years, should at the common assemblies and feasts sit in the lowest and vilest place, as on that committed a fact repugnant to nature, terming him nought else but a filthy old lecher.⁴⁶⁹

It seems though that amongst labouring men in rural Suffolk in this period such advice was rarely heeded. Research findings for this study indicated that not only was it commonplace for farm labourers in Suffolk to remarry on the death of a spouse, it was also common practice to marry someone much younger than themselves.⁴⁷⁰ However, it is not possible to conduct a meaningful quantitative analysis of how many remarriages exhibited this feature. As Wrigley and Schofield identified, marriage registers in this period do not consistently record the marital

⁴⁶⁷ Song CCCLVI, *The Nightingale: A Collection of four hundred and twenty-two of the most celebrated English songs* (London: J. Osborn, 1738), p. 284.

⁴⁶⁸ Samuel Bufford, *A Discourse Against Unequal Marriages* (London: D. Browne, 1696), p. 19.

⁴⁶⁹ Nicholas Ling, *Wits Common-Wealth: or a treasury of divine, moral, historical and political admonitions* (London: W. Taylor, 1722), p. 191.

⁴⁷⁰ SRO(I) FB/191/D1/12.

status of marriage partners and, ‘provide only sporadic and incomplete evidence about the proportion of those marrying who were widows or widowers.’⁴⁷¹ This makes it difficult to arrive at a reliable estimate of the exact number of remarriages and also of the number of times individuals may have remarried. However, they ascertained that the evidence that does exist would suggest that between 25% to 30% of all marriages in eighteenth-century England were remarriages. In a similar manner it is not possible to undertake a meaningful quantifiable analysis of the number of marriages of unequal age which took place in Suffolk. However, the evidence that does exist would suggest that in the parish of East Bergholt in the region of 25% of remarriages were of unequal age. In effect, these unions may have been used by aged poor men simply as a means to maintain their independence and could be regarded as a ‘symbiotic’ form of marriage, a relationship that was mutually beneficial to both parties.⁴⁷² In fact, by remarrying on the death of a spouse elderly men exhibited what could be described as a premeditated evasion of being alone in their old age, as illustrated by the following examples. Jacob Newman was aged 35 when he married Elizabeth Allestone in 1752, aged 21 years. However, this was not Newman’s first marriage. The marriage register identifies him as a widower at the time of his marriage to Elizabeth but provides no information of his previous marriage or possibly marriages. However, he then remarried on the death of Elizabeth and then on a further four occasions, each time to a partner significantly younger than himself, as confirmed by my research of the parish baptism records, as shown in Table 4.4. Newman was 71 when he married Theodosia Salmon in 1808, 40 years his junior.

⁴⁷¹ Wrigley, Edward and Scofield, Richard, eds. *Population History of England*, p. 190, 258.

⁴⁷² Botelho, Lynn, *Old Age and the English Poor Law*, p. 101.

Table 4.4 Jacob Newman - Remarriage⁴⁷³

Groom	Bride	
Jacob Norman (age 35 yrs.)	Eliz. Allestone (age 21 yrs.)	Married 1752 – Died 1757
(age 41 yrs.)	Sarah Newman (age 24 yrs.)	Married 1758 – Died 1760
(age 44 yrs.)	Mary Newman (age ?)	Married 1761 – Died 1764
(age 48 yrs.)	Martha Bennett (age 25 yrs.)	Married 1765 – Died 1806
(age 71 yrs.)	Theodosia Salmon (age 31 yrs.)	Married 1808 – (?)
Died 1814 (age 77 yrs.)		

Robert Askew provides a further example of the marriages that often took place between couples of unequal age. Askew married three times and his partners in both his second and third marriage were significantly younger than him, as shown in Table 4.5. At the age of 50 Askew married Sarah Randall aged 24 and 26 years his junior. Sarah died in 1792 and Askew remarried for the third time. His third wife Alice Sheldrake was 21 at the time of the marriage, and 35 years his junior.

Table 4.5. Robert Askew⁴⁷⁴

Groom	Bride	
Robert Askew (age 23 yrs.)	Mary King (age 21 yrs.)	Married 1764 - Died 1791
: : (age 50 yrs.)	Sarah Randall (age 24 yrs.)	Married 1791 - Died 1792
: : (age 56 yrs.)	Alice Sheldrake (age 21 yrs.)	Married 1797 – Died?

Residential Independence

This section explores the types of accommodation available to elderly men of the lower orders and aims to establish the difficulties they faced in both finding accommodation and the loss of personal freedom and independence which may have been experienced in institutional

⁴⁷³ SRO(I) FB191/D/1-3.

⁴⁷⁴ SRO(I) FB/191/D1/12.

accommodation. The experience of old age was naturally shaped by the nature and quality of the accommodation inhabited by the aged poor, as well as defining their status, self-worth and identity within the local community, however, not all elderly farm labourers were able to achieve residential independence.⁴⁷⁵ As Amanda Vickery has argued, a house afforded privacy to individuals and their families and the ‘absence of privacy was understood to be a level of degradation which would have totally undermined an individual’s self-esteem.’⁴⁷⁶ Prevalent societal notions of individualism and independence decreed that individuals place a high priority on maintaining household autonomy in later life and it was firmly believed that the elderly should remain head of their household in their old age if conditions and health allowed.⁴⁷⁷

The access to and provision of housing, as Sharpe and McEwan point out, ‘is an important and overlooked factor in the changes to society and landscape,’ which were experienced in this period.⁴⁷⁸ However, while the subject of housing the poor is of developing interest to historians traditional methods of research into domestic dwellings, that focus on material remains, are rarely possible due to the flimsy structure and nature of the accommodation normally occupied by the poor.⁴⁷⁹ Consequently, as historian Steve Hindle has highlighted, this is an area where historical investigation is severely hindered due to the lack of evidence and our understanding of the nature of the accommodation inhabited by the poor and the quality of life it afforded is

⁴⁷⁵ Keith Snell, *Spirits of Community – English Sense of Belonging and Loss 1750-2000* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), p. 34.

⁴⁷⁶ Amanda Vickery, ‘“An Englishman’s Home is his Castle?” Thresholds, Boundaries and Privacies in the Eighteenth-Century London House’, *Past and Present*, 19, (2008), pp. 147-173 (p. 151).

⁴⁷⁷ Susannah Ottaway, ‘The old woman’s home’, in *Women and Ageing*, ed. by Botelho and Thane, pp. 111-138, p. 113.

⁴⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 1

⁴⁷⁹ Alannah Tomkins, ‘Retirement from the Noise and Hurry of the World? The Experience of Almshouse Life’, in *Accommodating Poverty* ed. by Joanne McEwan and Pamela Sharpe, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 1

consequently limited.⁴⁸⁰ Consequently, the study's research findings are based on the comments of contemporary local social commentators and surviving pauper inventories to assess the type and nature of the accommodation occupied by the aged and the quality of the living environment it afforded.⁴⁸¹

The dwellings and accommodation occupied by the elderly poor and the quality of life they afforded have largely been overlooked by scholars of this period. Similarly, the material possessions of the poor have also received little attention. The housing inhabited by the poor in this period, as Sharpe and McEwan note, was usually 'small and of ephemeral construction,' and as a result has left few traces for historical analysis.⁴⁸²

The poor could be housed independently in several ways. They could, for instance, rent accommodation in existing empty farmhouses or cottages. Alternatively, they could occupy newly built accommodation, provided by landlords or small-holders or finally they could build a cottage themselves. In Suffolk, as elsewhere in rural south-east England, most rural families lived in a small dwelling typically comprised of only one or two rooms, constructed from wood, stone, bricks, or thatch with some sort of open fire that was used for cooking.⁴⁸³ Eden's account of the 'State of the Poor' in eighteenth-century England commented that, 'it is much to be regretted, that most of the habitations of the labouring class are but ill adapted to the culinary processes.'⁴⁸⁴

Eden further commented:

⁴⁸⁰ Steve Hindle, "' Without the Cry of Any Neighbours": A Cumbrian Family and the Poor Law Authorities c. 1690-1750', in *The Family in Early Modern England* Henry Berry and Elizabeth Foyster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 126-5 (p, 154).

⁴⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁴⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁴⁸³ Sara Lloyd, 'Cottage Conversations: Poverty and Manly Independence in Eighteenth-Century England, Past and Present', 184, (2004), pp. 69-108, p. 75.

⁴⁸⁴ Eden Sir. Frederick Morton, *The State of the Poor*, p. 589.

their fireplaces are in general constructed upon the most wretched principles, the fuel they consume in them, instead of heating their rooms, not infrequently render them really colder, and more uncomfortable by causing strong currents of cold air to flow from all the doors and windows to the chimney.⁴⁸⁵

The quality of housing and type of tenure experienced by elderly labourers depended on a number of factors including, income, local economy and region. In the previous century, many labourers had been provided with accommodation on the farms where they worked either as unmarried servants in dormitories or occasionally in cottages provided for married workers. During the latter half of the seventeenth and during the eighteenth century the ‘insecurity and poverty’ suffered by farm labourers was exacerbated by the diminution of live-in service in the south and east of England and the associated difficulty of finding alternative accommodation.⁴⁸⁶

Young described the typical condition of farm labourer’s cottages in Suffolk in the following terms:

In Suffolk, they are in general bad habitations; deficient in all contrivance of warmth, and of convenience; the door very generally opening from the external air into the keeping room, and sometimes directly to the fireside: the state of reparation bad, and the deficiency of gardens too general.⁴⁸⁷

The condition of farm labourer’s accommodation in Suffolk was also described by Thomas Ruggles who wrote this description of the cottages inhabited by the labouring poor after visiting them when performing his duties as a local Magistrate in 1797:

⁴⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 589.

⁴⁸⁶ Thirsk, Joan, *Suffolk Farming in the Nineteenth Century*, p. 31

⁴⁸⁷ Young, Arthur, *General View of the County of Suffolk*, p. 11.

whose narrow tenement forbid the possibility of separating the sick from the well, the parent from the children; that miserable economy in fitting up the cottage, which to generally has denied the only bedroom either a fireplace or a casement window to ventilate the air ... the stench of confined air ... the vermin too frequently swarming on the bodies of the rags of the wretched inhabitants ... which hard labour and industry ought not be liable to endure.⁴⁸⁸

Nathaniel Kent, writing in 1775, also provided a contemporary description of the dwellings inhabited by the lower orders in the region. Kent compared the state of well-kept dwellings in other parts of England with the conditions experienced by many of the lower orders in Suffolk, as follows. 'Well-ordered dwellings ... snug, sheltered, productive, clean and neat, their occupants cheerful, industrious, frugal, happy and contented,' compared to the 'shattered hovels which half the poor of this kingdom are obliged to put up with.'⁴⁸⁹

Kent described the condition of rural cottages which were common in Suffolk:

Those who condescend to visit these miserable tenements, can testify, that neither health or decency, can be preserved in them. The weather frequently penetrates all parts of them; which must occasion illness of various kinds, particularly agues' which more frequently visit the children of cottagers than any others, and early shake their constitutions.⁴⁹⁰

He continued to comment, perhaps rather patronisingly, that:

All that is requisite, is a warm comfortable plain room, for the poor inhabitants to eat their morsel in, an oven to bake their bread, a little receptacle for their small beer and provision, and two wholesome

⁴⁸⁸ Ruggles, Thomas, *The History of the Poor Law*, p. 324.

⁴⁸⁹ Broad. 'Housing the Rural Poor 1650-1850', 151-170 (p. 78).

⁴⁹⁰ Kent, Nathaniel, *Hints to Gentlemen of Landed Property* (London: J. Dodsley, 1775) p. 229.

lodging apartments, one for the man and his wife, and another for his children.⁴⁹¹

In the absence of material evidence there has been a tendency for historians to assume that all housing conditions for the labouring poor were bad and squalid, as portrayed by Kent and others. However, my research of elderly pauper inventories from a number of Suffolk parishes revealed that the accommodation of the old, could in fact be reasonably well furnished. The level of materiality revealed in some pauper inventories undermining the common belief in the ‘remorseless poverty’ endured by elderly men, although not in every case. Study findings would suggest that while it is important to recognise the hardship experienced by many elderly poor men it is possibly a mistake to adopt the view that they would have been unable to find some comfort in their own home. Findings suggest, in common with the view of Adrian Green, that rather than accepting the view that the aged poor were universally condemned to live in squalid conditions it is necessary to recognise that the elderly would have at least endeavoured to maintain a homely space and a degree of comfort.⁴⁹²

Most labouring families, young and old, rented their accommodation.⁴⁹³ Unsurprisingly, the study’s research of the responses to Question 17 of the Rural Queries of the Poor Law Commissioners Report (1832) revealed very few farm labourers in Suffolk’s rural parishes owned their cottages with the exception of the parishes of Benhall (3), Stradbroke (5), Great Waldingfield (1) and Walsham (1). Eden was of the opinion that for labouring families, ‘their heaviest disbursement is their rent ... it is an article of expense that has all the inconveniences of a direct tax; and it is often called for at the moment when it is most inconvenient to pay it.’⁴⁹⁴

However, my findings based on the responses to Question 18 of the Rural Queries revealed

⁴⁹¹ Ibid., p. 209.

⁴⁹² Adrian Green, ‘Heatless and Unhomely?’, in *Poverty: The Housing and Living Arrangements of the English Poor, c. 1600-1850*, ed. by Sharpe and McEwan, p. 71 .

⁴⁹³ Snell, Keith, *Sprits of Community*, p. 7.

⁴⁹⁴ Eden, Sir Frederick Morton, *The State of the Poor*, p. 572.

that the annual rent of cottages in Suffolk generally ranged from £2 per annum without a garden, to £6 per annum with a garden, the average being £3 per annum.⁴⁹⁵ This amounted to between 7.5% and 12% of a labourers annual income and is consistent with the findings of both Feinstein and Hans Joachim Voth who both estimated annual rent accounted for in the region of 10% of a labourer's annual wage.⁴⁹⁶ Some sense of cost can also be gleaned from advertisements for properties for sale in the *Ipswich Journal* in December 1800, which were then to be let to others in multiple occupancy:

To be sold by auction – the following properties, situated in Framlingham, late the property of James More, surgeon deceased in the following lots.

Lot 1. A tenement and yard ... in the occupation of Jas Newsom and another; yearly rent £4.0.0

Lot 2. A tenement and yard ... in the tenure of Ezekiel Button and 3 others; yearly rent £9.17.6⁴⁹⁷

However, as income declined with age, the concerns over payment of rent inevitably increased. William James's letter to the overseers in Colchester in 1818, is typical of those written by the elderly poor:

I have not been in my power, to keep myself, out of debt, the Principal, is the Rent of the tenement in which we live, having not been Able, to pay any part of it, which have been going on from Michaelmas last. My Landlady is now become very Impressive, and will not wait any longer.⁴⁹⁸

⁴⁹⁵ *Royal Poor Law Commissioners Report 1832- Rural Queries, Question 18.*

⁴⁹⁶ Charles Feinstein, 'Pessimism perpetuated', 635; Hans Joachim Voth, 'Living Standards and the Urban Environment', in *The Cambridge Economic History of Modern Britain Vol. 1*, ed. by Roderick Floud and Paul Johnson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 200), pp. 268-294 (p. 282).

⁴⁹⁷ *Ipswich Journal*, 27th December 1800.

⁴⁹⁸ ERO(C), D/P 178/18/23. *Overseers' Correspondence, 1815-1883, William James Letter*, 20th July 1818.

Failure to pay his rent and the danger of having his goods seized by his landlady was a constant cause of concern for James, as his letter written in 1819 demonstrates:

tis wholly out of my power to make good my Rent, my Landlady gave me Notice on Yesterday, Friday, to pay her by next Tuesday night, in failure of which, she will take legal means and pay herself. ⁴⁹⁹

Responses to Question 21 of the Commission's Rural Queries, revealed that most Suffolk parishes tried to help the elderly by exempting them from parish rates and sometimes paying their rent, as was the case in the parishes of Clare and Earl Soham, who paid the rent of farm labourers, young and old, in 'extreme distress'. The parish of Nacton was more specific. Not only did the parish have its own cottages to accommodate the poor but also paid the rent of those 'such as cannot pay rent, such as the aged' and 'frequently placed ... [the aged] ... in cottages belonging to the parish to live rent free'.⁵⁰⁰ As Ottaway and Williams note, the provision of poor relief, including rent payments to old people, enabling them to retain to some extent their residential independence would suggest that there was 'a powerful assumption that even the poorest of the elderly belonged in homes of their own'.⁵⁰¹ Additionally, as King has indicated, the policy of compiling paupers inventories and leaving paupers in possession of their belongings until death, rather than simply confiscating them, enabled the poor law authorities to allow elderly recipients to retain a degree of residential independence and comfort even after they were completely dependent on relief.⁵⁰²

⁴⁹⁹ ERO(C), D/P 178/18/23.

⁵⁰⁰ *Royal Poor Law Commissioners Report 1832- Rural Queries, Question 21.*

⁵⁰¹ Susannah Ottaway, 'The old woman's home', in *Women and Ageing*, ed. by Botelho, p 45-46.

⁵⁰² Peter King, 'Pauper inventories', *Pauper Inventories and the Material Lives of the Poor in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries*, in *Chronicling Poverty: The Voices and Strategies of the English Poor, 1640-1840*, ed. by Tim Hitchcock, Paul Slack and Pamela Sharpe, 155-191 (p. 182).

Pauper Inventories

Pauper inventories provide an important source to gain an insight into the material lives of the poor. My research for this study confirmed the view of Joseph Harley that pauper inventories with careful examination, provide the means to gain an understanding of both the material possessions and the home environment of the poor of the lower orders, as the study by King also demonstrates.⁵⁰³ As King states, pauper inventories, ‘complex though they are, can, when properly contextualised begin to open up the material worlds of the poor.’⁵⁰⁴

However, the physical environment and material world of the aged poor in the eighteenth century and in the first half of the nineteenth century has received relatively little interest from historians. Contemporary surveys, such as those conducted by Eden and Davis, while including details about family expenditure and earnings omitted any information on the material situation of the aged poor and their possessions.⁵⁰⁵ Few probate inventories relate to the labouring poor who largely remained outside the bounds of the probate system, prompting Lorna Weatherill in her study of consumer behaviour and material culture between 1660 and 1760 to suggest that, ‘there is a lack of reliable evidence about those who did not leave inventories ... we simply do not know what they owned.’⁵⁰⁶

However, during the old poor law the compilation of pauper inventories was common practice as part of the process of obtaining poor relief. Yet, as Harley in his recent study of pauper inventories noted, although historians have been aware of this source of evidence on the material well-being of the poor for some time it remains largely overlooked as the means of

⁵⁰³ Peter King, ‘Pauper inventories’, in *Chronicling Poverty*, ed. by Hitchcock, King and Sharpe, pp. 155-191, p. 155; Joseph Harley, ‘Pauper Inventories, Social Relations, And The Nature of Poor Relief Under The Old Poor Law, England, c.1601- 1834’, *The Historical Journal*, 62, 2 (2019), pp, 375-398.

⁵⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 156.

⁵⁰⁵ Eden Frederick Morton, *The State of the Poor Vols. 1-3*; David Davies, *The Case of the Labourers in Husbandry Stated and Considered* (London: G.G. and J. Robinson, 1795).

⁵⁰⁶ Lorna Weatherill, *Consumer Behaviour and Material Culture in Britain 1660-1760* (London: Routledge, 2nd edition, 1989)

establishing what type of parishioner had their possessions itemised in this manner and the nature and extent of those possessions.⁵⁰⁷

However, as this study found, pauper inventories are not often easy to find and it was necessary to undertake in-depth research of parish poor law records to identify relevant inventories for analysis. Often, inventories were found to be interspersed with other records, such as overseer's accounts, and it was necessary to conduct lengthy archival searches in order to uncover them. My research of local archival sources identified a total of sixty inventories compiled in this period. While a pauper inventory does not record the age of the pauper this was ascertained by cross-referencing the date of the inventory with the relevant parish birth register.⁵⁰⁹ This ensured that the inventories included in this study related to aged paupers and not those inventories compiled for other reasons. For instance, inventories were often taken 'as a distraint for arrears for rent' or 'seized for rent due to his landlord'.⁵¹⁰ It was also recognised that it is necessary to exercise caution in the analysis of elderly pauper inventories as they do not always provide a full assessment of an individual's possessions. There was a tendency for individuals about to be admitted to the workhouse to redistribute their possessions to friends and family prior to admittance. As a result, as my findings show, inventories sometimes contain only a few basic possessions. However, this is not altogether surprising given an absence of parochial

⁵⁰⁷ Harley, 'Pauper Inventories, Social Relations', 375-398.

⁵⁰⁹ SRO(I)FB191/G/6/1-6 *East Bergholt Inventories*; SRO(I)FB130/N/4/1-7 *Gislingham Inventories*; SRO(I)FC117/G/3/1 *Marlsford Inventories*; SRO(I)FB164/g/11/1 *Thornham Parva Inventories*; SRO(I)FB161/G/9/1 *Cotton Inventories*; SRO(I)FB159/G/11/1-4 *Mendlesham Inventories*; SRO(I)FB151/G/7/1 *Wetheringset Inventories*; SRO(I)FB153/g/8/1 *Thwaite Parvis Inventories*; SRO(I)FB156/G/5/1 *Rishangles Inventories*; SRO(I)GB136/G/12 *Burgate Inventories*; SRO(I)FB136/G/12 *Wortham Inventories*; SRO(I)FB98/G/8/1 *Ipswich St Clement Inventories*; SRO(I)FB12/G/6/1 *Creting St Mary Inventories*; SRO(I)FC73/G/6/1-11 *Yoxford Inventories*; SRO(I)FC91/G/6/1-11 *Metfield Inventories*; SRO(I)FC92/G/3/1-12 *Withersdale Inventories*; SRO(I)FC101?G/4/1-5 *Framlingham Inventories*; SRO(I)FC161/7/1-10 *Iken Inventories*; SRO(I)FC606/1/1/8-14 *Mildenhall Inventories*; SRO(I)FB80/G/9/1-2 *Stoke-By-Nayland Inventories*; SRO(I)FB78/G/9/1-4 *Polstead Inventories*; SRO(I)FC127/G/1-3 *Rendham Inventories*; SRO(I)FC125/G/7/1-2 *Little Glemham Inventories*; SRO(I)89/G/7/1-3 *Brundish Inventories*.

⁵¹⁰ Peter King, 'Pauper Inventories', in *Chronicling Poverty*, ed. by Hitchcock, King and Sharp, p. 158.

storage space and what appears to have been a public acceptance for individuals to redistribute their possessions prior to workhouse admittance. Despite recognising the caution which must be exercised, the analysis of inventories relevant to this study provided the means to gain an insight into the material world of the aged and nature of their home environment. Importantly, my research of pauper inventories was also instrumental in revealing the significant stratification and diversity that existed within Suffolk's aged population.

Pauper inventories are one of the few documents which refer specifically to aged members of the lower orders and who in Suffolk were predominately former farm labourers. A pauper inventory provides a list of goods which may or may not comprise an individual's total possessions and was most likely to be compiled either at the time an individual became a recipient of regular poor relief, was admitted to the workhouse or at the time of their death, often leaving a widow who would become dependent on poor relief. While very similar to probate inventories they do not include a valuation of the goods described, or in most instances the condition of those goods. Study findings of inventories from across the region identified that the differences in the volume and nature of possessions listed between inventories was indicative of a significant diversity in the material well-being within the aged population, between those who had remained independent up to the point of their death leaving a dependent wife and, those who had become dependent on relief some time prior to the time of their death or admission to the workhouse.⁵¹¹

Pauper inventories were usually compiled by parish overseer's sometimes with help from churchwardens or parish clergy. Figure 4.3. shows a representative example of a pauper inventory from East Bergholt.

⁵¹¹ Ibid., pp. 155-19 (p.157).

Figure 4.3 – Inventory for Joseph Clark⁵¹²

Inventory for Joseph Clarke – East Bergholt (27th March 1751). Taken by John Lewis and Miles Crow

Three Tables	A Hutch and a little tub
Three Chairs	2 earthen dishes
One Iron Pot	2 wooden dishes
One warming pan	A wood ladel
6 Coal Bars	A tin pepper box and slice
A pair of bellows	Two beds
A pair of tongs	Two hutches
One Tram (?)	A candlestick
One hour glass	A linnin blanket
A linnin fork	2 wheels and a rule
A spade	Scales and weights
A looking glass	

The inventory starts by naming to whom the possessions belonged, where and when it was written and who was responsible for listing the items in the inventory. Although no assessment of the value of the possessions listed in an inventory was undertaken, the nature and volume of household possessions listed provides an insight into the nature of accommodation occupied and level of material well-being enjoyed by the subject of the inventory. Study findings revealed the contents listed in inventories varies enormously. Some inventories list a wide range of household goods and furniture while others have only a sparse collection of possessions of little value reflecting the situation of an impoverished aged person. Some inventories related to unskilled farm labourers who had always lived on the margin of poverty and as they grew older and suffered longer periods of unemployment or underemployment their material possessions would be gradually depleted. Others related to formerly prosperous artisans or tradesmen who had fallen victim to the downward gravitational pull of poverty in old age but would have been relatively well off in material terms compared to other members of the aged population of the lower orders up to the time of their death. Some inventories give

⁵¹² SRO(I), FB191/G/6/1.

the impression of a formerly independent household and list a wide range of cooking and heating equipment as well as furniture, bedding, linen and a variety of household utensils, such as that of Joseph Clarke, shown in Figure 4.3. While other inventories portray the meagre living environment of an elderly impoverished individual.⁵¹³

In common with the findings of King and Harley, my research of Suffolk inventories revealed that from mid-eighteenth century the inventories of aged poor men listed an increasing number and variety of household goods as well as decorative and 'semi-luxury' goods. However, perhaps more significant was that my research of pauper inventories revealed the significant degree of diversity and stratification which existed within the lower orders.

Research was undertaken of the possessions listed in sixty pauper inventories identified as relevant to this study and an analysis of the incidence of various types of possession listed in the inventories is shown in Figure 4.4.

My analysis revealed, in common with the findings of King, that the number of inventories in which 'semi-luxury' goods such as looking-glasses, tea related items, lanterns and candlesticks were listed was significant. The analysis revealed a significant number of inventories which listed items of furniture such as a chest of drawers, listed in 42% of inventories, cupboards in 57%, and square tables in 70% of inventories. Bedsteads were listed in 87% of inventories with beds listed in 27%, bedding such as linen were listed in 47%, and blankets listed in 37% of inventories. Analysis of inventories also revealed the listing of 'semi-luxury' items such as candlesticks, listed in 32% of inventories, lanterns listed in 28%, clocks listed in 15% and tea kettles listed in 57%, looking glasses listed in 20% and warming pans listed in 45% of inventories.

⁵¹³ Peter King, 'Pauper Inventories', pp. 155-191; Harley, 'Material lives of the poor', pp. 375-398.

Figure 4.4. Suffolk pauper inventories: analysis of goods⁵¹⁴

Item	% listed in inventories	Item	% listed in inventories	Item	% listed in inventories
Chairs (1-2)	20%	Hake	28%	Plates, saucers, cups	27%
Chairs (3-4)	33%	Salt box	22%	Trenchers	7%
Chairs (5+)	33%	Pepper box	2%	Knives & forks	23%
Stools	68%	Grid iron	33%	Spade/Scythe/Hoe	22%
Oval Table	22%	Fire pan	35%	Ladder	3%
Square Table	70%	Fire stick	8%	Ladle	12%
Desk	8%	Bellows	52%	Spinning wheel	47%
Chest of drawers	42%	Tongs	43%		
Cupboard	57%	Cob irons	25%		
Coffer	23%	Bottles	12%		
Boot stool	8%	Pail	18%		
Candlesticks	32%	Wooden tubs	30%		
Lanterns	28%	Hutch	40%		
Looking glass	20%	Bed(s)	27%		
Hour glass/clocks	15%	Bedstead	83%		
Books	5%	Linen	47%		
Iron box	25%	Sheets	37%		
Earthenware	20%	Blankets	37%		
Wooden bowls	22%	Bolster	32%		
Pewter dishes	12%	Pillows	20%		
Vessels	25%	Coverlid	27%		
Iron pots	62%	Warming Pan	45%		
Frying pan	37%	Trunk	17%		
Skillet	33%	Rug	7%		
Iron oven	2%	Curtains	7%		
Colander/Sieve	10%	Shelves	13%		
Tea kettle	45%	Partition	2%		

⁵¹⁴ SRO(I)FB191/G/6/1-6; SRO(I)FB130/N/4/1-7; SRO(FC)117/G/3/1; SRO(I)FB164/G/11/1; SRO(I)FB161/G/9/1; SRO(I)FB159/G/11/1-4; SRO(I)FB151/G/7/1; SRO(I)FB153/G/8/1; (I)FB156/G/5/1; SRO(IG)B136/G/12; SRO(I)FB136/G/12; SRO(I)FB98/G/8/1; (I)FB12/G/6/1 SRO(FC)73/G/6/1-11; SRO(FC)91/6/G/1-1; SRO(FC)92/G/3/1-12; SRO(FC)101/G/4/1-5; SRO(FC)161/7/1-10; SRO(FC)606/1/1/8-14; SRO(I)FB80/G/9/1-2; SRO(I)FB78/G/9/1-4; SRO(FC)127/G/1-3; SRO(FC)125/G/7/1-2; SRO(I)89/G/7/1-3.

Findings indicated that the ownership of 'semi-luxury' items increased from mid-eighteenth century onwards. While the increased incidence of 'semi-luxury' items suggest an improvement in the material conditions as the eighteenth century progressed and into the early nineteenth century.

The examples of pauper inventories which follow, as well as providing a telling insight into the material lives of the elderly, reveal the diversity and stratification which existed within the lower orders and which has been largely neglected in previous studies. Importantly, while an analysis of pauper inventories establishes that not all elderly men from the lower orders were destitute and living in abject misery it also provides examples of the downward gravitational pull of poverty in old age.

Pauper inventories, such as that of John Alexander a petty shopkeeper, reveal the existence of what King terms 'sub-groups' differentiated by different levels of wealth.⁵¹⁵ While a member of the lower orders Alexander was able during his life to achieve sustenance and remain independent, however, on his death his wife was deemed unable to support herself. Alexander's inventory taken on his death in 1762 aged 63, and the range and nature of his possessions would indicate that he was a member of one of the better-off sub-groups King referred to, as shown in Figure 4.5. On his death Alexander's wife became dependent on relief which necessitated the compilation of an inventory of his possessions by the Iken overseers.⁵¹⁶

⁵¹⁵ Peter King, 'Pauper Inventories', 174.

⁵¹⁶ SRO(I), FC161/G/1/1-50, *Iken Parish Overseers Accounts and Disbursements to the Poor* (1728-1801).

Figure 4.5. Inventory of John Alexander – Iken (1762)⁵¹⁷

In the kitchen	In the chamber	In the shop
2 oval tables	A bed	1 working table
1 long table	2 iron pots	1 brewing tub
1 great chair	1 powdering tub	1 iron spade
6 other chairs	1 brewing tub	1 buffott stool
1 warming pan	1 pail	1 long stool
1 gridle iron	1 tea kettle	1 bottle
2 Box irons and 2 heaters	Sum earthen pots	4 irons.
1 pair flesh forks	1 spinning wheel	
1 salt box		
1 fire pan and tongs		
1 pair bellows		
1 candlestick		
1 pair cob irons		

Findings revealed that in exchange for providing relief to Alexander's widow it was proposed that the parish would inherit the possessions listed in the inventory on her death and would then sell them in order to recover the cost of her relief. Richard Burn commented in 1764 that, 'where man's actions left wives and children upon the charge of the parish: the church wardens and overseers ... may seize their effects.' Burn went on to say, 'So when they die, it seemeth reasonable, that the overseers should have the power to dispose of their clothes, and other effects, in aid of the parish for their funeral and other expenses'.⁵¹⁸ Research of the parish poor law records for the parish of Iken revealed no evidence that Alexander had been in receipt of poor relief during his lifetime. His accommodation, as suggested by his inventory, would have consisted of at least three rooms, a kitchen which would also have been used as a living room, a single bedroom and a third room which would have housed his shop. Alexander, although a member of the lower orders, was certainly not destitute and living in abject poverty when he

⁵¹⁷ SRO(I), FC161/G/7/4.

⁵¹⁸ Richard Burn, *History of the Poor Laws: With Observations* (London: A. Miller, 1764), p. 101.

died, as the extensive range of furniture and household utensils listed in his inventory demonstrates and which suggest a relatively well-appointed material environment.

The inventory of William Finch was taken in 1752 prior to his admittance to the workhouse on the grounds he was no longer able to support himself would also suggest that he was a member of one of the better off ‘sub-groups’ within the lower orders. He had however succumbed to the downward pull of poverty in old age. As in the case of Alexander, Finch was in possession of a wide range of furniture and domestic goods. Notably, the inventory also includes a number of ‘semi-luxury’ items such as, a salt box, candlestick, tea kettle and a looking glass, as shown in Figure 4.6.

Figure 4.6. Inventory for William Finch – East Bergholt (1751)⁵¹⁹

A table	4 benches
A Jolt Boose (?)	A Sive
A Candlestick	A pair of bellows
A gridiron	A sieve
Five pan tongs	A spit
Three Chairs	A hook
Two tubs	A Fork
Two pots and a pan	A bed as it stands
Three potatoes	Bedding
A Kettle	A real and two frames
A trammel	A pint
2 mugs	A quarter of a peck
A Looking glass	A spade
Trencher case	A mattock (pickaxe)

The inventory taken of John Harper’s goods was taken in 1780, prior to him being admitted to the workhouse, is shown in Figure 4.7. Despite being a member of one of the better-off sub-groups within the lower orders Harper he became a victim to the downward pull of poverty in old age. In common with the inventories compiled for Alexander and Finch it shows Harper to

⁵¹⁹ SRO(I), FB191/G/6/5

have been in possession of a wide range of furniture and household goods. The inventory would suggest that his accommodation comprised of at least three rooms, the chamber, low room and buttery. As well as listing some significant items of furniture such as, rugs, a nest of drawers, and a cupboard. The inventory also included a number of ‘semi-luxury goods’ such as, bellows, a warming pan, and a looking glass, items which as King and Harley identified were becoming more common as the eighteenth century progressed.

Figure 4.7. Inventory for John Harper – (1780)⁵²⁰

<u>Chamber</u>	<u>In Low Room</u>	<u>Buttery</u>
2 beds	Meat hatchet	2 casks
1 Bedstead	1 table	1 tub
2 Rugs	1 small table	Cupboard
2 Bolsters	Nest of drawers	2 iron pots
1 pillow	2 Bowls	Fire pan
5 sheets	6 chairs	Stool
1 chaste	Rake and cob iron	Pail
2 chairs	Pair of tongs	2 hatches
1 box	Fire pan	1 hook
	Pair of bellows	Spade
	Warming pan	2 pots
	Looking glass	
	One pail	
	Skillet	
	Handsaw	
	Gridiron	
	1 sheet	

The stratification which existed within the lower orders is aptly demonstrated by the following inventories which, in contrast, to the previous examples reveal the sparse material environment experienced by many members of the destitute elderly poor. The inventory of Jonathan Garrard a widower from the parish of Gislingham is typical of such inventories, as shown in Figure 4.8.

⁵²⁰ SRO(I)FC/G/6/5.

Garrard, was an unskilled farm labourer aged 72 years when his inventory was compiled prior to his admittance to the Hartismere Incorporation House of Industry in 1781. Garrard's accommodation consisted of a two-room dwelling, the kitchen which would also have been used as the living room and, a bedroom. Both rooms contained only the bare essentials, some of which were referred to as being old.

Figure 4.8. Inventory of Jonathan Garrard – Gislingham (1781)⁵²¹

In the kitchen	In the chamber
1 old table	1 oak bedstead
1 wheel and reels	1 bed mattress
1 iron pot	1 feather bed
1 old chair	1 old quilt
1 old cupboard	1 pillow and bolster
	1 old sheet

Terry Rose an unskilled farm labourer from the parish of Gislingham provides a further example of the meagre material possessions typically owned by a destitute aged farm labourer, as shown in Figure 4.9.

Figure 4.9. Terry Rose – Pauper Inventory (1780)⁵²²

In the kitchen	In the chamber
1 frying pan	a bed
1 pair of bellows	a bedstead
1 oval stool	a bolster
1 kettle	1 pair sheets
1 bag of tea	1 old blanket
tea kettle	1 cover lid
1 wheel and reels	1 hutch
1 old warming pan with iron handle	1 small cupboard

⁵²¹ SRO(I)FB//G/13/6.

⁵²² SRO(I)FB130/G/13/3.

Rose was a widower and his inventory was compiled prior to his admittance to the Hartismere Incorporation workhouse in 1780, aged 63 years. His accommodation comprised of two rooms, the kitchen and a bed chamber. The lack of furniture in the kitchen is indicative of an individual living alone and is furnished only with a single stool. The bed chamber is furnished in a similar sparse manner with only a bed, some old bedding and a small cupboard. However, also listed in the inventory were the ‘semi-luxury’ items of a warming pan and tea related goods.

The inventory of Francis Richardson, an unskilled farm labourer, taken at the time of his death aged 59 years provides a final example of the accommodation and meagre material environment typical of many aged widowers, as shown in Figure 4.10. His accommodation consisted of two rooms, a parlour which would have been both kitchen and living room and a single bedroom, both of which were sparsely furnished with possessions of little value. The spinning wheel used by his wife prior to her death was still in his possession. The inventory provides no details as to the size of the rooms occupied by Richardson, nor does it provide any information as to the overall condition of Richardson’s accommodation.

Figure 4.10. Inventory of Francis Richardson – Iken (1728)⁵²³

In the parlour	In the chamber
A cupboard	A bed
3 chairs	2 milk bowls
Iron (?)	2 chairs
Coffer – 3 books	A table
A warm pan	A wife worke wheel
A frying pan	1 stool
3 skillets	Chafon dish
A spade	Fire tongues
Greed iron(?)	3 stools

⁵²³ SRO(I), FC/161/G/7/2.

However, despite the absence of information about the actual nature and size of accommodation research of pauper inventories conducted for this study offer a telling insight into both the accommodation occupied by many poor elderly men as well as the diversity within the aged poor population and differences in the level of material well-being that was experienced in this period.

Family Support

Eighteenth-century household listings reveal that up to 88% of elderly men, aged 60 years and over, were head of a household. Although twice as many women as men lived as dependents in the household of another, up to 68% were either the head of their household, were married to the head of the householder or lived alone. Household listings also show that approximately half of elderly women and men lived with their children with very few of the old living outside of their nuclear family. While this remained the case throughout the eighteenth-century, gender was an important factor in determining the position of the old person relative to his or her co-residential children. Up to 14% of women lived in the homes of their children while only up to 3% of men in the listings did so.⁵²⁴ It seems that elderly women, but not men, may in certain situations have lived in their children's home before their death. However, the over-riding expectation of the aged was to live independently in their own residence for as long as possible. Unfortunately, the lack of household listings in Suffolk hinders an investigation of co-residence patterns and the household structure experienced by the elderly. However, Ottaway's research on nearby Terling in Essex contradicts the findings of Laslett and Wall, suggesting that 50% of men and 33% of women, in the region of 40% of the elderly, lived with their children. Ottaway is also of the opinion that the incidence of co-residence was such that it suggests that 'it would

⁵²⁴ Richard Wall, 'Elderly Persons and Members of Their Households in England and Wales from Preindustrial Times to the Present' in David Kertzer and Peter Laslett (eds), *Aging in the Past: Demography, Society and Old Age* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1995), p. 89.

have been natural for needy elderly parents to keep a child at home to help them, to ask a child to move back in with them, or to move into the home of a child'.⁵²⁵ She further suggests that even the 'passive help' of apportioning expenses would have been beneficial to the old.

While the belief that the aged should remain independent for as long as possible prevailed throughout this period it was not belief of all sections of society that household independence should necessarily permeate down to the aged poor.⁵²⁶ Research for this study has identified examples when the elderly who were dependent on poor relief were expected to co-inhabit with other paupers rather than be supported in their own homes. In fact, Burn contended in his legal treatise that there was legal precedent for paupers being forced to live together.⁵²⁷ Despite this, the numerous examples in pauper correspondence from the old requesting assistance with rent payments reveal the importance assigned to residential independence by the aged poor and their sustained effort to maintain it, perhaps due to not having the option of living with family, or not wishing to succumb to institutional accommodation.

Institutional Welfare – Overview

Aged men and women unable to achieve residential independence through their own efforts or because of an absence of accommodation and support from family members had by necessity to seek support from charitable, parish or poor law authorities. This support took the form of almshouse accommodation established by charitable foundations, accommodation in cottages provided for the aged by the parish or admittance to a workhouse.

⁵²⁵ Susannah, Ottaway, 'Elderly in the Eighteenth Century', in *Medicine and the Workhouse*, ed. by, Reinartz & Laslett, p. 395.

⁵²⁶ Susannah Ottaway, 'The old woman's home', in *Woman and Ageing*; ed. by Botelho. 111-138 (p. 113).

⁵²⁷ Richard Burn, *The Justice of the Peace and Parish Officer Vol. ii* (London: T. Cadell, 1755), p. 256.

Alannah Tomkins in her study of almshouse and workhouse accommodation drew attention to the neglect in the historiography of the experiences, welfare and quality of life experienced by aged male almshouse residents or workhouse inmates.⁵²⁸ Since then, although historians such as Angela Nichols, Nigel Goose, and Brian Howson have begun to address the issue of life within almshouses, the second half of the eighteenth century and the first half of the nineteenth century, remains a somewhat overlooked period of historical study.⁵²⁹ Similarly, the workhouse environment and the quality of life it afforded has received little in-depth consideration in this period other than the recent studies of Ottaway of the treatment of the elderly, management regime and the maintenance of discipline in eighteenth-century workhouses. While Harley has focused on the strategic use of the workhouse in the closing decades of the eighteenth century in his study of the material lives of the poor.⁵³⁰ However, the nature and quality of the living environment and the possible loss of freedom and personal independence which almshouse residents or workhouse inmates may have experienced has not previously been undertaken in Suffolk.

Charitable initiatives and social policy undertakings have long prioritized the provision of residential welfare, for as Tomkins notes in her study of almshouses, that they were built 'to provide shelter is to meet one of the basic human needs.'⁵³¹ The important role played in the provision of accommodation for the elderly poor by both parishes and charities was also revealed by John Broad's study in which he explored the housing of the rural poor in southern

⁵²⁸ Tomkins, 'Almshouse versus Workhouse', 45-58 (p. 45).

⁵²⁹ Nicholls, Angela, *Almshouses in early modern England*; Goose, 'Accommodating the elderly poor', pp. 35-57; Goose, 'The English almshouse', p. 3-19. Nigel Goose, *Almshouses: a social and architectural history* (Stroud: History, 2008).

⁵³⁰ Susannah Ottaway, 'The Elderly in the Eighteenth-Century Workhouse', in *Medicine and the workhouse*, ed. by Reinartz and Schwarz, pp. 40-57. Susannah Ottaway, '"A Very Bad Presidente in the House": Workhouse Masters, Care, and Discipline in the Eighteenth-Century Workhouse', *Journal of Social History*, 54.4 (2021) 1091-1119; Ottaway, 'Reconsidering poor law institutions by virtually: reconstructing and reviewing the eighteenth-century workhouse', 557-582; Harley, 'Material lives of the poor', 71-103;

⁵³¹ Tomkins, 'Almshouse versus Workhouse', p. 45.

England between the seventeenth century and early nineteenth century.⁵³² However, little information has previously been thought to exist on the actual experience of almshouse residents or workhouse inmates. Consequently, previous investigation has tended to focus on the material conditions provided by almshouses and workhouses rather than the actual experience of residence and potential loss of freedom and personal independence. However, this is not the case in Suffolk, and the existence of a wide range of rich source material facilitated the study's research of the situation and likely experiences, including the loss of personal independence, which elderly male almshouse residents and workhouse inmates may have suffered, a subject which has not been previously investigated specifically.⁵³³

My research of the responses to Question 21 of the Rural Queries of the Poor Law Commissioners Report (1832) revealed that Nacton was the only Suffolk parish to provide accommodation for the impoverished elderly of the parish, as previously mentioned. Consequently, elderly men unable to achieve self-sufficiency and residential independence and not having the option to live with family had either to gain accommodation in an almshouse or faced admittance to the workhouse.

Consideration of instances of cruelty or kindness and feelings regarding the loss of independence and personal control which are of significant importance to our understanding of the experience of institutional accommodation have been largely neglected in previous studies. However, the existence of extensive and detailed records from the large purpose-built workhouses, known as 'Houses of Industry', established by Suffolk's rural incorporations from the 1750s, and by reading against the grain it was possible for the study to gain an insight into

⁵³² John Broad, 'Housing the Rural Poor in Southern England, 1650-1850', in *Agricultural History Review*, 48:2, (2000) pp. 151-170; 'Parish Economies of Welfare 1650-1834' in *Historical Journal*, 42, (1999), pp. 985-1006.

⁵³³ SRO (I), FC25/L/3/2, *Seckford Alms House Accounts, Statutes and Ordinances for the Government of the Almshouses in Woodbridge, in the County of Suffolk 1719-1853* (Woodbridge: John Loder, 1792); SRO(I), C/3/10/1/2/1-2, *Tooley Foundation Records*.

the experience of aged male inmates. While the records of the Seckford Charitable Foundation and Tooley Charitable Foundation almshouses located in Woodbridge and Ipswich provided this study with the means to explore and speculate on the likely experience of elderly male almshouse residents.

Almshouses – Catering for the Poor

The historiography of welfare, as Tomkins has identified, portrays a generally positive view of life within almshouses. As she suggests, The experience of almshouse residence can be examined on the basis of four criteria: the extent to which they catered for the poor aged male population; the physical environment they provided; additional benefits for residents beyond accommodation and their management regime.⁵³⁴ However, previous research has focused primarily institution's architectural and structural design and financing through endowments, rather than on the actual experience of residents.⁵³⁵ When considered within the historiography of welfare the perception of almshouse accommodation focused largely on the idealistic aims of their founders and nineteenth-century interpretations of their function and the 'survival of neat stone or brick built cottages with commemorative plaques over their doors.'⁵³⁶ This image has been further reinforced by almshouse residents being commonly regarded as 'respectable gowned Trollopian worthies.'⁵³⁷ As Tomkins states, almshouses have, 'enjoyed a bland but positive continuity of image which impinges on both the material comfort of the inmates (their gowns) and the steadiness of their behaviour (their worthiness).'⁵³⁸

⁵³⁴ Tomkins, 'Almshouse versus Workhouse', p. 47.

⁵³⁵ Elizabeth Prescott, *The English Medieval Hospital: c. 1050-1640* (London: Batsford, 1992).

⁵³⁶ Tomkins, 'Almshouse versus Workhouse', p.46.

⁵³⁷ Slack, Paul, *From Reformation to improvement*; Robert Canning, *An account of the gifts and legacies that have been given and bequeathed to charitable causes in the town of Ipswich* (Ipswich, W. Craighton, 1774).

⁵³⁸ Tomkins, 'Almshouse versus Workhouse', p. 46

The role and significance of almshouses has been examined more recently by Angela Nicolls, whose study considers how almshouses were founded, who the residents were and what benefits they received. While her study reveals that despite ‘local and regional disparities in wealth, and apparent variation in responses to need, the idea of the almshouse seems to have held an almost universal appeal.’⁵³⁹ Nicholls identified that by mid-nineteenth century there were almshouses in every English county and that by 1870 there was a total of 1,336 almshouses, accounting for in excess of a quarter of the expenditure from all endowed charities. Despite her study stopping in 1725 it does provide valuable background and contextual information when considering how almshouses operated in the second half of the eighteenth century and first half of the nineteenth century.

There is, as Tomkins draws attention to in her comparison of the accommodation provided by almshouses and workhouses, an absence of research about the actual residential experience of elderly almshouse residents, in part due to the lack of contemporary records. However, the existence and access to the statutes, ordinances and records from the Seckford Charitable Foundation in Woodbridge and the Tooley Charitable Foundation in Ipswich provided the means for this study to explore and speculate on the residential experience of male almshouse residents in Suffolk and in doing so enhance our understanding of the living environment within an almshouse. Thomas Seckford from Woodbridge received Letters Patent from Elizabeth I in 1587, ‘to erect, create, ordain and found one Hospital or Almshouse ... for the relief of the Poor and Indigent.’⁵⁴⁰ Accordingly, Seckford aimed to provide ‘sheltered care in a well-regulated and spiritual environment,’ funded by the income of properties he owned in Clerkenwell.⁵⁴¹ Residents of the almshouse were chosen by the Lord of the Manor of Seckford

⁵³⁹ Nicholls, Angela, *Almshouses in Early Modern England*, p. 53.

⁵⁴⁰ SRO (I), FC25/L/3/2.

⁵⁴¹ Carol and Michael Weaver, *The Seckford Foundation* (Woodbridge: Ancient House Press, 1987), p. 1.

Hall together with the Minister of Woodbridge and parish churchwardens. The Seckford Charitable Foundation, in common with other almshouses, established eligibility for admission according to a combination of gender and personal attributes rather than simply on chronological age. Eligibility for admittance was determined by criteria, which included age, gender, physical capacity and previous behaviour. Old age was defined according to conditions such as ‘lameness’, ‘ymptency’, ‘infirmite’, as well as being from ‘poor estate’.⁵⁴² Admittance was also conditional on having ‘dwelled and lived ‘honestly’ in the locality for the space of three years.’⁵⁴³ For example, Edward Loder was a typical resident in the Seckford almshouse, ‘an unmarried man who hath dwelled and lived honestly in the said town of Woodbridge for the space of three years.’⁵⁴⁴ In this respect, election to the almshouse reflected the accepted view of society and the necessity to discriminate between the deserving and undeserving poor and, allowed those who oversaw the management of the almshouse to choose who and who not to accommodate.

The proportion of the elderly catered for by almshouses was small, as historian Paul Slack identified in his study of public welfare in early modern England, only one in ten parishes provided almshouse accommodation.⁵⁴⁵ In addition, as Nicholls noted, most almshouses in England provided accommodation solely for women and almshouses for men were a rarity.⁵⁴⁶ The Seckford Charitable Foundation and Tooley Charitable Foundation in Suffolk, however, were an exception to this practice, providing relief and accommodation specifically for elderly men. However, my findings revealed that if the elderly gained a place in an almshouse they were fortunate.

⁵⁴² SRO (I), FC25/L/3/2, p. 1

⁵⁴³ Ibid., p. 2.

⁵⁴⁴ John Loder, *Statutes and Ordinances, 13th June 1774*, (unpaginated)

⁵⁴⁵ Slack, Paul, *From Reformation to improvement*, p. 84.

⁵⁴⁶ Nicholls, Angela, *Almshouses*, p. 111

My research of the almshouse records of the Tooley Foundation in Ipswich and the Seckford Foundation in Woodridge revealed that the estimated ratio of almshouse places to men aged 50 years or over in the local population in 1801 was 1:42 in Ipswich and 1:29 in Woodbridge.⁵⁴⁸ Although there are no first-hand testimonies from elderly residents of the Seckford or Tooley Foundations research conducted for this study of the statutes and ordinances of both almshouses provided a valuable insight into the living environment and likely experience of elderly male residents and the degree of freedom and personal independence they enjoyed.⁵⁴⁹ The Seckford Foundation almshouses provided accommodation for twelve single elderly men. No provision was made for elderly poor women but employment was provided for three widows to act as nurses and who were housed separately. The Tooley Foundation in Ipswich followed similar admission procedures to that of the Seckford Foundation and required almshouse residents to have lived in the Ipswich locality for a significant length of time and performed some service to the town, as well as on account of their respectability and infirmity. Both Richard Kynge and Richard Swallows were typical of Tooley almshouse residents, both had been residents of Ipswich for some time and both had held positions of trust within the town. Kynge was referred to as ‘an ancient inhabitant of this town and somtyme one of the number of alderme,’ while Swallows was described as a ‘somtyme a hedoroughe.’⁵⁵⁰

The Tooley Foundation offered ten almshouse places to elderly men, stating that residents:

At the time of Receipt of them into the said House shall be tried unfeignedly Lane, by occasion of the King’s Wars, or otherwise, that cannot acquire or get their Living, or the one Half thereof. And in case

⁵⁴⁸ SRO(I), HD2448/4/2/24/3, *PP. 1822 X., 1821. Census, Enumeration abstract*; SRO(I), FC25/L/3/1-2, *Seckford Charity Account Books 1 and 2*; SRO(I), C/5/1/4/1-4, *Tooley’s Foundation Payrolls (1761-1794)*

⁵⁴⁹ SRO (I), FC25/L/3/2.

⁵⁵⁰ Shepard, Alexandra, *Meanings of Manhood in Early Modern England*, p. 244.

there be not many in Ipswich found Lame, then that of the Aged and Decrepid Persons, which be unable to get their like Living.⁵⁵¹

The residents of the Seckford Almshouse on 1st January 1792, including details of their former occupation and date of admission are shown in Figure 4.11.

Figure 4.11. Residents – Seckford Almshouse - 1st January 1792⁵⁵³

	Former Occupation	Admitted	Age
<u>Principal</u>			
William Swaine	Writing-Master	26 th Jan 1788	64
<u>Almsmen</u>			
James Hugging	Peruke-Maker	20 th Jan 1784	64
Thomas Peacock	Tailor	17 th Oct 1785	58
Moses Coe	Labourer	6 th July 1779	62
William Carlton	Peruke-Maker	4 th August 1787	60
William Norfield	Innholder	13 th Nov 1789	70
Thomas Girling	Grocer	29 th Nov 1777	46
Thomas Allison	Carpenter	13 th May 1788	69
Thomas List	Labourer	9 th Aug 1774	58
Thomas Parish	Bricklayer	5 th July 1776	56
Philip Eade	Carpenter	30 th Oct 1789	60
Robert Howell	Innholder	11 th Mar 1785	51
Abraham Church	Peruke-Maker	30 th Dec 1791	68
<u>Nurses</u>			
Sarah Kell	Widow	25 th Mar 1791	56
Mary Rye	Widow	23 rd Dec 1782	57
Mary Buttrum	Widow	29 th Oct 1789	51

Seckford almshouse residents in 1792 were aged between 46 and 70 years of age, the youngest resident being Thomas Girling, a former grocer, who was aged 46 years and the oldest William

⁵⁵¹ Reverend Canning, *An account of the gifts and legacies that have been given and bequeathed to charitable causes in the town of Ipswich* (Ipswich, W. Craighton, 1774), p. 2.

⁵⁵³ SRO (I), FC25/L/3/2. p. 26.

Norfield, a former innholder aged 70. Research of almshouse records reveal that the residents were mostly skilled or semi-skilled artisans, including a tailor, three peruke makers, two innholders, two carpenters and a bricklayer. Only one resident, Thomas List, was a former labourer. Of the thirteen almsmen, resident in 1792, nine were drawn from only four occupations. While this did not necessarily result in a harmonious environment it did at least ensure residents may have shared similar life experiences, knowledge and interests.⁵⁵⁴ It would, however, also indicate that the opportunities for unskilled labourers from the lower orders to become residents of the almshouse was limited.

Physical Environment

Elderly men fortunate enough to be admitted to an almshouse enjoyed accommodation most probably superior to that lived in previously. The Seckford Foundation almshouses were purpose built and located in the centre of Woodbridge. It was formed of a single row of houses which comprised 'seven Houses or Dwellings all under one roof ... erected and builded of Brick and Stone, with two Stories and one Garret in every one of them.'⁵⁵⁵ Twelve men lived in six of the dwellings and the Principal lived in the seventh. Each dwelling had two rooms on two storeys. In addition, there was a piece of common land of about two acres for the use of the 'sowing of beans, peas, corn, and grain ... or any other thing that may be used for their benefit.'⁵⁵⁶ Residents of the almshouse were also granted use of a well in Seckford's 'new enclosed park ... for the washing of the cloaths, or any other needful use.'⁵⁵⁷

⁵⁵⁴ Alannah Tomkins, 'Retirement from the Noise and Hurry of the World? The Experience of Almshouse Life', Alannah Tomkins, in *Accommodating Poverty*, ed. by McEwan and Sharpe, pp. 263-283, p. 265.

⁵⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. v.

⁵⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, Item 3, p. 1.

⁵⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, Item 4, p. 2.

Benefits

In addition to accommodation the Seckford Foundation provided residents with a pension, coal, clothing, and medical aid, as did the Tooley Foundation in neighbouring Ipswich which provided almsmen, ‘besides their Pay, Coals, and Linen Stockings and Shoes.’⁵⁵⁸ When originally established in 1587 the Seckford Foundation provided almshouse residents with an annual pension of, ‘five and twenty shillings’, together with ‘three loads of wood ... or fifteen shillings to buy the same’, and a ‘gowne of two yards and a half of broad clothe, of the price of six shillings a yard.’ While the Principal of the almshouse received a pension amounting to ‘six pounds and thirteen shillings and four pence yearly’, together with ‘four loads of wood or twenty shillings to buy the same’, and a ‘gowne of two yards and a half of broad clothe, of the price of six shillings a yard.’⁵⁵⁹ The provision of additional benefits to men accommodated in the Seckford and Tooley almshouses was consistent with the findings of both Tomkins and Nicholls who identified this as common practice within almshouses generally.

However, pensions did not rise through the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in line with inflation nor the increased annual revenues being received from the Seckford Foundation properties in Clerkenwell. Annual income from these properties increased from £13 in 1587 to £180 by 1718, with none of the increased revenue being passed on to the almshouse residents. In 1718 John Bloomfield, Principal of the almshouse, drew up a petition to the governors stating:

That all provisions and necessaries of life are become much dearer now, then they were at the time the said Almshouse was founded ... for the said Almsmen are some blind, some lame, and others so aged and infirm that they cannot work, and their present pensions after allowing for making gowns, repairing windows, and other outgoings amount to little

⁵⁵⁸ Canning, *An account of the gifts and legacies*, p. 24.

⁵⁵⁹ SRO (I), FC25/L/3/2, p. 3.

more than three pence a day to find them in meat, drink, washing shoes, stockings and other necessaries, so that some of them are near starved and forced to go without shirts and have scarce shoes to their feet ... by which means their conditions are become much worse than those who receive alms of the parish.⁵⁶⁰

As a result, almsmen pensions were increased to £4 a year and the principal to £6 a year.

Revenues from the Seckford properties in Clerkenwell continued to increase significantly in the eighteenth century and by 1767 had reached £563 per annum. As a result, pensions were further increased to £20 a year for each almsmen and £27 a year for the principal, who was also supplied with coal rather than wood. In addition, each almsman was provided with, 'one gown or outward garment, one waistcoat, one pair of breeches, one hat, three shirts, two pairs shoes and two pairs stockings.'⁵⁶¹ The 1767 audited accounts for the Foundation, detailed below, show the sum of £230. 10. 0. being spent on clothing and other benefits.

Annual Rent of Mr. Seckford's Estate in Clerkenwell,	£563. 0. 0.
Ground rent of Cop Hall, in Woodbridge,	<u>10. 0. 0.</u>
	£563. 10. 0.

Pensions and Exhibitions per Annum

To the Principal	£27. 0. 0.
12 Poor Men, each £20	£240. 0. 0.
3 Nurses, each £12	£36. 0. 0.
Exhibition to the Minister of Woodbridge	£10. 0. 0.
Exhibition to the Churchwardens of Woodbridge, each £5	£10. 0. 0.
Exhibition to the Poor of Woodbridge	<u>£10. 0. 0.</u>
	£333. 0. 0.

The remaining £230. 10. 0. is expended towards Cloathing, Firing, Medical Attention and Repairs. The Surplus to be distributed to among the poor and indigent people living in Woodbridge, as do not receive the Alms of that, or any other Parish.⁵⁶²

⁵⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 16.

⁵⁶¹ Ibid., Item 4, p. 22.

⁵⁶² Ibid., p. 26.

Management Regime

Little is actually known or could be gleaned by my research of the almshouse records about the day-to-day lives of the almsmen resident in either the Seckford or Tooley almshouses and no first-hand testimonies could be found in the records and documentation of either Charitable Foundation. However, my research would suggest that almshouse residents do not appear to have experienced a repressive management regime or unduly strict discipline. While the almshouse had an elected Principal this position did not involve either a management or disciplinary role. Discipline within the almshouse was largely dependent on the good conduct and behaviour of the residents, a situation which Tomkins termed, the 'light' management of almshouse residents.⁵⁶³ However, the relative independence of residents and the likelihood that once individuals had entered the almshouse they would remain for the rest of their lives was considered by the Governors of both the Seckford and Tooley Charitable Foundations to be a potential source of disciplinary problems. Yet, despite inclusion of a number of behavioural clauses within the almshouses statutes and ordinances, the maintenance of order and discipline within the almshouse, as Slack identified, 'was easier to inscribe on paper than in ... practice.'⁵⁶⁴

The behavioural clauses included within the almshouse statutes and ordinances of the Seckford and Tooley almshouses which residents were expected to uphold would appear to be common to most other almshouses. Certainly, the statutes and ordinances of the Tooley Foundation in Ipswich were a mirror image of those of the Seckford Foundation. My research of the statutes and ordinances reveal that attempts were made to control life and behaviour in the almshouse in order to ensure almsmen conformed to the desired behaviour of the deserving poor, an

⁵⁶³ Tomkins, 'Almshouse versus Workhouse' p. 50.

⁵⁶⁴ Slack Paul, *From Reformation to improvement*, p. 48.

approach described by historian Steve Hindle, as a mixture of ‘control and relief.’⁵⁶⁵ Residents of the Seckford almshouses could not leave without permission, to do so resulted in a fine of 4 pence. They were also required to wear a silver badge bearing the Seckford coat of arms on their gowns when they left the almshouse, ‘so apparently as they may be discerned thereby.’⁵⁶⁶ While in part a commemoration of the founder of the almshouse and as such a symbol of pride, alternatively it could also be considered to be what historian Hindle has referred to as the symbolic representation of the shame of pauperism.⁵⁶⁷ Almsmen were also required ‘every Sunday, Holy Day, Wednesday and Friday, to attend their parish church and to remain there and reverently hear Divine Service ... on paine of forfeit for every default, two pence.’⁵⁶⁸

The statutes and ordinances also reveal a desire on the part of the Governors of the two Foundations that residents should not be seen as being idle, so as not to be viewed as members of the ‘idle’ poor by the local community, and also likely to result in a lack of discipline and subsequent bad behaviour, stating:

that the poor of the said Almshouse, shall in avoidance of idleness, each of them according to their ability and strength of body, labour and be occupied, either in digging, planting or setting the gardens and grounds allotted to them ... or be occupied in some other commendable exercise.⁵⁶⁹

To remind residents of the behaviour expected of them the statutes and ordinances were read aloud in church twice a year and any individual guilty of contravening them was punished according to a sliding scale of fines and in the case of persistent breaches, expulsion, as follows:

⁵⁶⁵ Steve Hindle, *On the Parish* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004), p. 364.

⁵⁶⁶ SRO (I), FC25/L/3/2, Item 15, p. 4.

⁵⁶⁷ Hindle, Steven, *On the Parish*, p. 433.

⁵⁶⁸ SRO (I), FC25/L/3/2, Item 12, p. 4.

⁵⁶⁹ SRO (I), FC25/L/3/2, Item 18, p. 5.

that if any of the poor of this Almes-House, shall not at any time ... swear any manner of unlawful or blasphemous oath, the same forfeit for every such offence, two pence.⁵⁷⁰

that none of the poor of this Almes-House shall give any blow or strike to any other upon pain to forfeit for the first offence, two shillings and six pence; for the second, five shillings and for the third, to be expelled for ever.⁵⁷¹

that if any of the poor of the said Almes-House shall commit any fornication, adultery, incest, or any such horrible crime, he or they to be expelled out of this House for ever.⁵⁷²

that no tippling, or uttering of any beer, ale or victuals, shall be kept in this Almes-House, under pain of expulsion for such person as shall keep it.⁵⁷³

In reality, maintaining control over the behaviour of almshouse residents was difficult. While relief could be denied or fines imposed for breaches of the statutes and ordinances this approach sometimes only worsened the problem, however, for serious breaches the penalty could be expulsion, as in the case of John Blackman in 1762, who:

has been guilty of the crime of Fornication or Adultery as appears the charge of Martha the widow or wife of George Brighting being Dead or Absent (the person with whom he committed the crime) and also by his own confession ... the Churchwarden of Woodbridge ... by virtue of the twenty second Ordinance expulse him out of this house and he is expelled forever.⁵⁷⁴

⁵⁷⁰ Ibid., Item 20, p. 5.

⁵⁷¹ Ibid., Item 21, p. 5.

⁵⁷² Ibid., Item 22, p. 5.

⁵⁷³ Ibid., Item 25, p. 5.

⁵⁷⁴ Ibid., March 15th 1762, John Blackman, (unpaginated)

However, in practice, discipline within the almshouse appears to have been fairly light and primarily involved the imposition of financial penalties for misconduct, as follows:

That none of the poor of this Almes-House shall haunt any Tavern, Alehouse, or Tippling-house; nor shall play at dice, cards or other unlawful games, upon pain to forfeit, for the first offence, twelve pence, for the second two shillings and for the third to be expelled for ever.⁵⁷⁵

An example of this practice, taken from the Seckford Almshouse records, is the case of Robert Bentley who in 1769 was ‘punished for Haunting and frequenting public houses pursuant to the 26th Ordinance ... fined two shillings, being deemed their second offence,’ and for Nicholas Ansell who in 1774, who was:

seen by both the Churchwardens at a Publick House in a very disorderly situation, at the same time was heard to use very bad and abusive language contrary to the Twenty-Sixth Ordinance ... was fined one shilling, deemed the first offence.⁵⁷⁶

The Seckford and Tooley almshouses provided a degree of domestic privacy and residential independence to its elderly male residents unlikely to have been experienced in their previous accommodation. Although accommodation for elderly men was subject to another co-resident the amount of space provided would probably have been significantly larger than most men’s previous domestic experience which would also usually have entailed sharing rooms with other family members. The almshouse also undoubtedly provided a secure environment for its aged male residents, a degree of privacy but not one of isolation. Importantly, election to an almshouse such as Seckford’s could also confer a degree of status to elderly men much greater than its material advantages.⁵⁷⁷ The loss of a certain degree of personal independence and

⁵⁷⁵ Ibid., Item 26, p. 6.

⁵⁷⁶ Ibid., 1769, Robert Bentley, (unpaginated)

⁵⁷⁷ Tomkins, ‘Retirement from the Noise and Hurry of the World?’, in *Accommodating Poverty*. ed. by McEwan and Sharpe, p. 278.

freedom which almshouse residents experienced was probably compensated for by both the quality of the living environment, the substantial additional benefits that were provided, as well as the provision of company to combat instances of loneliness.

Poorhouses and Workhouses

Given the absence in Suffolk of a significant level of almshouse accommodation for elderly men admission to the workhouse was often the only alternative for old men unable to achieve self-sufficiency and maintain residential independence. For many elderly men admittance to the workhouse not only infringed their personal aspiration for independence but also contradicted fundamental ideals of community and familial support for the aged. My research revealed that there was a significant degree of commonality in the manner policies and procedures were implemented by workhouses across the region.⁵⁷⁸

The workhouse has a less positive image than that of the almshouse. Early twentieth century assessments of workhouse accommodation, such as those of Stanley and Beatrice Webb, criticised them for ‘their incredible foulness and promiscuity, their insanitation and utter inadequacy of accommodation’. Other historians, including Dorothy Marshall, were also overwhelmingly critical.⁵⁷⁹ The image of the workhouse as, ‘an object of fear and loathing ... a potent symbol of oppression of the poor’, resonated throughout eighteenth century and nineteenth-century society and was regarded as the ‘ultimate system of neglect and despair for the old sunk in poverty.’⁵⁸⁰ George Crabbe’s eighteenth-century poem *The Village* presented an image which reflected the widely held public perception of the workhouse:

Thus, groan the old, till, by disease oppressed,
They taste a final woe, and then they rest.

⁵⁷⁸ Tomkins, ‘Almshouse versus Workhouse’ p. 45.

⁵⁷⁹ Sidney and Beatrice Webb, *The Parish and the County*, (London: Longmans, 1906) p. 593; Dorothy Marshall, *The English Poor Law in the Eighteenth Century: A Study in Administrative and Social History* (London: Routledge, 1926).

⁵⁸⁰ Ottaway, Susannah, *The Decline of Life*, p. 247.

Theirs is yon house that holds the parish poor,
 Whose walls of mud scarce bear the broken door;
 There where the putrid vapours, flagging play,
 And the dull wheel hums doleful through the day.⁵⁸¹

However, while society regarded the workhouse as the ultimate symbol of familial neglect, the experience of inmates was possibly not as universally dreadful as Crabbe would suggest. Anne Digby, in particular, takes a more lenient view and suggests that the material surroundings of the workhouse were adequate and the environment was monotonous rather than unkind.⁵⁸² In a similar vein, Ottaway described conditions as being, ‘more often filled with tedium than abuse.’⁵⁸³ In addition, Harley’s article on the manner in which the poor used the workhouse strategically as part of their economy of make-shifts has also furthered our understanding of the nature of poor relief and adds further weight to recent historical work that has emphasised pauper agency.⁵⁸⁴ The study’s research of the workhouse records of Suffolk’s rural poor law incorporations supports a more positive view of workhouses and the study’s findings are consistent with the more recent studies of a number of historians who have questioned the previous overwhelmingly negative perception of the workhouse.⁵⁸⁵ However, the need exists, as Ottaway argues in her study of the elderly in the workhouse, to examine more fully what she considers the emotive, ‘ubiquitous and compelling depiction of the workhouse as a malodorous

⁵⁸¹ George Crabbe, ‘The Village’, in, *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, Vol. 1, 4th ed., Stephen Greenblatt, et al, (New York: Norton, 1979).

⁵⁸² Digby, Anne, *Pauper Palaces* p. 46.

⁵⁸³ Susannah Ottaway, ‘The Elderly in the Eighteenth-Century Workhouse’, in *Medicine and the workhouse*, ed. by Reinartz and Schwarz, p. 40.

⁵⁸⁴ Harley, ‘Material lives of the poor’, p. 71.

⁵⁸⁵ Digby, Anne, *Pauper Palaces*; Michael Anderson, *Approaches to the History of the Western Family 1500-1914* (London: Macmillan, 1980); Lynn Mackay, ‘A Culture of Poverty?: the St. Martin in the Fields Workhouse’, *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 26 1995, pp. 209-31; Don Rhodes, *Workhouse: The people, the place, the life behind doors*; J. Taylor, *The Unreformed Workhouse 1776-1834*.

and unsanitary prison' in order to reveal the actual use and experience of the inmates of these institutions.⁵⁸⁸

In fact, the commonly accepted eighteenth-century image of the workhouse does not accord with the stated aims of Suffolk's rural incorporation workhouses which were established from mid-eighteenth century, 'to administer proper comfort and assistance to the sick, infirm and aged,' by providing a 'liberal' approach to the administration of welfare relief for 'the weaker members of society.'⁵⁹⁰ Despite being stigmatised as 'Pauper Bastilles' from mid-eighteenth century and into the early nineteenth century they did in fact provide a level of accommodation and care to the elderly previously not available.⁵⁹¹ Studies by Digby, Kathryn Morrison and Tomkins of workhouses after 1834 have also highlighted the role of workhouses in providing care as well as discipline.⁵⁹²

The workhouse movement of the late seventeenth century culminated in the eighteenth century with Knatchbull's General Workhouse Act (1722) and resulted in the workhouse gaining wide acceptance and the provision of inhouse relief a key feature of poor relief provision. For the purpose of clarity, the term 'workhouse' is defined here as being an establishment which provided both a place of residence and of work for paupers. Separate accommodation was on occasion provided for specific groups of inmates, such as the sick or elderly, but not in every instance. Work was an intrinsic part of the ethos of workhouses and it was expected that all able inmates, including the old, would participate if able.

⁵⁸⁸ Ibid., pp. 40-57 (p. 41)

⁵⁹⁰ Stanley & Beatrice Webb, *English Poor Law History* (London: Longmans 1927), p. 127

⁵⁹¹ Ottaway, 'A Very Bad Presidente in the House', p. 1091.

⁵⁹² Digby, Anne, *Pauper Palaces*; Kathryn Morrison, *The Workhouse: A Study of Poor-Law Buildings in England* (Swindon: Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England, 1999); Alannah Tomkins, *The Experience of Urban Poverty, 1723-82: Parish, Charity and Credit* (Manchester; Manchester University Press, 2006).

This definition differs from that of a ‘poorhouse’ or parochial workhouse which was merely a place of residence, primarily for the aged, with no requirement to work and described by a contemporary commentator as being places where, ‘the poor are neither fed, clothed ... but are suffered to wander about like vagabonds.’⁵⁹³ Parish poorhouses which existed from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century were, as Sidney and Beatrice Webb state, ‘nothing that could be termed an institution ... typically a small converted building used to provide accommodation for aged pensioners, the disabled or sick, tramps and paupers awaiting removal to other parishes.’⁵⁹⁴ Conditions in the typical poorhouse were described in the following terms by the Poor Law Inquiry Commissioners:

Where a number of paupers of all ages are herded together, and subject to no superintendence, little else is to be expected than a mass of poverty, misery and vice ... to the aged they are places of punishment.⁵⁹⁵

The poorhouse in the Suffolk parish of Worlingworth was typical of the parish poorhouses in the region. It had previously been a guildhall but was converted into a poorhouse in the 1730s and was capable of accommodating up to thirty-five individuals, many of them old or infirm. Accommodation was also provided for married couples with families who would be allocated a single room. Payments were made by the parish overseers’ to the governor of the poorhouse of 1/6d per inmate, per week.⁵⁹⁶ However, the ‘poorhouses’ had by mid-eighteenth century been largely replaced in both urban and rural parishes by an institutionally organised ‘workhouse’, managed by a governor and run according to a set of rules, regulations and disciplinary regime. Work was a key feature of early workhouses and manufacturing activities were usually closely allied to the textile industry and involved activities such as weaving, carding and spinning.

⁵⁹³ A Letter to J. W. Esq, ‘*Reflections in favour of the House of Industry at Nacton*’ (Ipswich: Craighton & Jackson. 1784). p. 7.

⁵⁹⁴ Webb Stanley and Webb, Beatrice, *English Local Government: English Poor Law History*, p. 212.

⁵⁹⁵ *Report of Poor Law Inquiry Commissioners (1832)*, Appendix A, p. 173

⁵⁹⁶ Worlingworth Local History Group, www.wlhg.org.

Those inmates who possessed craft skills were expected to use them for the benefit of the workhouse. The aim of the eighteenth-century workhouse was to effectively manage poor law expenditure and in doing so constrain further rises in the poor rate through placing the able bodied to work and subsidizing workhouse costs through the profits obtained through manufacturing activity.

The Establishment of Rural Incorporations in Suffolk

The Workhouse Test Act of 1722 acted as a stimulus to the establishment of workhouses, establishing the principle that relief claimants refusing to enter a workhouse were ineligible for relief. Under the terms of the act multiple parishes could jointly operate a workhouse. In 1774 James Vernon bequeathed Weathercock Farm at Great Wratting, in the Risbridge Hundred, to be used by three separate Suffolk parishes.⁵⁹⁷

My research of the returns sent to the overseers of the poor in 1777 revealed that there were eighty-nine workhouses in Suffolk.⁵⁹⁸ These were scattered across the county but a concentration in two areas can be identified. There were twelve workhouses in Ipswich and there was another concentration of workhouses in the south-west of the county. The making of woollen cloth had been the principle economic activity in these areas since the thirteenth century but was in serious decline throughout the eighteenth century resulting in an increase in demand for poor relief in these areas and prompting most parishes to establish a workhouse prior to 1776.⁵⁹⁹

Houses of Industry

However, the establishment of further parish workhouses was surpassed by the trend in eastern Suffolk to establish rural poor law incorporations to administer the poor law on behalf of

⁵⁹⁷ David Dymond, *An Historical Atlas of Suffolk* (Sudbury: The Lavenham Press, 1999), p. 120.

⁵⁹⁸ *Abstracts of the Returns made by the Overseers of the Poor, Sessional Papers*, 31 (1777).

⁵⁹⁹ BPP, 118, xiv

previously autonomous parishes. Each incorporation had a large purpose built House of Industry (workhouse) capable of accommodating up to 300 inmates from the parishes within the Hundred. The first of Suffolk's rural incorporations was established in 1756 to administer the poor law for parishes within the Carlford and Colneis Hundreds. A further six incorporations were established between 1775 and 1779 to administer the poor law and provide relief to paupers, formerly provided by 253 formerly autonomous parishes.⁶⁰⁰

The establishment of larger administrative entities by merging formerly autonomous parishes into incorporations was based on the incentive to make the administration of the poor law more efficient and to constrain further increases in the poor rate. However, the incorporation movement in Suffolk, as David Dymond has identified, resulted in two competing systems. While most of the region established incorporations a number of the region's Hundreds, such as Plomesgate, continued to administer the poor law through individual parishes as originally envisaged in the 1598-1601 legislation.

Research conducted for this study of the workhouse rules and regulations of the region's rural incorporations provided an insight into both the quality and nature of the accommodation they afforded elderly male inmates and the management regime under which they lived.⁶⁰¹ The principal difference between almshouse accommodation and that provided in a workhouse was that the latter was an integral part of the relief system administered under the poor law. Each of Suffolk's rural incorporations built a 'House of Industry' (workhouse) which provided

⁶⁰⁰ Suffolk rural incorporations – Carlford and Colneis (1756), Blything (1764), Bosmere and Claydon (1764), Samford (1764), Mutford and Lothingland (1764), Wangford (1764), Stow (1778).

⁶⁰¹ *Carlford and Colneis, Rules, Orders and Regulations, for the Better Government of the Poor, in the House of Industry* (Ipswich, J. Craighton, 1759); SRO(I), ADA10/AB3//1-6, *Carlford and Colneis Incorporation, Weekly Committee Meeting Minutes 1758-1801*; SRO(I), ADA10/CB5/1, *Carlford and Colneis Incorporation, Workhouse Master: Inmates: Weekly Report on the State of the Poor, 1794-1801*; SRO(I), AB3/1-3, *Blything Incorporation, Weekly Committee Meeting Minutes 1764-1783*; SRO(I), ADA/1/AG1/1, *Workhouse Admissions*, SRO(I), ADA11/AB3/1-10; *Loes and Wilford Incorporation, Weekly Committee Meeting Minutes 1768-1826*; SRO(I), AD7/AB4/1-4, *Samford Incorporation, Weekly Committee Meeting Minutes 1766-1789*.

accommodation for paupers regardless of age or gender or whether they were able to perform any actual work. In contrast to almshouse accommodation, with few residents who were, moreover, selected according to age, gender and previous behaviour, workhouse accommodation was open-ended and available to all ages and dispositions. While the incorporation workhouses were much larger than was the case with the Seckford or Tooley almshouses they were required to cater for much larger populations. Study findings established the inmate capacity for each of the rural incorporation workhouses in the region together with the ratio of workhouse places to each Hundred's total population for 1781 and 1821, as shown in Table 4.6.

Table 4.6. Rural Incorporations Houses of Industry⁶⁰²

Incorporation	Date	Capacity	Ratio of places to Hundred population* (1781)	Ratio of places to Hundred population* (1821)
Carlford and Colneis – Nacton House	1756-1835	350	1:20	1:29
Wangford – Shipmeadow	1763-1849	450	1:21	1:28
Mutford and Lothingland - Oulton	1763-1893	350	1:22	1:39
Samford – Tattingstone House	1763-1849	500	1:17	1:20
Blything – Bulcamp House	1764-1835	560	1:32	1:41
Bosmere and Claydon – Barham	1765-1835	600	1:17	1:20
Loes and Wilford – Melton House	1765-1827	250	1:50	1:76
Stow – Onehouse	1778-1835	350	1:15	1:22
Cosford – Semer	1779-1835	500	1:22	1:39

⁶⁰² SRO(I), ADA10/AB3//1-6; SRO(I), ADA11/AB3/1-10; SRO(I), AD7/AB4/1-4; SRO(I), ADA11/A/A/1/8; SRO (L), 36/1/8/7; SRO(L), 34/3; SRO(I), FB/37/G2;. Stephen Thompson, 'Population Growth and the Corporations of the Poor', in *Population, Welfare and Economic Change in Britain 1290-1834*, ed. by C. Briggs et al, pp. 218-19, SRO(I), HD2448/4/2/24/3, PP. 1822 X., 1821. Census, Enumeration abstract; Wendy Goult, *A Survey of Suffolk Parish History: East Suffolk Vols. 1 & 2* (Ipswich: Suffolk County Council, 1990).

*All age groups.

The Blything Incorporation House of Industry was the largest in the county with an inmate capacity of 300. The study's findings of the ratio of the availability of workhouse places to the population of the Hundred in which they were located revealed that it varied between different workhouses from 1:15 to 1:50 in 1781 and from 1:20 to 1:76 in 1821, as shown in Table 4.6.

My research of parliamentary papers also provided details of the maintenance of the poor in Suffolk's incorporations in 1803 and 1814 and the ratio of individuals receiving outdoor as opposed to indoor relief, as shown in Table 4.7.

Table 4.7. Suffolk Rural Incorporations – Inhouse/Outdoor Relief⁶⁰³

Incorporation	1803			1814		
	No. of persons receiving inhouse relief	No. of persons receiving outdoor relief	Ratio of provision outdoor inhouse relief	No. of persons receiving inhouse relief	No. of persons receiving outdoor relief	Ratio of outdoor to indoor provision
Carlford and Colneis	215	927	1:4	306	657	1:2
Wangford	250	1476	1:6	935	287	1:3
Mutford and Lothingland	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	88	n/a
Samford	270	588	1:3	860	235	1:4
Blything	300	1462	1:5	1471	211	1:7
Bosmere and Claydon	212	4361	1:20	133	1336	1:10
Loes and Wilford	252	1537	1:6	1084	131	1:8
Stow	196	301	1:2	653	218	1:3
Cosford	220	678	1:3	229	1446	1:6

The ratio of outdoor relief recipients as opposed to those receiving inhouse relief in 1803 varied between 1:20 in the Bosmere and Claydon Incorporation to a ratio of 1:2 in the Stow

⁶⁰³ *PP.* 82, 1804, pp. 477-500; *PP.* 175, 1815, pp. 425-441.

Incorporation, as shown in Table 4.7.⁶⁰⁴ The greater number of outdoor relief recipients reflecting an awareness of the increased cost necessitated by providing inhouse relief which was normally over twice that of providing indoor relief which allowed the recipient to be semi-independent in their own home.

The study's findings of the provision of outdoor relief within the non-incorporated Hundreds also revealed a similar ratio of those receiving outdoor as opposed to inhouse. The higher ratio of those receiving outdoor relief as opposed to inhouse relief in the non-incorporated parishes may in part be explained by the smaller capacity of the parish workhouses compared to the larger purpose built incorporation houses of industry but also reflects the recognition by the parishes in the non-incorporated Hundreds of the greater cost incurred by the provision of inhouse relief to that of outdoor relief.

Further analysis of the returns of 1801 and 1814 made possible an analysis of the ratio of outdoor as opposed to inhouse relief for a number of parishes who were members of one of Suffolk's incorporations, as shown in Table 4.8. Findings revealed that ratio of inhouse to outdoor relief recipients within certain individual parishes was as high as 1:14, as in the parish of Halesworth in both 1803 and 1814. However, the average ratio of inhouse to outdoor recipients in incorporated parishes was 1:6 in 1801 and 1:5 in 1814. Analysis of the demographic profile of the inhouse population, as discussed in a later chapter also revealed those receiving inhouse relief to be predominantly children or the aged.

⁶⁰⁴ PP. 82, 1804, *Abstract of the answers and returns made pursuant to an act passed in the 43rd year of His Majesty King George III. Intituled "An Act for procuring Returns relative to the Expence and Maintenance of the Poor in England*, pp. 477-500; PP. 175, 1815, *Abstract of the answers and returns made pursuant to an act passed in the 55th year of His Majesty King George III. Intituled "An Act for procuring Returns relative to the Expence and Maintenance of the Poor in England*, pp. 425-441.

An analysis of the ratio of inhouse to outdoor relief recipients in Suffolk's non-incorporated parishes can be found in Appendix 3 and an analysis of relief provision in a number of parishes within the non-incorporated Hundreds can be found in Appendix 4.

Table 4.8. Incorporated Parishes – Ratio of Inhouse/Outdoor Relief⁶⁰⁵

Parish	Incorporation	1803			1814		
		No. of persons receiving inhouse relief	No. of persons receiving outdoor relief	Ratio of inhouse to outdoor provision	No. of persons receiving inhouse relief	No. of persons receiving outdoor relief	Ratio of outdoor to inhouse provision
Bramfield	Blything	21	62	1:3	13	74	1:6
Halesworth	Blything	22	318	1:14	11	156	1:14
Leiston	Blything	10	41	1:4	10	61	1:6
Barham	Bosmere & Claydon	n/a	n/a	n/a	9	34	1:4
Coddenham	Bosmere & Claydon	n/a	n/a	n/a	10	92	1:9
Grundisburgh	Carlford & Colneis	n/a	n/a	n/a	14	46	1:3
Trimley St. Martin	Carlford & Colneis	n/a	n/a	n/a	5	26	1:5
Bildeston	Cosford	12	66	1:5	17	60	1:3
Hadleigh	Cosford	30	112	1:4	80	509	1:6
Kersey	Cosford	5	44	1:8	13	101	1:8
Alderton	Loes and Wilford	11	66	1:6	16	36	1:2
Dallingho	Loes and Wilford	7	34	1:5	12	26	1:2
Hacheston	Loes and Wilford	n/a	55	n/a	25	10	1:2
East Bergholt	Samford	n/a	n/a	n/a	27	85	1:3
Holbrook	Samford	n/a	n/a	n/a	14	32	1:2
Hintlesham	Samford	n/a	n/a	n/a	20	39	1:2

The provision of outdoor relief, in preference to the provision of inhouse relief, is further illustrated by the ratio of inhouse/outdoor relief provision for the whole of Suffolk, as shown in Table 4.9. The ratio of outdoor relief provision to inhouse relief provision varied between 1:8 in 1803 and 1:6 in 1814. The original intention of the incorporations to abolish outdoor

⁶⁰⁵Ibid., pp. 425-441.

relief altogether was found to be both uneconomical and impractical because of the increase in receipt claimants due to the demographic and economic pressures exerted on the poor law authorities in the second half of the eighteenth century and first half of the nineteenth century.

Table 4.9. Suffolk – Ratio of Inhouse/Outdoor Relief⁶⁰⁶

	1803			1814		
	No. of persons receiving inhouse relief	No. of persons receiving outdoor relief	Ratio of outdoor to inhouse relief provision	No. of persons receiving inhouse relief	No. of persons receiving indoor relief	Ratio of outdoor to inhouse relief provision
Total for Suffolk	4098	32012	1:8	7537	21669	1:6

Nacton House - Environment

Study findings revealed incorporation workhouses were spacious, well planned and a significant improvement on parochial workhouses.⁶⁰⁷ The Carlford and Colneis Incorporation workhouse, known as Nacton House, was the first House of Industry to be built in Suffolk, becoming operational in 1758 and also the template for the design of Suffolk's other incorporation workhouses established in the following years. Nacton House was designed and built specifically for 'the Instruction of Youth, the Encouragement of Industry, the Relief of Want, the Support of Age and the Comfort of Infirmity and Pain.'⁶⁰⁸ Both the design and stated aim of Nacton House was adopted by the region's other incorporation workhouses which were designed to provide accommodation and compassionate treatment of the elderly. In their treatment of the elderly they aimed to comply with John Cary's view that within the houses of industry 'the ancient shall be provided for according to their wants'.⁶⁰⁹ Workhouses, however,

⁶⁰⁶ *PP. 82, 1804*, pp. 477-500; *PP. 175, 1815*, pp. 425-441.

⁶⁰⁷ A Letter to JW Esq, '*Reflections in favour of the House of Industry at Nacton, Suffolk*', (Ipswich: Craighton & Jackson, 1764), p. 7.

⁶⁰⁸ SRO(I), ADA10/AB3/1.

⁶⁰⁹ Webb, Stanley and Webb, Beatrice, *English Poor Law History*, p. 117.

accommodated inmates of all ages and in some respects it is difficult to ascertain how the treatment elderly men received and the conditions they lived in differed markedly from other inmates.

Management Regime

Research conducted for this study revealed, in contrast to almshouses, incorporation workhouses in Suffolk were governed in accordance to strict rules and routines, resulting in an environment that was highly regulated, communal and monotonous.⁶¹⁰ The Rules, Orders and Regulations for Nacton House, which were adopted by the region's other incorporations, provided the principal source of information on which to base an assessment of the workhouse environment which old men would have experienced. These established a management regime whereby daily life was conducted on a communal basis according to a strict routine in an environment which was meticulously ordered and deliberately designed to act as a deterrent to those considering admission. Inmates of Nacton House were required to observe rules such as:

That they shall obey the Governor and Matron in all their reasonable demands.

That they shall at all times keep themselves decent and clean, and behave orderly and peaceably.

That they do not pretend sickness or other excuses to avoid work.

Slothful and lazy persons who pretend ailments to excuse themselves from work; and if it appears they have made false excuses complaint shall be made to the Weekly Committee, who shall order such punishments as they think proper.

That they be in bed by nine o'clock from Lady Day to Michaelmas, and by eight o'clock from Michaelmas to Lady Day.

⁶¹⁰ Digby, Anne, *Pauper Palaces*, p. 46.

That they regularly attend Divine Services on Sundays and the daily prayers after breakfast and supper.

That all persons guilty of telling lies or profane swearing shall have a label fixed on their breasts with these words, Infamous Liar – Profane Swearer. And shall be made to stand in the middle of the hall during time of dinner.⁶¹¹

Incorporation records indicated that old people and men in particular could be obstinate and unpleasant to workhouse governors and staff, what Ottaway termed ‘visiting their frustration at incarceration on their keepers.’⁶¹² In fact, the view that workhouses were places of continuing negotiation among inmates and poor law officers has been expressed by a number of historians including Philip Andersen and King.⁶¹³

Inmates who contravened the workhouse rules were liable to receive a severe punishment, as follows:

Ordered that John Plumbly (having refused ... to work in the Spinning Rooms) be punished ... in diet to have bread and water only on the next two meat days.⁶¹⁴

Ordered that the Governor do confine Edward Warner ... in the dungeon all Wednesday ... on bread and water.⁶¹⁵

Ordered that John Smith ... be ordered into solitary confinement for three days having behaved ill.⁶¹⁶

⁶¹¹ Carlford and Colneis, *Rules, orders, and regulations, for the better government of the poor, in the house of industry for the hundreds of Carlford and Colneis* (Suffolk: Hundreds. 1759),

⁶¹² Ottaway, Susannah, *The Decline of Life*, p. 273.

⁶¹³ Philip Anderson, ‘The Leeds Workhouse under the Old Poor Law: 1726-1834’, *The Publications of the Thoresby Society* 56, no. 2 (1979): pp. 75–100; Steven King and Peter Jones, ‘Testifying for the Poor: Epistolary Advocates and the Negotiation of Parochial Relief in England, 1800- 1834’, *Journal of Social History* 49, no. 4 (2016): 784–807; Steven King, *Writing the Lives of the English Poor*.

⁶¹⁴ SRO(I), ADA/11/A/B/1/1.

⁶¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 22nd July 1771, Edward Warner punishment.

⁶¹⁶ SRO(I), ADA11/A/B/3/6, *Loes and Wilford Incorporation Sixth Weekly Minute Book, 1805-1812*. 12th June 1809.

Nacton House had two dormitories for the segregation of men and women and two separate rooms for girls and boys. While the able-bodied were expected to work the aged were exempt unless they wished otherwise. Old men were not expected to work in Nacton House or in other incorporation workhouses, as a contemporary noted:

of the aged no work is required: their silver cord is loosed and their golden bowl broken ... they are rescued from want, and consigned to respect and tranquillity ... where they form their little parties of conversation, sit around the fire, and tell their tales of ancient times.⁶¹⁷

Aged men were not segregated from able-bodied men and slept in the same dormitory as other inmates. There were, however, separate sitting rooms which the aged could use during the day and where elderly men and women could mix.⁶¹⁸

In addition, incorporation workhouses had a purpose-built infirmary as well as a pest house to provide isolation for infectious cases. Undoubtedly, aged men would have gained considerable benefit from the provision of medical care provided by the inhouse surgeon and nurse.⁶¹⁹ Studies conducted by Boulton, Siena and Hitchcock, as well as tracing the development of the eighteenth-century workhouse movement and the development of the corporations of the poor in rural areas such as Suffolk, have also argued that the provision of medical services by workhouses was increasingly extensive.⁶²⁰ However, in contrast to the practice in almshouses of providing a range additional benefits to residents, workhouses provided few other benefits apart from food, other than a small wage for those inmates who were able to work.

⁶¹⁷ Robert Potter, *Observations on the Poor Laws, on the present state of the poor, and on Houses of Industry* (London: J. Wilkie, 1775), p. 38

⁶¹⁸ Carlford and Colneis, *Rules, orders, and regulations, for the better government of the poor, in the house of industry for the hundreds of Carlford and Colneis* (Suffolk: Hundreds. 1759), pp. 3-24

⁶¹⁹ Thane, Pat, *Old Age*, p. 117.

⁶²⁰ Hitchcock, Tim, 'The English Workhouse'; Siena, 'Venereal Disease', Boulton, and Schwarz, 'The Medicalisation of the Parish Workhouse.'

Daily Life

The material environment and surroundings of Nacton House and that of other incorporation workhouses provided a standard of accommodation ‘roughly equivalent to that of the labouring poor outside the house’.⁶²¹ However, it is worth putting this into context by taking into account the views of local contemporary social commentators on conditions within the workhouse. Ruggles described the male dormitory of Nacton House as ‘much too crowded; three or four boys in a bed [and] two men ... this number in one bed occasioned the air to be disagreeable to the smell’.⁶²² Although, it is not possible to know if the Reverend White in correspondence to the Reverend Canning, two of Suffolk’s most noted antiquarians, was guilty of exaggeration when he told of rumours of plagues of rats infesting the workhouse. Likewise, Canning’s response, which was merely to suggest that the problem was more significant within the wider community than inside the workhouse also needs to be treated with care.⁶²³

On admittance to the workhouse paupers regardless of age or gender were treated in the same manner. Having provided their personal details including place of settlement and reason for entering the workhouse they were required to surrender their clothes and bathe prior to being issued with a new set of clothes in the form of a uniform. This was in accordance with the Rules, Orders and Regulations for the Better Government of the Poor, in the House of Industry (1759), which stated that ‘the Governor shall in no case place any persons in the wards, till they be carefully examined, washed and cleaned and new clothes.’⁶²⁴ The importance of clothing to the poor was highlighted by Vivienne Richmond, asserting that the poor’s ‘material

⁶²¹ Ottaway, Susannah, , *Decline of Life*, p.259.

⁶²² Ruggles, Thomas, *The History of the Poor*, p. 262.

⁶²³ SRO(I), S1/1/8/4, *Overseers’ Correspondence*

⁶²⁴ *Carlford and Colneis Rules, Orders and Regulations*, p. 4.

deprivation and visual distinction was the cause of physical discomfort and psychological trauma.⁶²⁵

As a later critic observed, it was not possible to refuse approval to ‘institutions that forced cleanliness upon those who are dirty and wholesome food upon those of depraved appetites’.⁶²⁶

In fact, the Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge (SPCK) claimed in 1732 that workhouses, ‘under a prudent and good Management, will answer all the Ends of Charity to the Poor, in regards to their Souls and Bodies’.⁶²⁷ Falcini in her study of cleanliness and the poor, concluded that the importance of cleanliness in the workhouse was identifiable in the everyday routines of these institutions, particularly through the attitude to beds, bedbugs and increasingly, the use of soap. In particular, Siena highlights the rules and regulations governing the workhouse as being the means to both implement and maintain a regimen of cleanliness.⁶²⁸

The motive behind the wearing of uniforms was partly for hygienic considerations but also as a deterrent to others in the local community by stigmatising workhouse inmates. The uniform bore the initials CCH (Carlford Colneis House) in bold yellow letters, making it very recognisable within the locality and setting inmates of Nacton House apart from others in the local community.⁶²⁹ The wearing of a uniform together with the monotonous daily routine and strict discipline to which elderly men were subjected were important elements in the institutionalism which aged men undoubtedly suffered and which contributed towards ‘the psychological deprivations of institutional life.’⁶³⁰ It is, however, not possible to ascertain the

⁶²⁵ Vivienne Richmond, *Clothing the Poor in Nineteenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 1-19.

⁶²⁶ Webb, Stanley and Webb, Beatrice, *English Poor Law History*, p.142.

⁶²⁷ *An Account of Several Work-Houses for Employing and Maintaining the Poor: Setting Forth Rules by Which They Are Governed, Their Great Usefulness to the Publick, and in Particular to the Parishes Where They Are Erected, as Also of Several Charity Schools for Promoting Work, and Labour* (London: SPCK, 1732).

⁶²⁸ Louise Falcini, ‘Cleanliness and the Poor in Eighteenth-Century London (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Reading 2018).

⁶²⁹ *Carlford and Colneis Rules, Orders and Regulations*, p. 6.

⁶³⁰ Digby, Anne, *Pauper Palaces*, p. 2.

opinions of aged men themselves and whether they felt stigmatised or any shame attached to being admitted to Nacton House or other workhouses, as no written evidence exists of their views.

The daily routine within Nacton House began with inmates being woken by a bell at six o'clock in the morning, from Lady-Day to Michaelmas, and at seven o'clock from Michaelmas to Lady-Day. Before breakfast at nine o'clock, workhouse inmates including the aged who were able, were engaged in cleaning the dormitories. After breakfast those able to work were then engaged in suitable employment, usually making sacking, twine or spinning wool, while the old, who were not required to work, were allowed to sit in their designated sitting room or walk within the grounds of Nacton House. An hour was allowed for dinner at mid-day and supper was provided at seven o'clock in the evening with both meals being preceded by the saying of Grace. Prayers were read every day in the morning before the commencement of work and again in the evening after supper at which time a rollcall of all inmates was undertaken. Inmates had to be in bed by nine o'clock in the summer and eight o'clock in the winter.⁶³¹ One can only surmise that for those elderly inmates who were not bedridden, life within Nacton House, as well as in the region's other workhouses, must have been not only monotonous, but a somewhat demoralising existence due to the almost total loss of freedom personal independence.

Diet

Meals were eaten communally with the elderly eating with other inmates in the dining hall of Nacton House, which Ruggles described as 'neat and commodious'.⁶³² Inmates received three meals a day according to the Nacton House dietary lists, as shown in Table 4.10. Robert Potter, writing in 1775, considered that the inmates of Nacton House were provided with 'wholesome

⁶³¹ *Carlford and Colneis Rules, Orders and Regulations*, p. 4.

⁶³² Ruggles Thomas, *History of the Poor*, p. 262.

and well-dressed food ... in liberal abundance'.⁶³³ In fact, the Poor Law Commissioners were of the opinion that the workhouse food was superior to that commonly consumed by the poor in their own homes.⁶³⁴ Although the food provided may have been better in both quality and variety than that available to many outside Nacton House, inmates had to endure enforced discipline and silence at meal times and paupers found consuming food out of the dining room were punished.⁶³⁵

Breakfast commonly consisted of either beef broth or water gruel while supper in the evening was always bread and cheese. It was the mid-day meal, which was the most varied, consisting of either beef, ox-cheek or broth and pease pudding. The diet provided by Nacton House was very similar to that provided by the region's other incorporations. Inmate meals at Nacton House were described by a contemporary writing in 1764, as consisting of 'ample portions ... such as meat, bread, cheese, puddings and broth'.⁶³⁶

Table 4.10. Nacton House Dietaries⁶³⁷

	Breakfast	Dinner	Supper
Monday	Beef-broth	Pease pottage	Bread and cheese
Tuesday	Water gruel	Beef-broth	Bread and cheese
Wednesday	Beef-broth	Barley or milk broth	Bread and cheese
Thursday	Water gruel	Beef-broth	Bread and cheese
Friday	Beef-broth	Barley or milk broth	Bread and cheese
Saturday	Water gruel	Ox cheeks and legs of beef	Bread and cheese
Sunday	Bread and small beer	Beef and pease pudding	Bread and cheese

⁶³³ Robert Potter, *Observations on the Poor Laws, on the present state of the poor, and on Houses of Industry*, p. 38

⁶³⁴ *PP. Report from His Majesty's Commissioners for Inquiring into the Poor Laws*, 44, XXVII (1834), p. 234.

⁶³⁵ *Carlford and Colneis Rules, Orders and Regulations*, p. 5

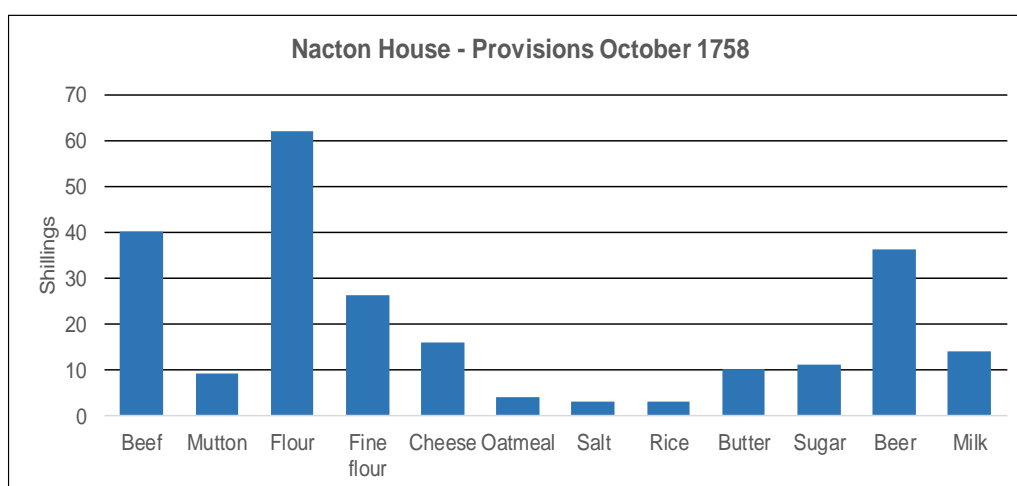
⁶³⁶ Potter Robert, *Observations on the Poor Laws*, p. 44

⁶³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

However, to consider the workhouse dietaries alone may not provide an accurate insight into what the inmates actually ate but rather what Nacton House would have ideally wanted to provide. It is only through my research of additional sources such as the workhouse accounts can a more nuanced analysis be achieved of the likely diet of inmates.⁶³⁸ The provisions ordered by Nacton House in October 1758 together with the approximate cost in shillings, of each item, is shown in Figure 4.12

By comparing the dietaries outlined in Table 4.10. with the provisions supplied to Nacton House in 1758 it would appear that the diet provided to inmates adhered to the specified dietaries and was significantly superior both in volume and quality to that experienced by many poor farm labourers outside the workhouse. In contrast, the diet of many poor farm labourers and the elderly outside Nacton House consisted primarily of bread, potatoes and milk, with meat probably only being eaten once a week and a diet that sometimes consisted of little apart from dry bread and cheese.⁶³⁹

Figure 4.12 Provisions Supplied to Nacton House, October 1758⁶⁴⁰



⁶³⁸ Harley, 'Material lives of the poor', 71.

⁶³⁹ Harley, 'Material Lives of the Poor', 71.

⁶⁴⁰ SRO(I), ADA10/C/B/5, *Workhouse Master Accounts for Weekly Provisions, 1794- 1818*.

The Poor Law Commission was later to regard this as unjust and that the ‘industrious and provident are forced to contribute what they are ill able to spare, to maintain paupers in a manner far better than they have been accustomed to live, and far better than the contributors themselves live’, and was the ‘chief feature in the mismanagement’ of institutions such as Nacton House.⁶⁴²

The recent work by Collinge and Falcini has revealed that the management of the supply of provisions and goods to institutions such as Nacton House was both complex, time-consuming and increasingly bureaucratic. Interestingly, they also point to the influence exerted by workhouses on the local economy and the range and nature of the goods and services offered by local businesses and the complex interaction which existed between the workhouse and the local community, a subject which I consider merits further research.⁶⁴³

Materially, Nacton House provided superior conditions for its elderly male inmates to that which they would have enjoyed outside the workhouse. It also provided a diet which in terms of quality, variety and volume was vastly superior to that available to many of the elderly poor in the wider community. In addition, the aged and infirm would have gained considerable benefit from the provision of in-house medical and nursing care.⁶⁴⁴ Cash was rarely paid to workhouse inmates but food, clothing and medical assistance were all available. However, it is important to take into consideration the constraints of institutional life that elderly men would have experienced. My research of life within Nacton House revealed it to be governed on adherence to a strict management and disciplinary regime for elderly and able-bodied inmates alike. In workhouses such as Nacton House, the old, young and those described as lunatics, lived together in the same accommodation, ‘in a setting at the furthest possible remove from

⁶⁴² *PP. Report from His Majesty’s Commissioners for Inquiring into the Poor Laws*, 44, XXVII (1834), p. 169.

⁶⁴³ Collinge, Peter and Falcini, Louise, *The Old Poor Law*, p. 1-19.

⁶⁴⁴ Thane, Pat, *Old Age*, p.117.

the traditional ideal of a private fireside and the comfort of their own homes', with all vestiges of freedom and residential independence removed.⁶⁴⁵ It must not, however, be assumed that once admitted to the workhouse that all elderly inmates would remain until they died, as shown in Table 4.11.

Table 4.11. Nacton House – Length of Admission⁶⁴⁶

	Age	Length of Admission			Discharged/Died
		From	To	Weeks	
John Gobbitt	56	30/06/1823	04/08/1823	4.5	Discharged
John Gobbitt	56	20/07/1824	23/12/1824	17	Discharged
James Dorkins	56	09/07/1811	28/09/1811	12	Died
James Bolter	56	20/10/1808	18/07/1809	33	Died
Stephen Glandfield	52	01/03/1830	12/10/1830	30.5	Discharged
James Cole	52	25/10/1789	?		Died
William Spurling	70	08/04/1806	07/02/1809	98	Died
Simon Ford	68	16/11/1801	19/01/1802	9	Died
Joseph Candler	66	25/09/1826	19/03/1827	23	Died
John Stannard	64	07/10/1816	15/04/1817	23	Discharged
John Stannard	67	10/09/1821	07/07/1822	39	Discharged
John Stannard	72	14/11/1825	02/12/1825	2	Died

Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to reveal both the expectation of old age for elderly men of the lower orders and the extent to which they were able to achieve self-sufficiency and maintain residential independence in this period.

Although my research of pauper correspondence highlighted many men from the lower orders had a modest expectation of old age, study findings revealed the significant age related constraints and difficulties they faced in old age and which were a constant obstacle to the achievement of independence. Study findings revealed the achievement of independence was

⁶⁴⁵ Ottaway, Susannah, *Decline of Life*, p. 265.

⁶⁴⁶ SRO(I), ADA10/AB3/1.

dependent on a number of factors such as, continued working in old age, availability of lifecycle options which they could draw upon, as well as the importance of marriage. Study findings revealed that the limited lifecycle options of most elderly men would necessitate them working into advanced old age until finally prevented by decrepitude. The anxiety and difficulty experienced by the elderly in paying rent was identified in my research of pauper correspondence and which was an on-going problem for the elderly living in rented accommodation particularly as opportunities for work diminished in old age and earning potential was severely reduced. For many, as my research of the responses to the Rural Queries of the Poor Law Commissioners showed, marriage and the potential of an additional wage, was an important factor in the ability of elderly men to maintain their residential independence. Importantly, the research of pauper inventories conducted as part of this study also revealed that it would be a mistake to believe that all elderly men from the lower orders lived a life of abject misery. Analysis of pauper inventories revealed aspects of the material lives of the poor together with the diversity and stratification which existed in the lower orders. For some, however, as the analysis of pauper correspondence and poor law records show, the achievement of semi-residential independence was only achievable with regular relief from the poor law authorities. Elderly single and widowed men without the benefit of a second income which a wife could provide were particularly vulnerable to the downward pull of poverty and an inability to maintain residential independence, and for those unable live with family, or gain accommodation in an almshouse, admission to the workhouse was usually the only option.

Incorporation workhouses such as Nacton House, provoked a mixed reaction in the local community. The labouring poor and aged regarded them as a prison which deprived them of what they considered to be the right to be relieved in their own homes while others in the community regarded institutions such as Nacton House 'as pauper palaces due to their scale

and design.’⁶⁴⁸ In contrast to the experience of almshouse residents findings suggest that elderly men admitted to the workhouse suffered an almost total loss of all vestiges of freedom and personal independence in their old age.

The following chapter explores the pressures exerted on parishes due to increased demand for poor relief, particularly from the elderly, prompted by the economic and demographic changes which the region experienced in the second half of the eighteenth century and in the first half of the nineteenth century. It is argued that this pressure resulted in changes to the nature and manner in which poor relief was administered, to the detriment of aged male paupers.

⁶⁴⁸ Digby. Anne, *Pauper Palaces*, p. 2

Chapter 5. Rural Parishes Under Pressure

Introduction

The impact of the rising level of pauperism experienced in Suffolk during the second half of the eighteenth century and in the first half of the nineteenth century was described by John Glyde, social historian and local Ipswich resident between 1823 and 1844:

Pauperism! What a brood of evils are engendered by this one! The extent of moral and social evil flowing from this social malady, as well as the pecuniary loss that is incurred, it is difficult to determine. It is the plague spot of this county; a social cancer praying upon the vials of the community, and festering away the self-respect, independence, and industry of almost every class of our working population.⁶⁴⁹

This chapter aims to establish through a quantitative analysis of poor relief provision to the elderly between 1750 and 1834 how the demographic, economic, and social pressures experienced by parishes in this period impacted on poor law policies towards elderly men. The chapter aims to reveal how a combination of the ambiguous nature of poor law legislation combined with ever increasing relief expenditure and changing societal attitudes towards poverty and gender led to differential treatment being afforded to aged men and women when claiming or receiving relief. The chapter also seeks to demonstrate how far relief policies towards the elderly were gendered and the extent to which the level of sentiment and benevolence expressed by the poor law authorities towards aged male paupers was significantly less than that afforded elderly women. The chapter also challenges Ottaway's contention that care of the aged constituted, 'one of the most closely guarded principles and one of its least controversial doctrines', particularly in respect of elderly men.⁶⁵⁰ Studies by both Smith and

⁶⁴⁹ Glyde, John, *Suffolk in the Nineteenth Century: Physical, Moral, Social, Moral and Industrial* (Ipswich: Burton, 1850), p. 42.

⁶⁵⁰ Ottaway, Susannah, *The Decline of Life*, p. 173.

Williams have argued that relief was not provided simply on the basis of age criteria but rather often intended as a supplement to earnings or due to deteriorating health and decrepitude and that claims for relief were more often made and granted on the basis of ‘debility rather than old age.’⁶⁵¹ The view of Smith that ‘the pension was by no means a strictly age-related benefit’, is also explored.⁶⁵²

Methodology

Research focussed on the welfare policies of Suffolk’s rural poor law incorporations between 1750 and 1834 and the findings are the result of the analysis of quantitative sources to determine the demographic profile of the aged population and the apportionment and nature of poor relief provided by rural incorporations according to age and gender. Research sources included the 1801 and 1821 censuses, parish registers, poor law records of the rural incorporations established in Suffolk from mid-eighteenth century, complemented by a wide range of qualitative sources, which included contemporary essays, texts and pauper correspondence.⁶⁵³

The methodology adopted to analyse the provision of poor relief to the elderly and the impact of demographic, economic and social pressures on poor law practices towards elderly men

⁶⁵¹ Richard Smith, ‘Ageing and well-being’, in *Old Age from Antiquity*, ed. by Johnson & Thane; Williams, Samantha, *Poverty, Gender and Life-cycle*, p. 144.

⁶⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 79.

⁶⁵³ SRO(I), HD2448/4/2/2/4, *1801 Census, Abstracts of the Answers and Returns: Enumeration Part 1 England and Wales 1801* vi (140) 813, www.visionofBritain.or.uk/place/6912, *Abstracts of the Answers and Returns: Parish Registers, 1801-2*, vi, vii (140,9,112) 813, SRO(I), FB159/D/1/2, *Mendlesham Parish Registers (1661-1712)*, SRO(I), FB159/D/1/3, *Mendlesham Parish Registers (1661-1712)*, SRO(I), FB159/D/1/4, *Mendlesham Parish Registers (1662-1794)*, SRO(I), FB159/D/1/5, *Mendlesham Parish Registers (1794-1813)*, SRO(I), FL600/4 *Registers Lawshall All Saints (1558-1812)*, SRO(I) FC581/D *Cookley Registers (1538-1812)*, SRO(I) FC22/D *Culpho Registers (1660-1823)*, SRO(I) FC46/Di *Trimley St. Martin Registers (1678-1818)*, SRO(I), *Bawdsey Registers (1774-1815)*, SRO(I) FB187/D *Holbrook Registers (1721-1812)*, SRO(I) ADA/AB3/1-10 *Bawdsey Poor Law Records*, SRO(I) ADA11/AB3/1-10 *Hatcheston Poor Law Records*, SRO(I) ADA1/AB3/1-3 *Cookley Poor Law Records*, SRO(I) ADA10/AB3/1-10 *Culpho Poor Law Records*, SRO(I) ADA10/AB3/1-9 *Trimley St. Martin Poor Law Records*, SRO(I) AD&/AB4/1-7 *East Bergholt Poor Law Records*; Wrigley, Edward and Schofield, Roger, *English Population History*, pp. 157-179.

largely mirrors that outlined in the previous chapter. The parish registers and poor law records previously downloaded for the analysis conducted in the previous chapter were analysed further using the Microsoft Excel Spreadsheet Software. As in the previous chapter, parish register and poor law data sets were placed alongside each other to facilitate the identification of relationships or causal relationships through nominal linkage.

It was recognised at an early stage that establishing the age of many poor relief recipients was problematic due to the absence of a full range of entries in the parish registers. However, for the purpose of this study it was not always necessary to identify the precise age of all relief recipients but those simply aged over fifty years. Initial analysis of parish registers revealed only 38% of the incorporation's relief recipients between 1750 and 1834 were identifiable in the parish baptism records. In order to include those individuals missing from parish records a methodology similar to that employed by Mary Barker-Read in her study of the treatment of the aged poor in West Kent was utilized.⁶⁵⁴ Where only the date of birth was missing, the national average of first marriage was used to calculate the age of an individual. Similarly, where the marriage date was absent from the records, the national average interval between marriage and the birth of the first child was used to determine an age at marriage and then an estimation of date of age at death. The approach was made more rigorous by calculating the specific parish average of age of first marriage and the interval between marriage and the first child. Consequently, the results reflect local practice rather than being based on national averages, an approach which was also found to produce conservative age estimates.⁶⁵⁵

The spreadsheet analysis of national and local archival sources was again supplemented by my use of the FreeReg database of births, marriages and deaths, the British Online History database

⁶⁵⁴ Mary Barker-Reid, *The treatment of the aged poor in five selected West Kent parishes from settlement to Speenhamland (1622-1797)*, (unpublished doctoral thesis, Open University, 1988).

⁶⁵⁵ Lynn Botelho, 'Aged and Impotent', in *Charity, self-interest and Welfare*, ed. by Daunton pp. 91-112, (p. 94).

which was interrogated for relevant quantitative data and the Historical Texts database of eighteenth century and nineteenth century texts, which provided a valuable source of contemporary views and opinions.⁶⁵⁶

The Poor Law in Suffolk

As is well established in the historiography of poverty, despite the legal obligation to relieve, ‘every poor, old, blind, lame and impotent person’, established by the legislation of 1598-1601, the poor law did not always operate in an unquestionably benevolent or even-handed manner.⁶⁵⁷ While identifying the ‘old’ as being deserving of relief, the legislation neither defined ‘old’, nor what constituted deserving, and it did not specify the nature or duration of relief.

While Smith, King and Williams among others have examined the experience of poverty in the south, and although there are some references made to Suffolk in the existing literature, questions of poverty, age and gender have not previously been considered explicitly in relation to Suffolk.⁶⁵⁸ Research conducted for this study revealed that gender was an influential factor in the formulation and implementation of poor law policy in Suffolk, reflecting Sarah Lloyd’s view that debates about reform of the poor law increasingly focussed from mid-eighteenth century on questions of masculinity and on the qualities of independence and manliness, or lack of them, amongst the male labouring poor.⁶⁵⁹ Likewise, Goose has further suggested that welfare policies under the New Poor Law were gendered and as such displayed continuity with

⁶⁵⁶ <https://www.freereg.org.uk>; <https://www.britishhistory.ac.uk>; <https://www.historicaltexts.jisc.ac.uk>.

⁶⁵⁷ Elizabeth Leonard, *The Early History of English Poor Relief* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1900), p.133.

⁶⁵⁸ King, Steven, *Poverty and Welfare in England 1700-1850*; Williams, ‘Poor Relief, labourers’ households and living standards, pp. 485-519; Williams, Samantha, *Poverty, Gender and Lifecycle*, pp. 129-152.

⁶⁵⁹ Lloyd, ‘Cottage Conversations, pp. 69-108.

those in operation in the eighteenth century, particularly in regard to the difficulties faced by elderly male agricultural labourers when seeking poor relief.⁶⁶⁰

Social Policy Pressures

As Williams has identified, poor relief in rural areas became more comprehensive and generous from mid-seventeenth century.⁶⁶¹ The elderly were prominent recipients and the value of the relief provided to them increased in real terms during the seventeenth century. The study by Wales of pension payments in Norfolk revealed that relief rose from around sixpence a week in the first half of the seventeenth century to one shilling a week in the second half of the century, which he asserted was sufficient to maintain a single person alone and provide a standard of living which equated to that of 'day waged' labourers families. William Newman-Brown's study of Hertfordshire also revealed, in common with Wales, that the majority of the aged poor received increasingly generous relief throughout the seventeenth century and that the parish became for many their only means of support.⁶⁶² In fact, Wales believed that in the parish of Hedenham in Norfolk that, 'the parish was more important than children in supporting the aged poor.'⁶⁶³

Parish relief in seventeenth-century Norfolk, according to Wales was, 'especially important for those at certain stages in the life-cycle, notably the orphan and the widow and the aged generally.'⁶⁶⁴ Furthermore, he commented that for the majority of the aged the only respite to long-term relief was death. Research for this study also identified that relief was significantly

⁶⁶⁰ Goose, 'Poverty, old age and gender in nineteenth-century England, pp. 351-384, Steven King, 'Reconstructing the lives of the poor, the poor law and welfare in Calverley, 1650-1820', *Social History*, xxii (1997), pp. 318-338.

⁶⁶¹ Williams, Samantha, *Poverty, Genders and Life-Cycle*, p. 4.

⁶⁶² Tim Wales, 'Poverty, poor relief and life-cycle', in *Land, Kinship and Lifecycle*, ed. by Smith, pp. 351-404; William, Newman-Brown, 'The receipt of poor relief and family situation: Aldenham, Hertfordshire, 1630-90', in *Land, kinship and life-cycle*, ed. by Richard Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 405-22.

⁶⁶³ Tim Wales, 'Poverty, poor relief and life-cycle', in *Land, Kinship and Lifecycle*, ed. by Smith, p. 385

⁶⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 387.

gendered with women comprising a disproportionate number of relief recipients, findings which are consistent with those of Fideler.⁶⁶⁵ Wales, also identified that women represented up to 60% of regular pension recipients in seventeenth-century Norfolk.⁶⁶⁶

However, as Williams has noted, the level of generosity of the poor law in the long eighteenth century is a ‘rather thorny issue.’⁶⁶⁷ Total nominal expenditure rose during the eighteenth century and in real per capita terms increased steadily throughout the century. There has, however, been considerable historical debate about the relative generosity of poor relief for the elderly poor in this period. Snell has suggested that ‘one can be surprised by the generous and widely encompassing nature of relief ... to settled inhabitants rural parishes were indeed “miniature welfare states”, and before about 1780 relief policy was usually generous, flexible, and humane’.⁶⁶⁸ However, in the concluding decades of the eighteenth century increased expenditure necessitated by structural unemployment, population growth and agricultural depression exerted increasing pressure on rural parishes due to the resultant increase in the demand for poor relief.

In fact, in the debate on the generosity of the poor law towards the elderly, historians can largely be divided into two groups. The ‘optimists’, such as Smith, Wales, Solar and Ottaway, who point to the generous level of relief and the number of the aged receiving assistance.⁶⁶⁹ While the ‘pessimists’, on the other hand, such as Thane, King and Lees, suggest a residual system and argue as to the restricted nature of relief. While the debate between Thomson and Hunt has

⁶⁶⁵ Fideler, Paul, *Social Welfare*, 113-14

⁶⁶⁶ Tim Wales, ‘Poverty, poor relief and life-cycle’, in *Land, Kinship and Lifecycle*, ed. by Smith, p. 360-4.

⁶⁶⁷ Williams, Samantha, *Poverty, Gender and Life-Cycle*, p. 160.

⁶⁶⁸ Snell, Keith, *Annals of the labouring poor*, p. 103-108.

⁶⁶⁹ Richard Smith, ‘Ageing and well-being’ in *Old Age from Antiquity to Post Modernity*, ed. by Johnson and Thane; Tim Wales, ‘Poverty, poor relief and life-cycle’, in *Land, Kinship and Lifecycle*, ed. by Smith; Peter Solar, ‘Poor Relief and English Economic Development Before the Industrial Revolution’, *The Economic History Review*, 48 (1995), 1–22; Thomson, ‘The decline of social welfare’, Ottaway, Susannah, *Decline of Life*.

focused on the extent to which long-term relief amounted to an ‘old age pension’ or to an ‘unemployment benefit.’⁶⁷⁰ However, despite what Thomson and others have argued, that the elderly were never assured of a pension under the Old Poor Law, or that they would be of sufficient value to enable an individual to maintain a reasonable level of sustenance, my research of Suffolk’s rural parishes which form the basis of this study revealed a significant level of relief provided to their elderly parishioners, consistent with the findings of Ottaway.⁶⁷¹

National annual poor law expenditure increased significantly in the second half of the eighteenth century and into the nineteenth century. Expenditure increased from £400,000 p.a. in 1696 to almost £690,000 p.a. by mid-eighteenth century and was estimated to account for 1% of national income.⁶⁷² The national returns of poor law expenditure for 1776 revealed expenditure had increased to £1,529,780 p.a.⁶⁷³ The national returns of relief expenditure for 1776 was followed by similar enquires in 1783-85 and 1802-3 and then collected on a regular basis from 1813. The rise in expenditure after 1776, as King noted, was ‘precipitous’ and by 1803 had risen to £4,078,000 p.a. Expenditure peaked post-war at £7,871,000 p.a. in 1817, and thereafter expenditure fell until 1831 when it rose to £7,370,00, as shown in Figure 5.1. As King has suggested, by equating poverty with the level of poor law expenditure would suggest a continual increase in the incidence of poverty from in the second half of the eighteenth century and in the first half of the nineteenth century.⁶⁷⁴

⁶⁷⁰ King, ‘Poor relief and English economic development reappraised’; Thane, Pat, *Old age*; Lees, Lynn Hollen, *The Solidarities of Strangers: The English Poor Law and the People* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Thomson, ‘The decline of social welfare’; Hunt, ‘Paupers and pensioners’, 407-30.

⁶⁷¹ Ottaway, Susannah, *Decline of Life*, p. 10.

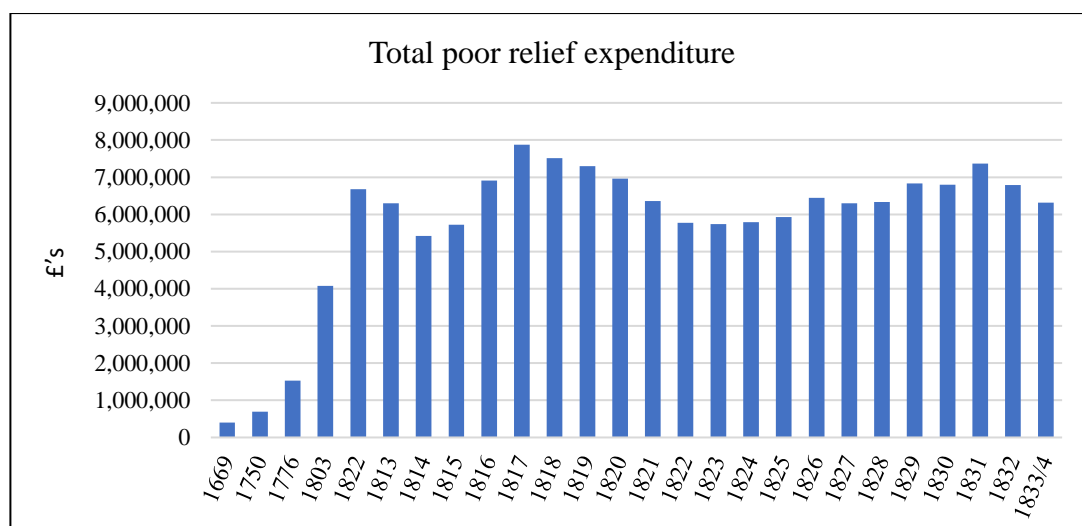
⁶⁷² Slack, Paul, *The English poor law, 1531-1782*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 31.

⁶⁷³ P.P. 306, Appendix No. 3 to Poor Returns of 1818, containing Table of Proportions of Comparative Increase (of Pauperism), 1776, 1785, 1803 and 1815

⁶⁷⁴ King, Steven, *Poverty and Welfare*, p. 81.

The number of relief recipients increased significantly in the final decade of the eighteenth century when the poor law is often referred to as being in ‘crisis’.⁶⁷⁵ The ‘crisis’ faced by the poor law authorities was due to a combination of factors including, rapid population increase, the decline of cottage industries (hand-weaving and spinning), and the impact of the Napoleonic Wars. These factors, which were compounded by severe harvest failures in the 1790s and early 1800s, resulted in rapid and significant price inflation and widespread seasonal underemployment and unemployment amongst farm labourers in Suffolk.⁶⁷⁶

Figure 5.1. Total poor relief expenditure in England 1696 -1834⁶⁷⁷



Feinstein draws particular attention to the impact of the Napoleonic Wars between 1793 and 1815 and Napoleon's continental blockade which he cites as the cause of inflationary financial conditions while hostilities also resulted in the withdrawal of thousands of men from the labour market.⁶⁷⁸ Feinstein's study of real wages and the standard of living identified the overriding

⁶⁷⁵ Samantha Williams, 'Crisis' of the English Old Poor Law', in *Population, Welfare and Economic Change in Britain 1290-1834*, ed. by Briggs, pp. 129-152.

⁶⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 131.

⁶⁷⁷ *P.P.* 82, 1804, pp. 477-500; *P.P.* 175, 1815, pp. 425-441; John Marshall, *The Old Poor Law 1795-1834*, London: Macmillan, 1968), p. 26.

⁶⁷⁸ Feinstein, Charles, 'Pessimism Perpetuated', 628.

feature from 1793 to 1815 as being the slow rate of improvement in full-employment real earnings. According to Feinstein:

From the 1780s to the end of the Napoleonic Wars, average nominal earnings kept roughly in step with the cost of living, and there was almost no increase in average real earnings. After 1815 there was slow progress, but by the mid-1850s real earnings were only 30% ahead of the level in the early 1780s.⁶⁷⁹

Feinstein estimated that from 1778 to mid-nineteenth century real weekly earnings increased by less than 30%, and that average real incomes were broadly stagnant from 1778 until the early 1830s, despite the fact that in regions such as Suffolk, incomes were starting from a very low level.⁶⁸⁰

The cost of living displayed a significant volatility marked by rapid price inflation from the 1790's and deflation after the end of the Napoleonic Wars. Prices rose from about 1750 to 1813 and then fell in the same manner from 1813 to 1850. However, as Williams noted, the poor law authorities were unable to benefit from the reduction in the cost of living after 1815 due to agricultural depression and the resultant high levels of unemployment which necessitated the continuance of significant levels of relief expenditure.⁶⁸¹ Significantly, as Alan Kidd has noted, the precipitous rise of poor law expenditure in this period also caused attitudes towards the poor to harden and ultimately resulted in the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834.⁶⁸²

There is a significant volume of secondary literature on the economic impact of the 'crisis' in providing for the poor in the final decade of the eighteenth century. There is also a widespread

⁶⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 642

⁶⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 649.

⁶⁸¹ Ibid., p. 135.

⁶⁸² Alan Kidd, *State, Society and the Poor in Nineteenth Century England* (London: Macmillan Press, 1999), p. 14.

belief amongst historians that 1795 marked a pivotal point in parish welfare policy. Stagnating wages and increased food prices resulted in an inability for many to achieve sustenance, even when in full employment. In response, allowances began to be paid to subsidise the weekly income of labourers' families, the most well-known being that of Speenhamland. These allowances were adjusted based on the price of bread and in some cases the size of the family.⁶⁸³ The major function of poor relief in Suffolk during this period became the provision of 'unemployment benefits to seasonally unemployed agricultural labourers.'⁶⁸⁴

The 'crisis' was particularly manifest in Suffolk, due to the region's rising population, absence of alternative employment to agriculture and ongoing high levels of unemployment among farm labourers, resulting in a continual increase in relief claimants. The study's research findings revealed, in common with Snell's study of agricultural seasonal unemployment, the extent of Suffolk's structural unemployment problem and the associated increase in poor law expenditure. It also highlighted that in addition to the rising number of unemployed and underemployed who were increasingly dependent on relief there was also a significant section of society whose earnings were below subsistence level.⁶⁸⁵ While the increase in relief expenditure was due to an expansion in the overall scope of poor relief to include pensions, as well as an increase in casual assistance to poor families and the able-bodied, especially in the 1790s, the expenditure also reflects the significant cost of aiding the aged poor. Indeed, according to Eden, 34% of parish pensioners nationally were aged sixty or more.⁶⁸⁶ By the late eighteenth century, the poor law accounted for one-fifth of national expenditure and there were increasing calls for a more centralised and uniform system as costs continued to increase.

⁶⁸³ Samantha Williams, 'Crisis' of the English Old Poor Law, in *Population, in Welfare and Economic Change in Britain 1290-1834*, ed. by Briggs, p. 131.

⁶⁸⁴ Boyer, George, *Economic History of the English Poor Law*, pp. 10-23.

⁶⁸⁵ Keith Snell, 'Agricultural Seasonal Unemployment, the Standard of Living, and Women's Work in the South and East, 1690-1860', *The Economic History Review*, 34/3 (1981), pp. 407-437.

⁶⁸⁶ Eden, Sir. Frederick Morton, *The State of the Poor*, p.148.

However, the overall cost of poor relief needs to be viewed relative to the overall annual national income, estimated as being between £300 and £400 million and that although poor rates had risen in the second half of the eighteenth century and into the nineteenth century the increase was in line with the general increase in wealth being enjoyed nationally and accounted for only around 1% of annual national income.⁶⁸⁷

The increase in poor law expenditure experienced nationally was mirrored by the rise in relief expenditure in Suffolk, prompting Glyde to comment:

that prior to the Poor Law Amendment Act coming into operation, Suffolk was the more deeply pauperised than any other county in England.⁶⁸⁸

However, while Suffolk undoubtedly suffered a significant level of pauperism in this period it was not as my research of parliamentary papers revealed, as Glyde suggests, the most pauperised county in the south east of England.

Table 5.1. South-Eastern Counties – Pauper Numbers/Ratio (1803)⁶⁸⁹

County	Pop.	No. of paupers	% of population	Ratio
Bedfordshire	63393	7276	11	1:9
Huntingdon	39316	4656	12	1:8
Hertford	102118	13349	13	1:8
Norfolk	286092	42992	15	1:7
Essex	236974	38337	16	1:6
Suffolk	220224	36110	16	1:6
Buckinghamshire	112444	19610	17	1:6
Berkshire	114297	22588	20	1:5
Cambridgeshire	93504	20294	22	1:5
Sussex	166725	37076	22	1:4

⁶⁸⁷ Webb, Stanley and Beatrice, *English Poor Law History*, p. 2

⁶⁸⁸ Glyde, John, *Suffolk in the Nineteenth Century*, p.43

⁶⁸⁹ *P.P.* 82, 1804, pp. 477-500; Wrigley, 'Growth of Population', 31.

Paupers in Suffolk comprised 16% of the overall population of the region. However, Berkshire with 20% and Sussex and Cambridgeshire with 22% of paupers within the overall population experienced greater levels of pauperism, as shown in Table 5.1.

Poor Law expenditure in Suffolk rose throughout the period due to increased demand for relief brought about by on-going structural unemployment and the region's overstocked labour market. My findings revealed the increase in poor law expenditure experienced by a number of Suffolk's typical rural parishes between 1764 and 1818, as shown in Table 5.2. These parishes displayed the demographic, economic and occupational characteristics common to parishes throughout the county. Between 1764 and 1818 relief expenditure in East Bergholt increased from £176 to £819 annually, which amounted to nearly a five-fold increase. Other parishes experienced similar increases in expenditure during the same period. Holbrook experienced an increase in annual expenditure from £121 to £660, amounting to in excess of a five-fold increase, while Hacheston experienced nearly a ten-fold increase with expenditure rising from £71 to £763 annually.

Table 5.2. Suffolk Poor Law Expenditure (Selected Parishes)⁶⁹⁰

Parish Poor Law Expenditure 1764-1818 (£'s)							
	Culpho	Cookley	Trimley St. Martin	Bawdsey	Hacheston	East Bergholt	Holbrook
1764	24	42	56	45	71	176	121
1803	55	87	111	141	147	381	166
1818	255	206	486	431	763	819	660
% increase - 1764-1818	963%	390%	768%	858%	975%	365%	445%

The dependence of Suffolk on agriculture as a source of employment, compounded by the decline of proto-industrial activities and rising population in this period was overwhelmingly

⁶⁹⁰ Goult, Wendy, *A Survey of Suffolk Parish History, Vols. 1 & 2.*

detrimental to the situation of the aged farm labourer and in the process placed poor law authorities under ever increasing pressure as demand for poor relief continued to increase, as did rising concerns as to its effectiveness.⁶⁹¹ As John Townsend commented in 1787:

There never was greater distress among the poor: there was never more money collected for their relief. But what is most perplexing is that poverty and wretchedness have increased in exact proportion to the efforts that have been made for the comfortable subsistence of the poor.⁶⁹²

Poverty was undoubtedly an overriding problem in Suffolk and in other southern and eastern counties at this time. My research findings revealed, in common with the view of Snell, that due to the pronounced seasonality of agriculture in Suffolk it was probable that most agricultural workers in the region would have required poor law support at some point in their lives. This was particularly the case in the late eighteenth century when it is estimated that in excess of 50% of the aged would have been in receipt of poor relief.⁶⁹³ At the beginning of the nineteenth-century Suffolk had the lowest agricultural wages in the southern and eastern counties together with a combination of high unemployment, high poor rates, and depressed rural industries.⁶⁹⁴ Research for this study revealed that the living standards of farm labourers in Suffolk mirrored those identified by Williams in her case study of labourers' living standards in Bedfordshire between 1770 and 1834:

Stagnant or falling wages for agricultural labourers in this region, along with the collapse of many rural industries, were accompanied by spiralling relief bills and a sharp rise in the number of relief recipients.⁶⁹⁵

⁶⁹¹ King, Steven, *Poverty and Welfare in England*, p.6.

⁶⁹² Townsend, Rev. John, *A Dissertation on the Poor Laws* (London: C. Dilly. 1787), p. 7.

⁶⁹³ Snell, Keith, *Annals of the Labouring Poor*. pp. 17-28.

⁶⁹⁴ Snell, 'Agricultural Seasonal Unemployment', 420.

⁶⁹⁵ Williams, Samantha, 'Poor relief, labourers' households, 485.

In his study of real wages and the standard of living Feinstein also concluded that the standard of living for a lower order's family 'improved by less than 15% between the 1780s and 1850s.'⁶⁹⁶ From the late eighteenth century to the end of the Napoleonic Wars, average nominal earnings remained fairly in step with the cost of living and average real earnings remained almost unchanged with real incomes generally stagnant until the 1830s.⁶⁹⁷ Real wages for farm workers in the period were, as Gregory Clarke identified in his study of farm wages and living standards, 'essentially flat' with farm workers not experiencing any improvement in living standards, as was also confirmed by the findings of this study.⁶⁹⁸ Ongoing problems of structural unemployment compounded by the seasonality of agricultural employment exerted ever mounting pressure on poor law authorities as demand for poor relief continued to rise and prompting changes to poor law policy and the manner it was administered. Research of *the Abstracts and Returns for the Expence and Maintenance of the Poor* (1803) revealed that between 35% and 40% of those in the lower orders of Suffolk were in receipt of poor relief, either in the form of short term financial relief or longer term relief.⁶⁹⁹ Added pressure was exerted on the poor law authorities due to rising demand for relief from the elderly. Williams in her study of labourers incomes in Bedfordshire and Smith in his study of the provision of pensions to the aged have both identified the aged were in receipt of relief payments between five to nine times more than according to their representation in the total population.⁷⁰⁰ Decisions on relief applications, due to the increasing economic and demographic pressures being exerted on parishes, increasingly had to take the availability of

⁶⁹⁶ Feinstein, 'Pessimism Perpetuated', 625.

⁶⁹⁷ Ibid., 642-649.

⁶⁹⁸ Gregory Clarke, 'Farm wages and living standards in the industrial revolution: England, 1670-1869', *Economic History Review*, 54 (2001), 477-505 (p. 497).

⁶⁹⁹ P.P. 82, 1804, pp. 477-500; King, Steven, *Poverty and welfare*, p. 83.

⁷⁰⁰ Samantha, Williams, 'Crisis' of the English Old Poor Law' in *Population, Welfare and Economic Change in Britain 1290-1834*, ed. by Briggs, p. 138; Richrd Smith, 'Ageing and wellbeing', in *Old Age from Antiquity to Post Modernity*, ed. by Johnson and Thane, p. 75.

limited local financial resources into consideration in the provision of poor relief. That attitudes towards the poor were hardening, as previously mentioned, has also been identified by Ottaway, Tomkins and Williams.⁷⁰¹ As Williams noted, ‘the aged poor were increasingly perceived as an encumbrance and a parish burden.’⁷⁰² While Deborah Valenz is amongst a number of historians who regard ‘the deterioration of good will towards the poor’ as taking place from 1780 or earlier.⁷⁰³ As Jane Fiske in her study of Bury St. Edmunds noted, the local poor law authorities were, ‘caught between a paternalistic and a more hawkish attitude aimed at reducing the rate burden.’⁷⁰⁴

The establishment of rural incorporations was one of the suggested solutions to rising poor relief expenditure and unlike other regions in the country were established throughout East Anglia from mid-eighteenth century to administer the poor law, replacing many of the autonomous parishes on which the administration of relief under the legislation of 1598-1601 had been based.⁷⁰⁵ The establishment of rural incorporations and the innovative reform to the administration of the poor law which they embodied had, according to Stanley and Beatrice Webb commenting at the beginning of the twentieth century, been ‘ignored by historians’. This situation remained largely unchanged until the publication of more recent studies by Ottaway, Tomkins, Hitchcock, Thompson, Boulton and Schwarz.⁷⁰⁶ The establishment of

⁷⁰¹ Ottaway, Susannah, *The Decline of Life*, p. 12-13; Alannah Tomkins, *The experience of urban poverty, 1732-82: parish, charity and credit* (Manchester: University of Manchester, 2006), p. 8; Samantha Williams, ‘Crisis of the English Old Poor Law’, in *Population, Welfare and Economic Change in Britain 1290-1834*, ed. by Briggs, p. 131,

⁷⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 133.

⁷⁰³ Deborah Valenz, *The First Industrial Woman* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 182

⁷⁰⁴ Jane Fiske, *The Oakes Diaries. Business, Politics and the Family in Bury St Edmunds, 1778-1827, Vol. 2* (Rochester. N.Y.: Boydell Press, 1991), p.159.

⁷⁰⁵ Stephen Thompson, ‘Population Growth’ in *Population, Welfare and Economic Change*, ed by Briggs, p. 194.

⁷⁰⁶ Webb Beatrice & Stanley, *English Local Government*, p. 109-148; Tomkins, ‘Almshouse versus Workhouse; Susannah Ottaway, ‘The Elderly in the Eighteenth-Century Workhouse’, in *Medicine and the Workhouse*, ed. by Reinartz & Laslett; Ottaway, ‘Reconsidering poor law institutions: Tim Hitchcock, ‘The English Workhouse: A Study in Institutional Poor Relief in Selected Counties, 1696-1750’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Oxford, 1985); Jeremy Boulton & Leonard Schwarz, ‘The Medicalization of a Parish Workhouse in Georgian Westminster: St. Martin in the Fields, 1725-

rural incorporations in Suffolk to administer the poor law marked a decisive break from the previous approach to the delivery of poor relief by autonomous parishes, as originally intended. By amalgamating small rural parishes into larger administrative units with a single large workhouse, it was believed that greater efficiency and a corresponding reduction in the cost of relief could be achieved.⁷⁰⁷ While there were scattered rural and urban incorporations in other parts of the country, the nine rural incorporations in Suffolk, based on the existing division of the county into Hundreds, represented the heaviest concentration in a single region. According to Digby, it meant for East Anglia that, ‘it was the incorporating movement of the eighteenth century, and not the national reform of the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834, that made a decisive break with the Elizabethan basis of the Old Poor Law.’⁷⁰⁸

A key aim for the rural incorporations was the efficient management and control of relief expenditure. Accordingly, Suffolk’s rural incorporations were established with the ‘explicit intention of imposing a cap on poor relief assessments.’⁷⁰⁹ The success of the Carlford and Colneis Incorporation both in reducing the cost of poor relief, a saving of £2000 from Easter 1758 to Michaelmas 1762, while at the same time appearing to provide better maintenance for the poor, resulted in the administration of the Poor Law being undertaken by a further fourteen other incorporations across Suffolk and Norfolk by 1785.⁷¹⁰ This initial cost saving was achieved partly through the termination of outdoor relief in the early years after the initial establishment of the incorporation but also through the implementation of strict financial controls and the limit placed on the parish poor rate assessments.⁷¹¹

1824’, *Family & Community History*, 17 (2014), 122-140; Stephen Thompson, ‘Population Growth’, *Population, Welfare and Economic Change*, ed by Briggs, 218-19.

⁷⁰⁷ Fideler, Paul, ‘*Social Welfare in Pre-Industrial England*’, p.152

⁷⁰⁸ Digby, Anne, *Pauper Palaces*, p. 2.

⁷⁰⁹ Stephen Thompson, ‘Population Growth’, *Population, Welfare and Economic Change*, ed by Briggs, 220.

⁷¹⁰ Webb, Beatrice & Stanley, *English Poor Law History*, p.128.

⁷¹¹ Stephen Thompson, ‘Population Growth’ in *Population, Welfare and Economic Change*, ed by Briggs, p. 216.

However, despite the intention of limiting expenditure through the termination of outdoor relief and the application of strict financial controls the demographic and economic changes which the region was undergoing and the subsequent increase in demand for poor relief inevitably led to rising expenditure. Fuelled by rising population and the region's ongoing structural unemployment, pressure on the incorporations became increasingly acute as the number of relief recipients increased markedly in the second half of the eighteenth century and in the first half of the nineteenth century.

My research of the Carlford and Colneis Monthly Treasurers Accounts revealed that between 1759 and 1801 the incorporation's total expenditure increased by over 40%, which was typical of the increase experienced by the other incorporations in the region.⁷¹² The number of recipients aged 50 years or over receiving outdoor relief rose from 10 in 1758 to 232 in 1800, of which 90 were elderly male recipients and 142 elderly female recipients, as shown in Table 5.3.

However, the establishment of the rural incorporations in Suffolk did have an important corollary. Rural incorporations acted as independent institutions and had the authority to exercise considerable discretion in the manner in which they administered the poor law. This included the ability to adapt local poor law policy in response to local demographic and economic pressures. Importantly, it also gave them the opportunity to amend policy in respect of particular groups of claimants, ultimately resulting in a discernible difference in the provision of relief between elderly women and their male counterparts.

⁷¹² SRO (I), ADA 10/AC2/1, *Carlford and Colneis Incorporation, Treasurers Account Book, 1759-1823*; SRO(I), ADA10/AB3/1-6.

Table 5.3. Carlford and Colneis Incorporation - Outdoor Relief Expenditure (1758-1801)⁷¹³

Carlford and Colneis Incorporation - Outdoor Relief 1758-1801				
	Total recipients	Recipients >50 years	Male recipients >50 years	Female recipients >50 years
1758-59	20	10	4	6
1763-64	17	9	3	7
1768-69	45	23	9	14
1774-75	77	39	14	21
1780-81	163	82	31	51
1785-86	185	93	33	60
1790-91	172	86	30	56
1795-96	353	177	69	108
1800-01	463	232	90	142

The vulnerability of aged farm labourers to unemployment did not go unnoticed nor did the potential cost of subsequent relief. Rather than provide regular ongoing relief to men on the basis of their advanced age and possibly for significant periods of time, as in the case of many elderly women, research findings revealed that relief was typically provided to elderly men in smaller amounts and for a shorter duration. This approach appears to have had the aim of tiding elderly men over what the poor law authorities considered to be short-term difficulties until they were able to return to work, as is discussed in greater detail later in the chapter.

As King and Tomkins note, it is possible to identify two alternative strands within recent research on the old poor law. The nature and influence of poor relief under the old poor law and the independence and agency of the poor has been the focus of one line of research while a second approach has focused on ‘the limits of poor relief, the variety of assistance available to the poor from other sources and the persistent necessity to exploit any and every source

⁷¹³ SRO (I), ADA 10/AC2/1.

available.⁷¹⁴ It has become clear, as King and Tomkins assert, ‘that poor households cobbled together incomes from a wide variety of sources and benefits, ranging from legitimate wage labour to the fragile advantage gained such as when a landlord withheld foreclosure.’⁷¹⁵

Historians are generally in agreement that the support provided by parishes to the aged was more important than the familial support provided to the elderly. In fact, Thomson has asserted that the family support section of the Old Poor Law was rarely implemented by the overseers of the poor. In his research of Bedfordshire parishes Thomson suggests that old people in receipt of relief would have received in the region of 70% of the value of that received by young adults.⁷¹⁶ Thomson’s articles, together with his doctoral research, argue that family care for the elderly was relatively unimportant. Although primarily focusing on the nineteenth century, his references to the situation under the Old Poor Law have resulted in his conclusions being applied by many to the earlier period as well.⁷¹⁷

Thomson’s views have not, however, been universally accepted. Thane argues that Thomson’s research which relied primarily on the failure of children to be prosecuted by the poor law authorities and forced to provide for their parents fails to recognize that ‘the existence of the family-support section of the poor laws probably had significant but unrecorded influence on the actions of the parish officers and the people of England.’⁷¹⁸ In contrast, Thane suggests that familial care for the elderly, upheld by the 1598-1601 legislation, was more important than has been previously suggested, and that the community was of less importance to the well-being

⁷¹⁴ Steven King and Alannah Tomkins, ‘Introduction’ in *The Poor in England 1700-1850* ed. by Steven King and Alannah Tomkins, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), p. 8.

⁷¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

⁷¹⁶ David Thomson, ‘Welfare and the historians’, in *The world we have gained*, ed by Lloyd Bonfield, Richard Smith and Keith Wrightson (Oxford, University of Oxford, 1989).

⁷¹⁷ David Thomson, ‘The welfare of the elderly in the past: a family or community responsibility’, in *Life, Dearth and the Elderly*, ed by Pelling and Smith, pp. 194-221; David Thomson, ‘Provision for the elderly in England 1830-1908 (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Cambridge, 1980); David Thomson, ‘I Am Not My Father’s Keeper’: Families and the Elderly in Nineteenth Century England: *Law and History Review*, 2(1984), pp. 265-286

⁷¹⁸ Ottaway, ‘Providing for the elderly, 391-418 (p. 393).

of the elderly than previously claimed.⁷¹⁹ Indeed, Thane's criticism of Thomson for making very far-reaching statements about the absence of familial care for the aged in the past, based on rather slender evidence, is valid. However, Thane provides little real evidence for the existence of familial support herself and mainly offers speculations to replace Thomson's hypothesis. However, Ottaway's reassessment of the strength of the family support section of the Old Poor Law upholds Thomson's view about the unimportance of this source of support.⁷²⁰ In addition, the findings of Smith also support the view that the poor law authorities provided support to the elderly when families were unable or unwilling to do so, a view supported by the findings of this study. Smith suggests that familial help usually augmented rather than replaced poor relief and that the relatives of the elderly were often paid to provide care for them. However, that the community would provide support to elderly paupers was a commonly held social expectation.⁷²¹

Ottaway, while acknowledging that familial and community support were important elements in the maintenance of the elderly, highlights a third source of support which she considers played a critical role in supporting the achievement of independence for the elderly namely, that of self-help.⁷²² The desire and ability of the elderly to remain independent was considerable and they would only seek help from their families or the wider community after they had exhausted all other avenues of support. Indeed, self-help, as a source of support and as the means of maintaining independence in old age, as Ottaway points out, is a somewhat neglected area of historical investigation and it has been the question of familial versus community care for the aged which has been the focus of previous historical investigation.⁷²³

⁷¹⁹ Pat Thane, 'Old people and their families in the English past', in *Charity, self-interest and welfare in the English past*, ed. by Marin Daunton (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 113–38.

⁷²⁰ Ottaway, 'Providing for the elderly', 393.

⁷²¹ Smith, Richard, 'Ageing and well-being', in *Old Age from Antiquity to Post Modernity*, ed. by Johnson and Thane, pp. 64–96.

⁷²² Susannah Ottaway, 392.

⁷²³ *Ibid.*, p, 392.

My findings would suggest that the provision of poor relief was an important element in the welfare of the aged in the region and was largely determined by the nature of the local economy, with only limited employment opportunities, particularly for elderly men.⁷²⁴ Yet, it is important to recognise, as research findings for this study revealed, that in Suffolk no more than half of the aged were relief recipients at any given time. Not all labouring men appeared in the poor law records and the situation and circumstances of elderly individuals varied significantly.

Research undertaken of the parish registers and poor law records of the parish of Hacheston, together with pauper inventories, revealed a significant degree of diversity within the aged population of the lower orders of the parish, which was typical of other rural parishes in the region. Not all aged men from the lower orders were considered poor or destitute and the poverty that did exist within the aged population of the lower orders was experienced in different ways and to varying degrees. In fact, nearly half of the parish's lower orders aged population were not in receipt of poor relief between 1773 and 1826 and were able to achieve self-sufficiency and maintain their residential independence through their own efforts or with assistance from family members, as shown in Table 5.4.

Table 5.4. Hacheston – Independent and Dependent Aged Poor (1773-1826)⁷²⁵

Hacheston –Relief Recipients - Aged Poor (1773-1826)							
Non-relief claimants	%	Occasional poor relief	%	Long-term outdoor relief	%	Long-term in-house relief	%
84	49%	42	25%	29	17%	13	8%

Very little is known about members of the independent aged poor who neither paid the poor rate nor were recipients of poor relief and who, according to Botelho are ‘defined ... by their

⁷²⁴ Richard Smith, ‘Ageing and well-being’ in *Old Age from Antiquity to Post Modernity*, ed. by Johnson and Thane, p. 77.

⁷²⁵ SRO(I), ADA11/AB3/1-10; (SRO), HD2448/4/2/2/4; *1801 Census Return*; GB Historical GIS / University of Portsmouth, Hacheston CP/AP through time | Population Statistics | Total Population, *A Vision of Britain through Time*, URL: <http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/unit/10256367>; Wrigley, Edward, *English population history*, pp. 198-340.

absence from the very records of poor relief.’⁷²⁶ Little historical interest has been afforded them in the historiography of poverty or social structure in the eighteenth century or early nineteenth century and due to the absence of documentary evidence only a scarce profile of their lives can be reconstructed. However, the experience of old age for independent members of the lower orders would appear to have been characterised by ‘a precarious balance of resources and residing on the knife’s edge of self-sufficiency.’⁷²⁷ Many men within this section of the aged population in Hacheston were artisans, small shopkeepers and former small landowners and who provided they were fit continued to work into old age.⁷²⁸ A subsistence level existence was achieved through a combination of work and support from family and neighbours. They were also more likely to be ‘kin rich’ and able to call upon support from other family members.⁷²⁹ Indeed, if they were lucky their children might also contribute financially to their upkeep without damaging the financial well-being of their own household.

Research of poor law records and documentation revealed that in order to control and limit the welfare relief provided to the aged the poor law authorities often used bonds of indemnity. These operated by ensuring the provision of a guaranteed regular ‘pension’ to an aged individual based on an indemnification agreement signed by a bond guarantor, usually a family relative. The indemnification agreement relieved the incorporation poor law authority of any further liability for welfare relief in addition to the provision of a regular pension based on a guarantee from the bond holder (the guarantor) that the individual would be of ‘no further expense to the incorporation.’⁷³² The indemnity, according to which William Smith agreed to provide care to his aged father Robert Smith, was typical of such arrangements.

⁷²⁶ Botelho, Lynn, *Old Age and the English Poor Law*, p. 80.

⁷²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 74.

⁷²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 78

⁷²⁹ Mary Fissell, ‘The “sick and drooping poor” in eighteenth-century Bristol and its regions’, *Society for the Social History of Medicine*, 2 (1989), pp. 35-58. King, Steven, *Poverty and Welfare*, pp. 168-171.

⁷³² SRO(I), ADA10/AB3/1.

William Smith of Hollesby do hereby covenant to agree with the parishoners of Iken to to provide for and maintain Robt. Smith of the said Parish of Iken during his natural Life on being allowed the sum of two shillings a week by the Parish and should the articles of provision reduce in price the allowance from the Parish to decrease in proportion.⁷³³

Examples of such indemnities can be found in the poor law records in a number of Suffolk parishes including, Iken, Mendlesham, Framlingham, East Bergholt, Shotley, Harkstead, Wyverstone and Bacton, all of which were used as means of limiting financial liability of the parish towards the elderly.⁷³⁴

Research of poor law records identified that aside from those who managed to stay independent of relief there were those in receipt of occasional relief in times of particular hardship who comprised 25% of Hacheston's aged population. Individuals who were in receipt of occasional relief did so in times of particular need such as, illness, burial costs or short-term unemployment. For some the need for relief may only have been necessary on a single occasion. For others it amounted to a small number of isolated occasions spread over a number of years. The recipients of occasional relief were able to maintain their self-sufficiency and residential independence without support from the poor law authorities other than at times of particular short-term hardship, as shown in Table 5.4. Research for this study revealed the difficulty in reconstructing the experience and material lives of individuals who were occasional recipients of poor relief and who were generally able to maintain their independence. Despite appearing in the parish poor law documentation, the manner that entries relating to the provision of occasional relief, often recorded over significant periods of time

⁷³³ SRO(I), FC161/G/11/6, *Agreement with William Smith to provide for Robert Smith* (1801).

⁷³⁴ SRO(I), FC161/G/111/1-4; SRO(I), FB159.G/5/1-14, SRO(I), FC101/G/3/1-2; SRO(I), FB191/G/7/1; SRO(I), FB198/G/1/1; SRO(I), FB184/A/1/1; SRO(I), FB158/G/4/1; SRO(I), FB160/E/1/1.

and in an inconsistent manner scattered across the poor law records, makes analysis somewhat difficult.

The dependent aged poor comprised a, 'multitude of poor and needy folks ... near the bottom of the social hierarchy constituting the final rung of respectable society,' and were considered worthy of relief due to a combination of age and physiological decline which prevented continued working and the achievement of self-sufficiency.⁷³⁵ The study's research findings revealed that the dependent aged poor comprised 25% of the aged population of Hacheston of which 17% were in receipt of long-term outdoor relief and 8% were inmates of Melton House, the Loes and Wilford Incorporation workhouse.

Turning to questions of gender, research of parish registers and poor law records between 1773 and 1826 indicated that the aged male population comprised 49% of aged men who were not in receipt of relief and 28% who were recipients of occasional ad hoc relief, as shown in Table 5.5. The dependent aged male population comprised 23% of aged men who were dependent on poor relief, 13% of elderly men receiving regular outdoor relief and a further 10% who were inmates of the Melton House workhouse. In contrast, the aged female population of the parish in this period comprised 51% of women who were not in receipt of poor relief and 23% who were recipients of ad hoc relief. The dependent aged female population of the parish comprised 20% of women who were recipients of regular outdoor relief and 6% who were inmates of the Melton House workhouse.

⁷³⁵ William Marshall, 'The Forme and Maner of Subvention of Helping for Pore People', in *Some Early Tracts on Poor Relief*, Frank Salter, (London, Methuen & Co., 1926), p. 37.

Table 5.5. Hatcheston Independent and Dependent Aged - Gender (1773-1826)⁷³⁶

	Non-relief claimants	%	Occasional poor relief	%	Regular outdoor relief	%	In-house relief	%
Men	35	49%	26	28%	9	13%	7	10%
Women	49	51%	23	23%	20	20%	6	6%

While the actual number of relief recipients appears to be small, this was due to the size of the parish which was typical of Suffolk's other rural parishes, with a population of only 543 in 1801. As Smith points out, a small rural parish such as Hatcheston may only have a small number of its elderly residents in receipt of regular poor relief, but those recipients may have received substantial support and many were almost totally dependent on the parish.⁷³⁷

Holbrook : Case Study

A more detailed investigation of the impact of age and gender on patterns of poor relief was made possible due to the availability of unusually rich and near complete local records for the Suffolk parish of Holbrook which had a population of 447 in 1801.⁷³⁸ Research of archival sources make possible an in-depth quantitative and qualitative analysis of local patterns of relief to provide more precise information on the experiences of elderly male paupers within the parish. Holbrook had a population large enough to make quantitative analysis meaningful as well as displaying the demographic, economic, social characteristics, and poor relief practices common to rural parishes across the county. The analysis that follows provides a quantitative and comparative analysis of the number of men and women in receipt of relief, the age when relief was received, and the nature and duration of support. The impact of age and

⁷³⁶ SRO(I), ADA11/AB3/1-10; SRO(I), HD2448/4/2/2/4; Wrigley, Edward, *English population* pp. 198-340.

⁷³⁷ Richard Smith, 'Ageing and well-being', in *Old Age from Antiquity to Post Modernity*, ed. by Johnson and Thane, p. 77.

⁷³⁸ SRO(I), HD2448/4/2/2/4.

gender on patterns of relief was assessed through a longitudinal approach that followed the experiences of several paupers through their old age within the context of the economic and demographic changes Holbrook experienced in the second half of the eighteenth century and early nineteenth century and the pressure these changes exerted on parish social policies.

Demographic Profile

The population of Holbrook increased by nearly 60% between 1801 and 1831.⁷³⁹ The increase in population experienced by Holbrook in this period compares to an increase in population nationally of 65%, as estimated by Wrigley and Schofield.⁷⁴⁰ Those aged 0-14 years comprised 35% of Holbrook's total population, those aged 15 to 49 years represented 56%, while the elderly, those over 50, represented 9% of the parish population. However, if children aged 0-14 years are excluded from the analysis the aged become a more prominent group, comprising nearly 15% of the adult population and as such would have constituted a very visible presence within a tightly knit community such as Holbrook, as shown in Table 5.6.

Table 5.6. Holbrook Demographic Profile (1801)⁷⁴¹

Holbrook Demographic Profile - All Age Groups (1801)							
		0-14yrs.	%	15-49yrs.	%	50+ yrs.	%
Total Pop.	447	155	35%	249	56%	43	9.60%
Adult Pop.	292	—	—	249	85.0%	43	14.70%

Occupational profile

Holbrook in common with other rural parishes in the county was heavily dependent on agriculture as a source of employment. Farming in Holbrook was progressive and the parish had the geographical advantage of proximity to transport links to London and the parish

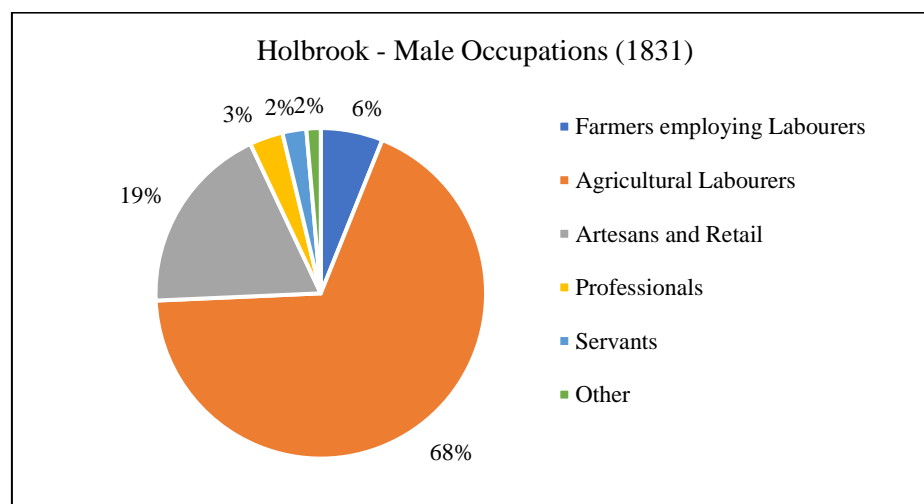
⁷³⁹ https://suffolk.gov.uk/media/pdfs/holbrook/east_bergholt.pdf

⁷⁴⁰ Wrigley, Edward and Schofield, *Richard*, *Population History*, p. 576-587.

⁷⁴¹ HD2448/4/2/2/4, FB187/D/1-5, *Holbrook Parish Registers (1721-1812)*.

experienced an increase in numbers of farm labourers alongside a decline in small independent farmers and servants in this period.⁷⁴² My research of the 1831 census revealed that farm labourers formed the largest occupational group within the parish.⁷⁴³ A total of 72% of males over the age of twenty were employed in agriculture, with 68% of men working as unskilled farm labourers, 2% as servants and a further 19% engaged in craft or retail occupations usually related to agriculture. The number of small independent farmers amounted to only 6% of the parish population and opportunities for employment other than in agriculture were negligible, with less than 1% of the male workforce employed in manufacturing activities not associated with agriculture. Figure 5.2. provides a snapshot of the occupational structure for Holbrook in 1831 and the predominance of agriculture as a source of employment in the parish which is in stark contrast to the falling numbers employed in agriculture nationally.

Figure 5.2. Holbrook – Male Occupations (1831)⁷⁴⁴



⁷⁴² Joan Thirsk, *Suffolk Farming in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1958). Nesta Evans, *The East Anglian Linen Industry: Rural Industry and Local Economy 1500-1850* (Guildford: Gower, 1985).

⁷⁴³ *1831 Census of Great Britain, Abstract of answers Table 1 – Population Abstract*, GB Historical GIS / University of Portsmouth, Holbrook CP/AP through time | Industry Statistics | Males aged 20 and over, in 9 occupational categories, *A Vision of Britain through Time*,

URL:http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/unit/10257554/cube/OCC_PAR1831

⁷⁴⁴ URL: http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/unit/10257554/cube/OCC_PAR1831.

Social structure

Study findings revealed that members of the lower orders comprised 72% of the population of the parish, while the middling orders comprised 19% and the upper orders 9%.⁷⁴⁵ These findings largely correspond to those of Wrigley, who while acknowledging local variations, estimated that nationally in the order of 5% of the population were members of the upper orders, 20% were members of the middle orders and in the order of 80% of the population were members of the lower orders dependent on wage income.⁷⁴⁶

However, it must be recognised that the social structure of Holbrook comprising of three orders is based on the occupations undertaken in the parish grouped by status. As such, this provides a somewhat crude portrait of the social structure of the parish and obscures the stratification and diversity which existed within the lower orders, as previously identified.

Social welfare pressure

Research of Holbrook's poor law records indicated that relief provision in the parish reflect practice in the wider region with the old receiving a disproportionate amount of parish relief expenditure according to their number. Those over 50 years of age received 40% of parish outdoor relief expenditure between 1760 and 1793 despite representing less than 10%, as shown in Table 5.7.

While advanced age was undoubtedly an asset for Holbrook's aged population when establishing the eligibility for relief it should not be assumed that the aged of the parish had an indisputable right to relief at all times and in all situations. The condition of old age in itself was not a *de facto* reason when determining eligibility for relief.

⁷⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁴⁶ Wrigley, 'British population', 57-95

Table 5.7. Outdoor Relief Expenditure (1760 - 1793)⁷⁴⁷

Holbrook Outdoor Relief Expenditure (1760-1793)			
	Total outdoor relief expenditure	Expenditure - recipients aged 50+ years	% of total expenditure
Holbrook	£253	£102	40%

My research confirmed the findings of previous studies which revealed it was necessary for aged claimants to cite additional cause for the hardship they were experiencing, such as illness or lack of employment, rather than simply the debilitating effects of advanced old age.⁷⁴⁸ Requests from the elderly and their eligibility to receive relief were seldom taken at face value by the poor law authorities. Contemporary social commentators often claimed that sickness, disability or even the lack of employment could be exaggerated, particularly when claimants resided some distance away from their parish of settlement. Defoe writing in 1700 asserted that, ‘A poor man or woman who has lost his Hand or Leg, or Sight, is visibly disabled, and we cannot be deceived, whereas other Infirmities are not so easily judged.’⁷⁴⁹ Holbrook’s elderly paupers were no doubt aware of the scepticism that their claim for relief may possibly evoke in the eyes of the poor law authorities and that requesting relief due to old age alone was unlikely to elicit a positive response from the authorities.

My findings confirmed that age was by no means the main criteria by which claimants were judged. For male aged recipients, the reason most often recorded in the poor law records for

⁷⁴⁷ SRO(I), AD7/AB4/1-4.

⁷⁴⁸ Ottaway, ‘Providing for the Elderly’, pp. 391-418; Susannah Ottaway & Samantha Williams, ‘Reconstructing the Life-Cycle Experience in the Time of the Old Poor Law’, *Archives*, Vol 23, Issue 98, (1998), pp. 19-29; Smith, ‘Ageing and well-being’, in *Old Age from Antiquity to Post Modernity*, ed. by Johnson and Thane, pp. 64-95; Williams, Samantha, *Poverty, Gender and Life-Cycle*; Samantha Williams, ‘The Crisis of the English Poor Law’ in *Population, Welfare and Economic Change in Britain 1290-1834*, ed. by Briggs, pp18-48; Pat Thane, *Old Age in English History: Past Experiences, Present Issues* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

⁷⁴⁹ Daniel Defoe, *Several essays relating to academies, banks, bankrupts, charity-lotteries* (London: Thomas Cockerill, 1700), p. 149

granting relief was inability to work due to illness or injury, even in cases of advanced old age. George Rivett at the age of 78 years received 3 shillings in 1784 not because of his advanced age but due to 'Having no work'. Likewise John Lucas age 64 years received 4 shillings relief in 1785 due to being 'Lame, unable to work'.

Analysis of Holbrook's poor law records also revealed, in common with other rural parishes in the region, that the outdoor relief provided to women was often of a more generous nature, granted at an earlier age and for a longer duration than was the case for their male counterparts. The findings of this study confirm the view of Thomson, that while a significant number of men in the early nineteenth century were in receipt of poor relief the evidence suggests that they were less likely to have enjoyed the same level of generosity as that granted women from the poor law authorities.⁷⁵⁰

The findings of this study support the argument made by Goose in his study of the situation after 1843, that in this earlier period, 'outdoor relief was granted to men more grudgingly than it was to women, and greater pressure was placed upon men to find work, however menial.'⁷⁵¹ Patterns of relief can be explained largely as a consequence of the acute financial pressures being exerted on poor law authorities. The increase in applications for relief by elderly male claimants as a result of high levels of agricultural unemployment in the region seems to have led to what might be described as a 'covert' change in social welfare policy, to the disadvantage of elderly men. Evidence from the poor law records of the region indicate an increased expectation on behalf of the poor law authorities that men, even in advanced old age, would continue to work whenever possible. The study's findings would suggest, in common with the

⁷⁵⁰ David Thomson, 'The Decline of Social Welfare: Falling State Support for the Elderly Since early Victorian Times', *Ageing and Society*, 4 (1984), 451-482 (p. 468).

⁷⁵¹ Goose, 'Poverty, old age and gender in nineteenth-century England, 353.

view of Pelling, that men ‘worked as long as they could even if their occupation had to be modified because of disability.’⁷⁵²

It can be argued, as Goose has done in his study of poverty in nineteenth-century Hertfordshire, that the apparent gender bias in the provision of relief in Suffolk can possibly be viewed in two ways. It is commonly interpreted as a recognition on the part of poor law authorities of the greater vulnerability of women and their need for relief, a perception which extended through the eighteenth century and into the nineteenth century. However, an alternative view would be to suggest that there was simply greater willingness on the part of Suffolk’s poor law officials to grant relief to women because of prevailing societal ideas about gender and gender roles.⁷⁵³

As Lynn Hollen Lees states, ‘The rules of welfare entitlement ... were shaped by the attitudes towards gender. Men worked and took care of their families; women cared for children and needed help if she lacked a husband.’⁷⁵⁴ However, this view was to change as the nineteenth century progressed.

My findings revealed that gender was a significant factor in the provision of relief to the elderly in Holbrook, as well as within the wider region. Holbrook’s outdoor relief expenditure is shown in Table 5.8. and reveals a distinctly gendered pattern of relief provision with 69% of poor law expenditure being allocated to aged female recipients as opposed to only 31% to aged males. Some care, however, needs to be taken with these findings. Due to the nature of the poor law records it is not always possible to determine whether relief was granted to women due to being widows with dependent children rather than purely as a consequence of old age. However, it is recognised that by defining the onset of old age at 50 years increases the likelihood of widows with small children being recipients of poor relief.

⁷⁵² Pelling, Margaret and Smith, Richard, *Life, Death and the Elderly*, p, 23

⁷⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 357.

⁷⁵⁴ Lees, Lynn Hollen, *The Solidarities of Strangers*, p. 134.

Table 5.8. Holbrook Outdoor Relief Expenditure – Gender Analysis (1760-1793)⁷⁵⁵

Outdoor Relief Aged Recipients - 50+ yrs. (1760-1793)					
	Total expenditure (£'s)	Expenditure - male recipients (£'s)	% of total exp.	Expenditure - female recipients (£'s)	% of total exp.
Holbrook	102	32	31%	70	69%

The nature of the Holbrook's poor law records do not make it possible to always identify those women receiving a 'widows pension'. Widows, as Williams identified, were deemed to be particularly worthy of relief due to not being accountable for their situation.⁷⁵⁶ However, even taking account of this, the weighting of the evidence would indicate significant gender bias in the provision of relief, to the disadvantage of elderly men.

There was also a difference, according to gender, in terms of the age at which relief was provided. The average age women began receiving regular relief compared to their male counterparts is shown for Holbrook and a number of other parishes in Table 5.9. Elderly women commonly became recipients of regular relief in their early fifties although it was not uncommon for regular relief to be provided for women still in their forties and for it to be provided over a long period of time, often lasting several years.

Table 5.9. Average age at which regular relief was received in 6 parishes (1756-1820)⁷⁵⁷

Elderly Labouring Poor –Regular relief provision (1756-1820)				
Parish	Male Ave. age	No. of observations	Female Ave. age	No. of observations
East Bergholt	58	37	51	33
Holbrook	56	20	52	19
Trimley St. Martin	58	19	51	22
Hacheston	61	29	52	21
Cookley	59	13	51	6
Bawdsey	57	23	49	25

⁷⁵⁵ SRO(I), AD7/AB4/1-4.

⁷⁵⁶ Williams, Samantha, *Poverty, Gender and Life -Cycle*, p. 12, p. 101.

⁷⁵⁷ SRO(I), AD7/AB4/1-4; SRO(I), ADA10/AB3/1-6; SRO(I), ADA11/AB3/1-10; SRO(I), AB3/1-3.

In Holbrook, the average age for women to first receive relief was 52 years as opposed to 56 years for men, as shown in Table 5.9. Analysis of the poor law records for several other Suffolk parishes revealed a similar age disparity between women and men. The average age across the region at which men became regular recipients of poor relief was 59 years, while for women the average age was much lower at 50.

Research of Holbrook's poor law records revealed that the financial relief received by women often comprised regular weekly or monthly amounts sometimes provided over a significant period of time. In contrast, the smaller amounts received by men would appear to reflect a more 'hawkish' approach commonly adopted by poor law authorities to the provision of relief to aged men. This relief took the form of minimal financial support intended to tide over elderly male recipients until they were able to resume work, rather than as a means of longer-term support in the form of a 'pension' in old age.

My research of the poor law records for a number of Suffolk parishes typical of the region, demographically and economically, revealed the extent that older women were treated with greater generosity by the poor law authorities in contrast to their male counterparts. The poor law relief records of the parishes of Trimley St. Martin, Cookley, East Bergholt, Hacheston and Holbrook between 1760 and 1826 were analysed to identify the number of older men and women who were relief recipients, the amount they received and the duration of the relief. Study findings also included the nature of relief and duration of relief provided to older couples and older families. The age of recipients of poor relief was established by research of parish baptism, marriage and burial records as well as the application of the methodology for establishing the age of relief recipients whose baptism records could not be found, as discussed earlier in this chapter. This process was supported by the use of the 'FreeREG' database of parish registers.

The relief received by elderly men is shown in Table 5.10. and the duration of relief provision in Table 5.11. I found that the relief provided to elderly men generally consisted of small financial sums between 1/6d to 2 shillings a week. My analysis of the poor law records revealed that 70% of elderly male relief recipients received relief amounting to between 1 and 20 shillings, as shown in Table 5.10.

The duration with which relief was provided to elderly men was usually found to be of a short term nature, typically lasting between 1 and 10 weeks, with 73% of elderly male relief recipients receiving relief for this duration, as shown in Table 5. 11.

Table 5.10. Relief Provision – Elderly Men⁷⁵⁸

Parish	No. Male Recipients	Shillings							
		1-10	11-20	21-30	31-40	41-100	101-200	200-300	300+
East Bergholt	54	18	19	10	4	2	1	0	0
Hacheston	35	15	11	7	1	1	0	0	0
Trimley St. Martin	18	8	5	1	3	1	0	0	0
Cookley	17	6	5	3	1	2	0	0	0
Holbrook	32	14	8	4	5	0	1	0	0
Total	156	61	48	25	14	6	2	0	0
%		39%	31%	16%	9%	4%	1%	0%	0%
		70%							

⁷⁵⁸ SRO(I), FC161/G/111/1-4; SRO(I), FB159.G/5/1-14, SRO(I), FC101/G/3/1-2; SRO(I), FB191/G/7/1; SRO(I), FB198/G/1/1; SRO(I), FB184/A/1/1; SRO(I), FB158/G/4/1; SRO(I), FB160/E/1/1.

Table 5. 11. Duration of Relief – Elderly Men⁷⁵⁹

Parish	No. Male Recipients	Duration of Relief							
		1-4 wks.	5-10 wks.	11- 20 wks.	21 - 30 wks.	31 - 52 wks.	53 - 79 wks.	80 - 100 wks.	100+ wks.
East Bergholt	54	18	19	10	4	2	0	1	0
Hacheston	35	15	11	7	2	0	0	0	0
Trimley St. Martin	18	10	5	1	2	0	0	0	0
Cookley	17	8	5	1	1	1	0	0	0
Holbrook	32	15	9	5	2	1	0	0	0
Total	156	66	49	24	11	4	0	1	0%
%		42%	31%	15%	7%	3%	0%	1%	0
		73%							

In contrast to the relief received by elderly men, the relief provided to women was generally of a higher amount and provided for a longer period of time. Research findings on relief provided to elderly women revealed 76% of elderly female relief recipients received financial relief amounting to between 21 and 100 shillings, relief which amounted to significantly more than that typically provided to men, as shown in Table 5.12.

Table 5. 12. Relief Provision – Elderly Women⁷⁶⁰

Parish	No. Female Recipients	Shillings							
		0-10	Nov-20	21-30	31-40	41-100	101-200	200-300	300+
East Bergholt	69	3	3	20	27	9	3	2	2
Hacheston	49	3	3	11	15	12	5	0	0
Trimley St. Martin	18	2	1	0	4	5	5	1	0
Cookley	19	2	0	2	6	5	3	1	0
Holbrook	47	2	3	15	12	10	2	3	0
Total	202	12	10	48	64	41	18	7	2
%		6%	5%	24%	32%	20%	9%	3%	1%
				76%					

⁷⁵⁹ Ibid.⁷⁶⁰ Ibid.

Research of poor law records also revealed the duration of relief provided to elderly women was usually between 11 and 52 weeks, with 78% of elderly female relief recipients receiving relief for that period of time, a significantly longer period of relief than that usually provided to men, as shown in Table 5.13.

Table 5.13. Duration of Relief – Elderly Women⁷⁶¹

Parish	Duration of Relief								
	No. Female Recipients	1-4 wks.	5-10 wks.	11-20 wks.	21 - 30 wks.	31 - 52 wks.	53 - 79 wks.	80 - 100 wks.	100+ wks.
East Bergholt	69	3	7	17	23	12	4	1	2
Hacheston	49	3	2	10	19	12	2	1	0
Trimley St. Martin	18	1	0	6	4	5	0	2	0
Cookley	19	1	4	1	7	4	1	1	0
Holbrook	47	2	3	11	14	12	3	2	0
Total	202	10	16	45	67	45	10	7	2
%		5%	8%	22%	33%	22%	5%	3%	1%
78%									

Research findings confirmed that relief provided to women was more generous and for longer periods of time than that provided for their male counterparts and were consistent with Smith's study of relief provision to the elderly.⁷⁶² For example, in the parish of Holbrook, Widow Cole was given financial support that amounted to 260 shillings between 1784 and 1789, while Widow Cowley received 275 shillings between 1775 and 1783 in the form of a regular monthly pension which amounted to between 2 and 3 shillings a week. However, it should be noted that the relief Cole received only amounted in total to less than twenty days of a skilled artisan's labour based on 1780 costs.⁷⁶³

⁷⁶¹ Ibid.

⁷⁶² Richard Smith, 'Ageing and well-being' in *Old Age from Antiquity to Post Modernity*, ed. by Johnson and Thane, 83-87.

⁷⁶³ SRO(I), AD7/AB4/1-4

However, the expectation remained that although widows, such as Cole were in receipt of regular support, that they would also continue to work in some capacity and that relief payments were only intended to supplement the income received from working. In contrast, however, relief provided to their male counterparts usually amounted to much less and for a shorter duration. For instance, John King from the age of 73 to 76 years was only in receipt of relief amounting to 34 shillings. Similarly, John Whiney received relief amounting to only 26 shillings when aged between 66 and 72 years.⁷⁶⁴

Findings from the poor law records for the neighbouring parish of East Bergholt also revealed a similar gendered pattern in the level and duration of relief allocation. For example, Margaret Abbott from 63 to her death aged 85 years received a total of 442 shillings, while Widow Hart between the age of 68 to 76 years was in receipt of 410 shillings. In contrast, the relief received by James Gusterson amounted to only 14 shillings between the age of 69 and 72 years, and John Hall only received 28 shillings between the age of 75 and 76 years. The relief provided to Gusterson and Hall can be regarded as being intended either to 'tide them over' till they were able to resume working again or prior to additional support being provided by kin. Research also revealed a difference in the level of generosity in the relief provided to families in contrast to that provided to elderly couples as shown in Table 5.14. and Table 5.15.

The relief provided to elderly couples was usually in the order of 21 to 100 shillings with 87% of elderly couples receiving relief over a period of between 11 and 52 weeks. In contrast the relief generally provided to elderly families comprised 82% of elderly families receiving relief ranging from 31 to 200 shillings provided over a period between 21 and 79 weeks, as shown in Table 5.15.

⁷⁶⁴ Ibid., AD7/AB4/1-4.

Table 5.14. Relief Provision Elderly Couple⁷⁶⁵

Parish	No. Male Recipients	Shillings							
		1-10	11-20	21-30	31-40	41-100	101-200	200-300	300+
East Bergholt	19	1	3	4	4	5	2	0	0
Hacheston	13	0	1	5	5	2	0	0	0
Trimley St. Martin	10	0	0	1	4	5	0	0	0
Cookley	8	0	0	1	3	4	0	0	0
Holbrook	12	0	0	—	4	7	1	0	0
Total	62	1	4	11	20	23	3	0	0
%		2%	6%	18%	32%	37%	5%	0%	0%
						87%			

Table 5.15. Relief Provision Elderly Family – Female Head of Family⁷⁶⁶

Parish	No. of Recipients	Shillings							
		1-10	11-20	21-30	31-40	41-100	101-200	200-300	300+
East Bergholt	21	1	1	1	4	8	6	0	0
Hacheston	17	1	0	2	5	5	3	0	0
Trimley St. Martin	10	0	0	2	4	4	0	0	0
Cookley	9	0	0	1	5	4	0	0	0
Holbrook	19	0	2	2	7	4	3	1	0
Total	76	2	3	8	25	25	12	1	0
%		3%	4%	11%	33%	33%	16%	1%	0%
						82%			

Study findings also indicated that while many women began to receive pensions usually in their early 60s, regular relief for most men was uncommon until they were in their 70s. A possible explanation, as Ottaway suggests in her study on the provision of relief for the elderly, is that that pensions fulfilled somewhat different roles for elderly men and women and as such were gender related. Men became dependent often at an advanced age and the short duration of their

⁷⁶⁵ SRO(I), FC161/G/111/1-4; SRO(I), FB159.G/5/1-14, SRO(I), FC101/G/3/1-2; SRO(I), FB191/G/7/1; SRO(I), FB198/G/1/1; SRO(I), FB184/A/1/1; SRO(I), FB158/G/4/1; SRO(I), FB160/E/1/1.

⁷⁶⁶ Ibid.

relief is indicative of them being in an advanced stage of decrepitude. On the other hand, women became dependent at an earlier stage of old age, possibly due to experiencing physical debility at an earlier age than men.⁷⁶⁷

Historians, including Ottaway and Smith, have identified what has been termed the ‘masculisation’ of pensions in the second half of the eighteenth century and in the first half of the nineteenth century, based on an increase in the dependency of elderly men on poor relief.⁷⁶⁸ Study findings also identified a ‘masculinisation’ of those receiving poor relief within the aged population of Suffolk after 1780, consistent with the findings of Smith.⁷⁶⁹ However, care must be taken in the interpretation of poor law records upon which this assertion is based. Williams, points to what she terms ‘the illusion of masculinisation’, which she attributes to the analysis of named relief recipients in poor law accounts rather than actual families. Poor relief provided to families and the elderly was usually recorded in the accounts in the name of the husband, while still benefiting wives and possibly children.⁷⁷⁰

There was an important change in the make-up of the elderly population of relief recipients after 1815. Prior to 1815 most elderly relief recipients were either single or widowed men or women but after 1815 due to extensive unemployment and underemployment the number of elderly couples receiving relief increased significantly. In Suffolk’s over-stocked labour market elderly men became increasingly marginalised and dependent on long-term relief.⁷⁷¹ Williams, in her study of Campton and Shefford, despite her reservations on the process of masculinization of relief, also identified a trend for pensioner populations to become increasing

⁷⁶⁷ Ottaway, ‘Providing for the Elderly in Eighteenth Century England’, p. 409.

⁷⁶⁸ Richard Smith, ‘Ageing and Well-being’ in *Old Age from Antiquity to Post Modernity*, ed. by Johnson and Thane, pp. 64-95; Ottaway, ‘Providing for the Elderly’, pp. 391-418.

⁷⁶⁹ Richard Smith, ‘Charity, self-interest and welfare: reflections from demographic and family history’. in *Charity, self-interest and welfare*, ed. by Martin Dauntton (London: Routledge, 1996). Pp. 23-50.

⁷⁷⁰ Samantha Williams, ‘Crisis of the English Poor Law’, in *Population, Welfare and Economic Change in Britain 1290-1834*, ed. by Briggs, p. 140.

⁷⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 151

masculinised at the end of the eighteenth century due to the increasing difficulties elderly men faced finding work.⁷⁷²

Both Ottaway and King have identified that in the second half of the eighteenth century and in the first half of the nineteenth century that the level of relief failed to keep pace with rising inflation and the real value of poor relief declined. Prices rose steadily throughout much of the eighteenth century with the rise in prices after 1790 being particularly rapid. An interesting insight into the extent of the rise in prices in Suffolk was obtained by research of the cost of provisions purchased by the Carlford and Colneis Incorporation intended for workhouse inmates. This enabled price rises specific to Suffolk to be identified rather than relying on national averages. While the provisions were intended for the inmates of the incorporation's House of Industry they reflect the general rise in prices which was experienced in the region. Research of the incorporation's Accounts of Weekly Expences for Provisions between 1758 and 1803 revealed that the price of staple foodstuffs purchased by the incorporation increased by between 25% to 30% between 1758 and 1791. The price of flour doubled between 1758 and 1796 and the average price of all staple commodities purchased by the incorporation in 1801 was double that of 1758.⁷⁷³

As Ottaway remarked:

For the aged poor, the safety net offered by the Old Poor Law had been thrown wider in this period, but it was also weakened in strength by the economic hardships of the late eighteenth century.⁷⁷⁴

⁷⁷² Williams, Samantha, *Poverty, Gender, and Life-Cycle*, p. 143.

⁷⁷³ SRO(I), ADA10/CD1/1-4; John Shaw, 'The Development of the Poor Law Local Acts 1695-1833 with particular reference to the Incorporated Hundreds of East Anglia', (un-published doctoral thesis, University of East Anglia, 1989).

⁷⁷⁴ Ottaway, 'Providing for the Elderly', 409.

Increasing Bureaucracy

My findings also suggest that changes in the manner relief provision was administered by rural incorporations may partly explain why gendered patterns in the provision of relief to the elderly became increasingly apparent in this period. Incorporations were run by elected Directors of the Poor and Acting Guardians drawn from the local clergy and landowners to manage and administer the provision of poor relief for parishes within the incorporations.⁷⁷⁵

The overriding priority for the incorporated Hundreds was, as Thompson notes, the efficient management and control of relief costs and they were established with the ‘explicit intention of imposing a cap on poor relief assessments.’⁷⁷⁶ This was usually achieved by a clause in the local act which specified that parish assessments should not surpass, ‘the Sum which shall have been expended for the Relief and Support of the Poor ... upon an Average of Seven Years’ prior to the passage of the act.’⁷⁷⁷

The establishment of larger administrative entities by merging formally small autonomous parishes into incorporations aimed to make the administration of the poor law more efficient and to constrain further increases in the poor rate of Suffolk’s parishes. But in reality and perhaps deliberately it also made decision-making increasingly bureaucratic and less personal.

As Lees commented:

Over time the granting of relief became an increasingly formalised process, depending more and more upon written records and decisions. Yet, it still involved intangibles: deference to paternalism, notions about gender, age and childhood. “Appropriate” relief was a protean,

⁷⁷⁵ Carlford and Colneis (1756), Loes and Wilford (1756), Blything (1764), Bosmere and Claydon (1764), Samford (1764), Mutford and Lothingland (1764), Wangford (1764), Stow (1778), Cosford (1779).

⁷⁷⁶ Stephen Thompson, ‘Population Growth’ in *Population, Welfare and Economic Change*, ed by Briggs, p. 220.

⁷⁷⁷ Stow Hundred, 18. Geo. III, c. 35.

changeable concept, one regularly redefined by ... authorities during the granting of welfare.⁷⁷⁸

Not only did the establishment of the rural incorporations increase the bureaucratic manner in which the poor law was administered, it also fostered a more 'hawkish' attitude within the incorporations towards the provision of relief, which is evident in the manner that claims for relief were assessed, particularly in the case of aged male claimants. The experience of John Lucas and the manner in which his request for relief was considered by the Samford Incorporation Directors and Acting Guardians of the Poor provides such an example. Lucas was a resident of the parish of Holbrook and appears typical of many elderly unskilled farm labourers in the region. His situation was revealed through a process of reconstitution using the parish registers of All Saints and nominal linkage with the Samford Incorporation poor law records.⁷⁷⁹ His application for relief and the procedures which were followed to determine his eligibility demonstrate the growing bureaucratic complexity and what may be considered inhumanity of the system.

Lucas was aged 68 when in 1785 he first applied to the Samford Poor Law Incorporation for relief. No records exist of him receiving financial support prior to this date, suggesting he was able through his own efforts to achieve self-sufficiency and maintain residential independence. Lucas was possibly a widower and no records could be found in the parish marriage records relating to him and the process of family reconstitution failed to reveal the existence of any extended family or kin from which he might have obtained support in times of hardship. The poor law records show Lucas suffered regular bouts of illness and physical incapacity in old age which prevented him from working and undermined his efforts to maintain independence. Importantly, possibly being single or a widower, also deprived him of the benefit which

⁷⁷⁸ Lees, Lynn, Hollen, *The Solidarities of Strangers*, p. 32

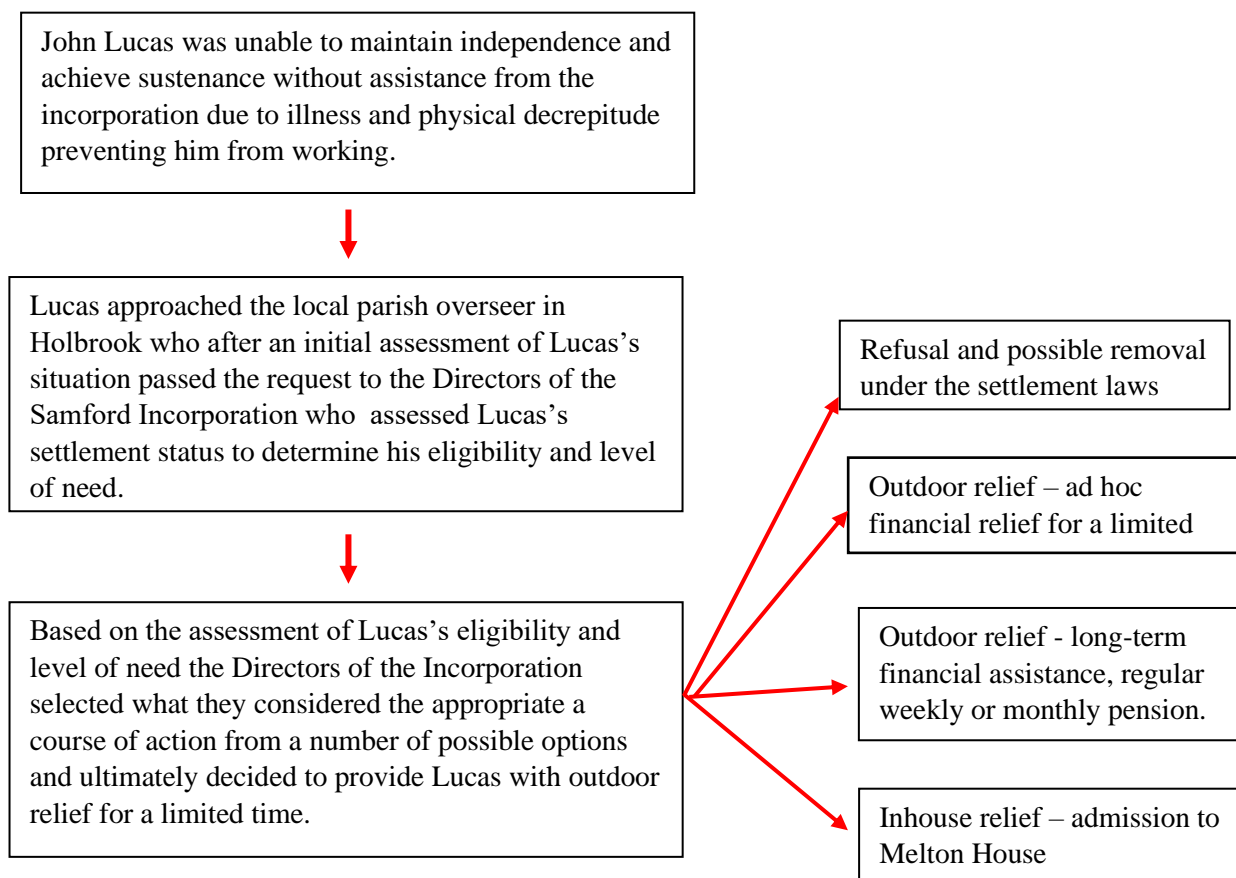
⁷⁷⁹ SRO(I), FB187/ D/1-5; SRO(I), AD7/AB4/1-4.

accrued from the second income a wife could provide, which for many aged couples was instrumental in achieving self-sufficiency and maintaining independence.

Lucas had no option other than to approach the poor law authorities for support in times of difficulty during his old age. He had, however, to take a series of steps to try and obtain help. Initially, Lucas had to approach the local overseer to explain the difficulties of his situation and who after an initial assessment of his need passed the matter on to the Directors of the Samford Poor Law Incorporation to be considered at their weekly committee meeting. At the outset, the Directors had to confirm Lucas's settlement status and consequent eligibility for relief. A decision was then made either to refuse his request or to determine the nature of relief based on his perceived level of need, as shown in Figure 5.3.

Despite being 68 years old Lucas's advanced age alone was not sufficient reason in itself for being granted assistance. The Samford Incorporation poor law records state that it was the combination of illness, which was preventing him from working, together with his advanced age, which established his eligibility. Illness and the consequent inability to work rather than hardship due to old age was cited in the Samford Incorporation records on each subsequent occasion Lucas was provided with relief.

Figure 5.3. The process of poor relief⁷⁸⁰



As a result of his initial claim for relief Lucas was provided with 4 shillings, on account of being ill and unable to work, the relief presumably being intended to tide him over until he was able to resume working again. Lucas approached the poor law authorities on several occasions between 1785 and his death in 1791 and the evidence shows that on each separate occasion, although his eligibility for relief had been established at the time of his initial claim, he had to be re-assessed and relief determined according to his perceived needs on each separate occasion.

⁷⁸⁰ Jeremy Boulton, 'Inhouse or Outdoors? Welfare Priorities and Pauper Choices in the Metropolis under the Old Poor Law, 1718-1824' in *Population, Welfare and Economic Change* ed. by Briggs (Woodbridge, The Boydell Press, 2013), 153-188, (p. 184).

The relief Lucas received took the form of a small financial payment, usually two or three shillings a week, as shown in Table 5.16.

Table 5.16. John Lucas - Poor Relief 1788-1791⁷⁸¹

Year	Date	Age (yrs.)	Type of Relief	Reason	Relief (shillings)
1785	27-Feb	68	Outdoor relief	'He being ill... unable to work.'	4
1789	14-Jan	69	–	'Being lame.'	3
1789	28-Jan	69	–	'Continuing lame.'	2
1791	12-Jan	70	–	'Two weeks relief - he being ill.'	6
1791	19-Jan	70	–	'Continuing ill'	3

The provision of short-term financial relief to men such as Lucas reflected the bureaucratic and increasingly gendered approach to the provision of poor relief. Labouring men, despite their advanced age, had to keep re-applying for financial assistance which usually consisted of small sums ranging from 1 to 3 shillings for up to three weeks at a time. The policy, it is suggested here, reflected the desire of the Samford Incorporation, to avoid wherever possible the provision of a long-term pension, in the form of a weekly or monthly sum paid throughout the year, which could result in a lifetime commitment and entail significant expenditure.⁷⁸² It seems there was a definite expectation on the part of the poor law authorities that although Lucas was in his late sixties he would continue to work whenever possible, relief was intended merely to supplement his own efforts of achieving self-sufficiency and residential independence.

The increasingly formalised and bureaucratic nature of dealing with relief requests as well as the re-assessment of repeat relief claimants, as in the case of Lucas, can be interpreted as being symptomatic of an attempt on the part of the poor law authorities to control relief expenditure by both the implementation of strict financial controls and procedures, but also by making the

⁷⁸¹ SRO(I), AD7/AB4/1-4.

⁷⁸² Steven King, (ed), *Narratives of the Poor*, (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2006), p. xxxvi.

application process as lengthy, intrusive, and formidable as possible, in response to rising unemployment and increasingly to the disadvantage of old men.

Inhouse Relief

The remainder of this chapter examines the provision of inhouse relief to elderly paupers and explores the extent to which decisions to admit members of the elderly poor to the workhouse were significantly influenced by gender as well as lifecycle dynamics. Findings are the result of my research of the workhouse admission procedures and administrative records of the Carlford and Colneis, Blything, Loes and Wilford and Bosmere and Claydon, and Samford incorporations.⁷⁸³ The research conducted for this study revealed the representation of the elderly typically found within the total workhouse population, what proportion were men, the age at which men were typically admitted to the workhouse and on what basis they appear to have been admitted rather than receiving outdoor relief. The chapter focuses specifically on the admission procedures of the region's workhouses and not the workhouse environment and quality of life it afforded to elderly male inmates which was discussed in the previous chapter.

How many elderly admissions?

Rising inflation from the second half of the eighteenth century and in the first half of the nineteenth century together with reduced opportunities for employment in agriculture for elderly men resulted in increasing numbers of them becoming recipients of poor relief. However, the view of Ottaway that elderly men unable to maintain their independence and achieve sustenance increasingly found that their only option was to enter the workhouse, 'deprived of ... personal freedom', is questionable in the case of Suffolk.⁷⁸⁴ In fact, my research

⁷⁸³ Note: The inhouse admission records and documentation for the following incorporations were analysed in depth: Carlford and Colneis, Blything, Loes and Wilford and Bosmere and Claydon, and Samford, who collectively administered the poor law on behalf of 170 formerly independent parishes, *Rules, Orders and Regulations, for the Better Government of the Poor, in the House of Industry* (Ipswich, J. Craighton, 1759).

⁷⁸⁴ Ottaway, Susannah, *The Decline of Life*: p.10.

of the workhouse records of the various Suffolk incorporations revealed that while the number of elderly males admitted to the workhouse remained higher than that of females throughout the period, the proportion they represented within the total workhouse population remained largely consistent throughout the second half of the eighteenth century and early nineteenth century.⁷⁸⁵

Establishing an accurate demographic profile of the elderly male workhouse inmate population is somewhat problematic due to the manner of the incorporations record keeping. While each workhouse admission was recorded by the various incorporations at their Weekly Committee Meeting, the age of an inmate was only seldomly recorded and the date of discharge or death is sometimes missing or inconsistent. Nor did incorporation records usually provide details of the total workhouse population and demographic profile of that population on a rolling weekly or monthly basis. Although this appears surprising, it was not common practice for the Directors to maintain a rolling total of workhouse inmates, which may have been due to the constantly changing inmate population.⁷⁸⁶ For instance, the study's research of workhouse records revealed that the able-bodied poor tended to use the workhouse on a short-term basis, usually due to short-term unemployment or illness, leaving as quickly as they could, often in a matter of days.

However, the Carlford and Colneis Incorporation Workhouse Master records, compiled between 1794 and 1800, provide the opportunity to assess the size and composition of the incorporation workhouse inmate population, and to compare it with that of 1758 when the workhouse first came into operation.⁷⁸⁷ The research of the incorporation's admission records

⁷⁸⁵ SRO(I), ADA10/AB3//1-6; SRO(I), ADA10/CB5/1, *Carlford and Colneis Incorporation, Workhouse Master: Inmates: Weekly Report on the State of the Poor, 1794-1801*, SRO(I), AB3/1-3; SRO(I), ADA/1/AG1/1, *Workhouse Admissions*, SRO(I), ADA11/AB3/1-10; , SRO(I), AD7/AB4/1-4.

⁷⁸⁶ John Adams, 'The Old Poor Law in Suffolk 1727 -1834', *The Suffolk Review*, Vol 47, (2006), pp. 20-34, (p. 19).

⁷⁸⁷ SRO(I), ADA/1/AG1/1.

revealed that a total of 192 paupers were transferred from Suffolk's parochial poorhouses to the Carlford and Colneis Incorporation House of Industry, Nacton House in 1758.⁷⁸⁸ This research also revealed that from its establishment Nacton House primarily provided inhouse accommodation to the young and to the old, as shown in Table 5.17. Accommodation in 1758 was provided for 47 elderly paupers aged 50 years and older and who comprised 24% of the total population of the workhouse, together with 117 children 0-19 years of age who comprised 61% of the total workhouse population.⁷⁸⁹ Unfortunately, no further records were kept on the size or demographic profile of the workhouse population after it first became operational in 1758 until 1794.

Table 5.17. Nacton House Admissions 1758⁷⁹⁰

Nacton House Admissions - March 1758		
Age	No.	%
0-9 yrs.	80	42%
10-19 yrs.	37	19%
20-29 yrs.	4	2%
30-39 yrs.	11	6%
40-49 yrs.	13	7%
50-59 yrs.	10	5%
60+ yrs.	37	19%
	192	100%

Research conducted of the Workhouse Master records, which were kept on a weekly basis between 1794 and 1800, revealed the number of elderly inmates as well as what percentage of the overall workhouse population they represented. Importantly, these records enable a comparison to be made of the profile of the workhouse population in 1758, and importantly the degree of continuity or change that took place between 1758 and 1800.

⁷⁸⁸ Webb, Stanley and Beatrice, *History of the Poor Law*, p.128.

⁷⁸⁹ SRO(I), ADA10/AB3/1-6

⁷⁹⁰ SRO(I), ADA10/AB3/1.

The workhouse demographic profile from 1794 to 1800 is shown in Table 5.18. and is the result of the study's research of the Workhouse Master records. This shows the total workhouse population, the number of able-bodied inmates under 50 years and the number of elderly inmates, aged 50 years and over, within the total workhouse inmate population. Importantly, the study's findings reveal that the number and proportion of elderly men within the total population between 1794 and 1800 appears to have remained little changed from that in 1758 and so does not reflect the findings of historians such as Williams who in her study of the 'crisis' of the poor law in the final decade of the eighteenth century identified a trend for the number of aged men being admitted to workhouses to increase as the century progressed.⁷⁹¹

Significantly, the study's research of the demographic profile of the Carlford and Colneis workhouse population, which appears typical of other incorporation workhouses in Suffolk, showed that it remained little changed between 1794 and 1800. The study's findings tend to counter Ottaway's view, certainly in the case of Suffolk, that the workhouse assumed greater importance for the elderly in the closing decades of the eighteenth century and, 'that older, poor individuals were increasingly relegated to the workhouse'.⁷⁹² While my research of the Carlford and Colneis Incorporation records reveal that while the workhouse population was predominantly male, the number of elderly male inmates and the proportion they represented within the total workhouse population remained largely unchanged at between 13% and 14% of the total workhouse population throughout the second half of the eighteenth century, as shown in Figure 5.4 and Table 5.18.

Significantly, the number of annual elderly admissions to Nacton House only rose slightly from 28 to 34 between 1794 and 1800, a period which has been described as one in which the poor

⁷⁹¹ Samantha Williams, 'Crisis' of the English Poor Law', in *Population, Welfare and Economic Change in Britain 1290-1834*, ed. by Briggs, p. 129-154.

⁷⁹² Ottaway, Susannah, *The Decline of Life*, p.14.

law was in 'crisis'. Elderly admissions were in fact lower in the final decade of the century than when Nacton House first became operational in 1758.⁷⁹³

Figure 5.4. Nacton House Inmate Demographic Profile (1794 – 1800)⁷⁹⁴

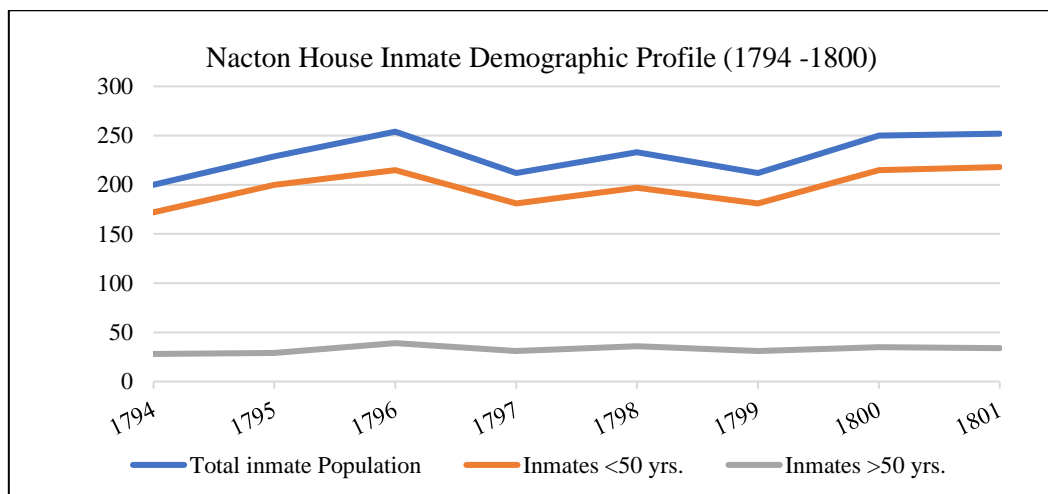


Table 5.18. Nacton House - Inmate Demographic Profile (1794 - 1801)⁷⁹⁵

Nacton House Inmate Demographic Profile (1794-1801)				
	Total Population	Inmates <50 yrs.	Inmates >50 yrs.	% of inmates >50 yrs.
1794	200	172	28	14%
1795	229	200	29	13%
1796	254	215	39	15%
1797	212	181	31	15%
1798	233	197	36	15%
1799	212	181	31	15%
1800	250	215	35	14%
1801	252	218	34	13%

My research of the workhouse admission records of other workhouses in the region revealed a level of elderly admissions consistent with that of Nacton House. For example, the number of elderly male admissions into the Blything Incorporation workhouse at Bulcamp between 1767

⁷⁹³ Samantha, Williams, 'Crisis' of the English Poor Law', in *Population, Welfare and Economic Change in Britain 1290-1834*, ed. by Briggs, p. 129-154.

⁷⁹⁴ SRO(I), ADA10/CB5/1.

⁷⁹⁵ SRO(I), ADA10/CB5/1.

and 1817 ranged between 16 and 33 elderly paupers annually. This equates to an average of 25 elderly admissions annually and represents an average of 16% of total admissions throughout the period. Between 1767 and 1817 the number of elderly paupers admitted into Bulcamp House remained consistently low and in common with Nacton House did not increase as the century progressed.

A further example of the masculine nature of the elderly workhouse population was provided by the research conducted into the Loes and Wilford Incorporation workhouse population. This revealed that between 1769 and 1780 Melton House admitted 156 inmates aged 50 years or over. Of these, 102 (65%) were elderly male paupers and 54 (35%) elderly females. The study's findings also revealed that as well as the elderly workhouse populations being predominately male, the age of admission to the workhouses maintained by Suffolk's rural incorporations also differed according to gender. The average age of admission for men was 67 years and 59 years for women.

While the number of elderly men remained low, the Nacton House population, in common with other incorporation workhouses, was predominantly masculine in character. The gender profile of the elderly inmates of Nacton House between 1794 and 1801 is shown in Table 5.19. Between 1794 and 1800 elderly men made up an average of 63% of workhouse inmates aged 50 years or over, while elderly females comprised only 37% of the total.

Table 5.19. Nacton House - Aged Inmate Demographic Profile (1794-1801)⁷⁹⁸

Nacton House Inmates >50 yrs. - Demographic Profile (1794-1801)					
Year	No. Inmates >50 yrs.	Male inmates 50 yrs.	%	Female inmates >50 yrs.	%
1794	28	18	64	10	36
1795	29	17	61	12	39
1796	39	25	65	14	35
1797	31	20	67	11	33
1798	36	23	66	13	34
1799	31	19	61	12	39
1800	35	22	64	13	36
1801	34	21	64	13	36
Average	33	21	63%	12	37%

However, quantitative analysis alone does not reveal why the elderly workhouse population was predominately masculine in this period. The views and opinions of those administering the poor law, overseers and Directors alike, were not usually recorded. Consequently, workhouse admission records do not reveal the basis on which decisions were made to admit an elderly man into the workhouse rather than providing outdoor relief and enabling them to live semi-independent lives in their own home. Workhouse admission records simply refer to elderly male workhouse inmates as ‘aged’, ‘very old’ or of ‘advanced years’. Put simply, analysis of the incorporation records do not in themselves provide the answer to why more poor aged men found themselves being admitted into the workhouse in comparison to their female counterparts. It was common for records to simply state, as in the case of Charles Barker aged 50, that he be ‘Admitted to the House’.⁷⁹⁹ In order to ascertain why admittance to the workhouse appears to have been gendered we need to explore societal attitudes to the provision of poor relief to the elderly from a wider perspective.

⁷⁹⁸ SRO(I), ADA10/CB5/1.

⁷⁹⁹ SRO(I), ADA11/AB3/1-10.

The admittance of a member of the aged poor into the workhouse cannot be regarded simply as an attempt to manage or reduce the cost of providing welfare relief to the elderly, although the perceived threat of admittance to the workhouse may have prevented some of the elderly from seeking poor relief. The provision of inhouse relief was recognised as rarely being the most cost-effective form of relief. It was significantly more expensive to provide inhouse rather than outdoor relief in the form of small regular financial sums. The study's research of the Treasurer's Accounts of the Carlford and Colneis Incorporation revealed the cost of keeping an elderly person in Nacton House in 1758 was in the region of £7 annually but, this had almost doubled to £13 annually by 1800 due to rising inflation and the consequent increase in the cost of provisions and maintenance of workhouse facilities. In contrast, outdoor financial relief in the form of a weekly pension usually only amounted to between £3 and £4 annually, the amount of relief provided remaining static throughout the period in spite of rising inflation.⁸⁰⁰ The rising expenditure of Nacton House between 1758 and 1801 and the difference in expenditure between male and female inmates, which is a result of research of the incorporation's Quarterly Accounts is shown in Table 5.20. Other than for a brief period between 1769 and 1778 expenditure on male inmates, due to their greater number, was usually more than double that expended on elderly female inmates.

It is necessary to take into consideration that the aged who were admitted to the workhouse were likely to be the most dependent due to their advanced decrepitude and therefore the cost of providing outdoor relief would have been significant, given the level of nursing care and medical costs that would have been necessitated. In other words, it may well have been just as

⁸⁰⁰ SRO(I), ADA10/AC2/1.

expensive or possibly more expensive to keep certain aged paupers in their own homes as in the workhouse.⁸⁰¹

Table 5.20. Nacton House Indoor Expenditure – Inmates Aged 50+ years (1758-1800)⁸⁰²

Nacton House Indoor Expenditure - Inmates 50+ yrs.			
	Maintenance costs for inmates >50 years	Male Inmates >50 yrs.	Female Inmates >50 yrs.
1758-63	£1,332	799	£533
1764-68	£1,902	1,591	£311
1769-73	£2,609	1,205	£1,404
1774-78	£2,044	800	£1,244
1779-83	£2,001	1,426	£575
1784-88	£2,460	1,651	£809
1789-93	£2,621	1,651	£970
1794-01	£4,170	2,585	£1,585

However, this does not help to explain why more aged men were admitted to the workhouse than women. Quite simply, the costs incurred providing medical and nursing care to an elderly relief recipient would have been the same irrelevant of gender. That aged widowers or single men were more likely to be admitted to the workhouse than aged females can only be assumed was a recognition on the part of the poor law authorities of the inability of many elderly men to maintain themselves in advanced old age. The inability of many aged men to live independently, even if provided with outdoor relief, is illustrated by the numerous letters written on behalf of elderly male paupers to the poor law authorities which describe their inability to maintain their independence due to a lack of domestic or home management skills. For example, Solomon Spooner who was discussed earlier, was described as ‘not capable of

⁸⁰¹ Smith, ‘Aging and well-being’, in *Old Age from Antiquity to Post Modernity*, ed. by Johnson and Thane, p. 82.

⁸⁰² SRO (I), ADA 10/AC2/1.

doing anything for himself for his age is 76.⁸⁰³ The perceived inability of aged men to maintain themselves independently was perhaps the decisive factor in the decision to provide inhouse relief. In fact, workhouse records commonly stated that aged men were ‘ordered’ into the workhouse. For example, the Loes and Wilford Workhouse records state Francis Hall aged 79 was ‘Ordered into the House’ in 1810 and, Henry Capon aged 62 who in 1781 who was ‘to be brought to the House of Industry.’⁸⁰⁴

Research conducted, as part of this study, of workhouse records also show that while able-bodied men tended to use the workhouse on a short-term basis this was in stark contrast to the experience of aged men who once admitted to the workhouse often remained for long periods and sometimes until they died.⁸⁰⁵ The parish of Leiston, a member of the Blything Incorporation, provides a typical example of the mortality rate of elderly male inmates within incorporation workhouses. Seventeen elderly male paupers from the parish were admitted into Bulcamp House between 1767 and 1810, of these ten died in the workhouse and seven were discharged, a mortality rate of 59%. Naturally, the older the age at the time of admission the more likely the inmate was to die within the workhouse. Once admitted to the workhouse aged men could spend a significant length of time as an inmate, the average length of admission in Melton House being 37 weeks, as shown in Table 5.21.

A further explanation for the predominance of elderly men in the workhouse is that they were less likely to live with their married children than elderly women who appear to have been more readily accepted into their children’s families. Women were more useful for providing assistance with gendered domestic tasks such as childcare and so were more likely to be taken in.

⁸⁰³ ERO(C), D/P 264/18/24, *Braintree Overseers’ Correspondence*.

⁸⁰⁴ SRO(I), ADA11/AB3/1-10.

⁸⁰⁵ SRO(I), ADA10/AB3//1-6.

Table 5.21. Leiston – Melton House Admissions Aged 50+ yrs. (1766 – 1806)⁸⁰⁶

Name	Age at Admission	Admission	Discharged	Died	Length of Admission – Weeks
Peter Palmer	50	27/04/1772		14/12/1773	83
John Browning	54	08/10/1781		10/10/1781	3 days
Robert Fuller	50	22/07/1793	16/09/1793		9
Robert Fuller	51	05/08/1794	20/10/1794		7
Thomas Girling	50	13/10/1800		05/01/1801	12
John Bullard	50	08/11/1802	20/07/1803		38
John Smith	67	16/10/1766		07/10/1767	50
James Holly	68	09/03/1795		01/04/1796	42
Jon Bullard	63	16/09/1805		21/12/1808	169
John Holding	69	06/01/1806	09/06/1806		20
John Holding	69	20/06/1806	30/06/1806		1.5
William Clarke	62	21/06/1810	01/01/1811		28
Isaac Newson	75	16/10/1766		30/06/1767	36
Robert Booth	78	19/10/1772		29/10/1773	53
Benjamin Fairweather	75	03/08/1789		02/12/1789	17
James Tavernier	70	01/11/1805		01/06/1806	28
John Holding	70	21/07/1806	16/02/1807		30

The downward pull into poverty, experienced by many men during old age, undermined their attempt to achieve self-sufficiency and maintain residential independence and which could also result in a reduction of their masculine status in the eyes of others, in contrast to the situation and status enjoyed by aged widows within the community. Significantly, the privileged status enjoyed by many elderly women coupled with their perceived vulnerability, was not a sentiment which appears to have been extended to aged men. The belief that the workhouse provided an appropriate form of assistance to elderly females also increasingly ran counter to societal beliefs in the second half of the eighteenth century and in the first half of the nineteenth century which increasingly thought it to be both socially and morally wrong. The highly

⁸⁰⁶ SRO(I), AB3/1-3.

regulated workhouse environment to which elderly women would have been subjected was opposed by the elderly themselves as well as by many contemporary social critics.⁸⁰⁷

However, research conducted for this study of contemporary qualitative sources did not reveal any discernible sympathy or indeed concern among prominent contemporary social commentators for the situation or hardships experienced by aged men. Expressions of concern from contemporary social commentators for the hardship of the elderly were few in number and mainly addressed to the situation of elderly widows. That widowed females or lone women were considered as being particularly worthy of relief is revealed in parliamentary papers throughout the eighteenth century. For example, a member of the House of Lords insisted in 1736 during the debate on the Mortmain Act that, 'To assist the widow and fatherless, to nourish the tender infant, ... is a duty incumbent upon every society.'⁸⁰⁸ Equally, Daniel Defoe, as early as 1700, commented that, 'widows should receive a pension during widowhood.'⁸⁰⁹ The perception in this period that women were economically vulnerable did not extend to elderly men and comments of a similar nature pertaining to the difficulties and hardship endured by many elderly poor men are noticeably absent.

Conclusion

For the poor law authorities, elderly claimants posed the possibility of potentially long-term assistance and substantial costs. It is argued that the failure of the 1598-1601 legislation to define adequately who should be regarded as old and the nature of assistance that was to be provided contributed to the provision of poor relief becoming increasingly gendered, as limited resources appear to have been increasingly focused on elderly women. The ambiguities of the legislation coupled with the favoured place elderly women, especially elderly widows due to

⁸⁰⁷ Ottaway, Susannah, *The Decline of Life*, p. 275

⁸⁰⁸ Gareth Jones, *History of the Law of Charity* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1969). p. 111.

⁸⁰⁹ Defoe, Daniel, *Several essays relating to academies*, p. 148.

their perceived economic vulnerability, worked in favour of elderly women and against aged men in the level and duration of poor relief they could expect to receive. As research for this study has revealed elderly women were less likely to be admitted to a workhouse and more likely to be in receipt of outdoor relief of greater value and for a longer duration than their male counterparts.⁸¹⁰ Research findings have also revealed that gender became an increasingly important factor in the nature of relief provision and although men comprised a significant proportion of aged recipients of relief, elderly women and especially the widowed, comprised a disproportionate number of long-term ‘pension’ recipients often for a number of years. The relief provided to women more often took the form of ‘pensions’, consisting of regular weekly or monthly amounts. In contrast, elderly men usually only received small financial sums, reflecting the expectation that they would go back to work.⁸¹¹ The research findings of this study have confirmed the views of Thane and others who also have highlighted the prominence of elderly women in the poor law records of this period. This prominence has commonly been explained by patriarchal assumptions about female dependence.⁸¹² However, what is less often considered is the plight of elderly males who found themselves at a distinct disadvantage. It would appear that prevailing patriarchal ideas about masculinity and ‘independence’ in this period worked against men in welfare decisions, a subject which merits further research.

The following chapter in this study presents a number of ‘pauper biographies’ to illustrate the experience of old age for men employed as farm labourers this period in rural Suffolk and surrounding areas and aims to provide an insight into the situation and day to day experience of old age for men from the lower orders. It also includes the pauper biographies of a number

⁸¹⁰ Williams, Samantha, *Poverty, Gender and Life-cycle*, p. 101

⁸¹¹ Ottaway, Susannah, *The Decline of Life*, pp. 198-200

⁸¹² Thane, Pat, *Old age in English History*, p. 193; Thane, Pat, *Woman and Ageing*, p. 1-12; John Raven and Keith Snell (eds), *Women, work and wages in England, 1600–1850* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2004), pp. 102–118.

of elderly women, by way of comparison, to further demonstrate the influence of gender on the experience of old age in this period.

Chapter 6. Case Studies

Introduction

This chapter presents a number of case studies in the form of pauper biographies and aims to provide an insight into the situation and experiences of many elderly men in rural Suffolk in the second half of the eighteenth century and in the first half of the nineteenth century. The biographies highlight the age and gender related employment constraints faced by elderly male agricultural workers in rural Suffolk and neighbouring north Essex within the context of the changing demographic, economic and social environment of the region. The chapter also includes the pauper biographies of a number of women by way of comparison to further demonstrate the influence of gender on the experience of old age in this period. It is not suggested that these biographies portray 'typical' aged farm labourers, rather they are intended to highlight the difficulties many poor old men faced in this period. It is recognised that growing old was and is a very individualistic experience and the result of a combination of societal attitudes towards old age together with the mental and physical health and personality of the individual. A process which Olwyn Hufton has aptly described, as 'an individual odyssey with very personal refinements.'⁸¹³

The pauper biographies which follow have been compiled through family reconstitution, based on my research and analysis of parish registers and nominal linkage with poor law records, supplemented by pauper correspondence. In addition to a quantitative analysis of patterns of relief, the archival records of Suffolk parishes that survived enabled a more 'longitudinal' study to be conducted which revealed the interactions between relief claimants and parish authorities and provide rich detail not visible through quantification alone.⁸¹⁴ This approach also provides

⁸¹³ Olwyn Hufton, *The Poor of Eighteenth-Century France* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1974), p. 4.

⁸¹⁴ Samantha Williams, 'Crisis of the English Old Poor Law', in *Population, Welfare and Economic Change in Britain 1290-1834*, ed. by Briggs, p. 142.

an insight into why people needed support and how age and gender shaped their interaction with the poor law authorities and the nature of the relief they received.

Finding Work

It was necessary, in fact expected by society in this period, that men of the lower orders would continue working into old age until prevented by physical debility, as this study has earlier demonstrated. Yet, faced with an overstocked labour market, competition from younger men and the unpredictability and seasonality of agricultural employment, elderly men were at a severe disadvantage in finding employment. Men of the lower orders typically had few lifecycle options they could call upon to support them in their old age and it is unlikely that many would have been able to 'lay' anything aside for their old age. Consequently, the majority of elderly men from the lower orders had little option but to continue working until prevented by physical debility. The case studies of Philip Hart and William James, which follow, provide a telling insight into the experiences and situation of aged farm labourers in rural Suffolk and neighbouring areas and the difficulties and hardships they faced.

Philip Hart – Case Study

Philip Hart's situation and experience of old age would have been common to many men from the lower orders in rural Suffolk. Hart's pauper biography was compiled from family reconstitution based on my research of the East Bergholt parish registers together with nominal linkage to the Samford Poor Law Incorporation records and provides rich details of his situation and his experience of old age. Hart was born in the parish of Cretingham in 1732 but migrated to East Bergholt in search of work and eventually achieved settlement in the parish.⁸¹⁵ The

⁸¹⁵ SRO(I), AD7/AB4/1-5; SRO(I), FB191/D/1-3; SRO(I), HD2448/4/2/2/4, *1801 Census Returns*; SRO(I), DD/2448/4/2/36/9; *1831 Census Returns of GB, Abstract of Answers*; <https://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/unit/10250481>.

parish of East Bergholt, in which Hart lived until his death in 1793 aged 63 years, was typical of other parishes in the region, demographically, economically and socially.

In common with other rural parishes East Bergholt was heavily dependent on agriculture as a source of employment with 59% of employable males working as farm labourers and with only very limited alternative employment opportunities. Hart was a 'daily waged' unskilled farm labourer and due to the low wages he probably received throughout his working life it is highly unlikely that he would have been able to 'lay' anything aside for his old age. As a result, in order to achieve self-sufficiency and maintain his residential independence it was necessary for him to continue working in his old age.

Hart married Anne, his first wife, in 1761 and the marriage produced three children all of whom died within their first year. Anne died in 1765 and the situation Hart faced after her death was common to many men from the lower orders and which for many men necessitated the need to remarry for the second income it provided in order to achieve self-sufficiency and maintain residential independence. Hart remarried in 1770 and his second wife Sarah outlived him dying in 1820, the marriage producing six children.

Hart's pauper biography, his first marriage to Anne (née Stowe), and his remarriage in 1770 to Sarah (née Thompson) together with the children from the two marriages is shown in Figure 6.1. The four year interval between the death of his first wife in 1765 and his marriage to Sarah in 1770 was longer than was usual for most men in Hart's position who usually remarried within a shorter time interval. However, while Hart probably experienced considerable grief at the death of his wife and would have had to address practical problems such as the domestic management of his household as well as the loss of his wife's income, the absence of the need to support surviving children probably reduced his need to remarry immediately.

The potential benefit of a second income in light of the insecurity Hart would have faced in old age as a ‘day waged’ farm labourer was probably influential in his eventual decision to remarry. The death of a spouse could threaten the well-being of a household and the actions taken by a widower had implications not just for themselves but for any children living with them. However, Hart was fortunate in this respect as he did not have any surviving children from his first marriage to provide for, but he would have been well-aware of both the practical and financial advantages of remarrying, particularly as he aged.

Table 6.1. Philip Hart – Family Reconstitution⁸¹⁶

Groom	Bride		Children
Philp Hart (1732-1795)	Anne Stowe	Married 1761 Died 1765	Philip <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Baptised 1762 • Died 1762 Philip <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Baptised 1763 • Died 1763 Sarah <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Baptised 1765 • Died 1765
	Sarah Thompson	Married 1770 Died 1820	William <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Baptised 1771 • Died 1774 John <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Baptised 1774 • Died 1776 Lucy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Baptised 1776 • Died ? Elizabeth <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Baptised 1778 • Died 1815 Sarah <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Baptised 1780 • Died ? William <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Baptised 1790 • Died 1790

⁸¹⁶ SRO(I), FB191/D/1-3; SRO(I), FB191/D/1, *East Bergholt Parish Registers*.

Hart had two options on the death of his first wife: to continue to live alone and if necessary seek help from friends and neighbours when necessary, or remarry with the potential benefit of a second income and seek to achieve self-sufficiency and residential independence as head of a household. Hart's expectation of self-sufficiency and residential independence in old age would have been constrained not only due to his physical decline as he aged and reduced earning potential but also due to the limited opportunities for alternative employment to agricultural work in Suffolk. Consequently, like most men in his position, Hart decided to remarry, most probably influenced by the benefit of a second source of income to enable him to fulfil his modest expectation of an independent old age. For as a contemporary commented, 'the best wife for a labourer is the woman who has worked out'.⁸¹⁷

Hart's level of income as a farm labourer is likely to have fluctuated significantly at different times of the year and the difference in earnings for farm labourers between winter and harvest time was considerable, ranging between 8 shillings a week in winter up to 15 shillings a week during harvest time, as discussed earlier. Demanding arduous physical labour and the declining functionality associated with old age inevitably resulted in reduced work productivity and reduced earning potential for older men. As Hart aged and would have been unable to perform the more strenuous tasks he would have probably only been able to find employment in less arduous work such as mowing, raking, forking, stacking, tedding (turning hay to help it dry), and cocking (gathering the windrows into piles), at a reduced level of pay, usually two-thirds of the full daily adult rate.⁸¹⁸ Hart's hopes of fulfilling his expectation of old age would have been seriously undermined by his dependence as a farm labourer on 'day wages' which

⁸¹⁷ Reay, Barry, *Rural England*, p. 73.

⁸¹⁸ Edward Collins, 'Harvest Technology and Labour Supply in Britain 1790-1870, *Economic History Review*, 22, (1969), 453-473

exposed individuals such as him to periods of underemployment and unemployment in the slack periods of the year characteristic of arable farming.⁸¹⁹

However, that men such as Hart were required to continue working in old age should not necessarily be regarded in an entirely negative manner and as a failure on the part of society to maintain the aged. It is quite possible that Hart would have wished to continue working as long as possible, not only to maintain his independence and status within the community, but also due to the satisfaction and pride which he could have experienced in doing so. It is also possible that the work of a farm labourer provided genuine job satisfaction for men like Hart, not often found in other types of manual labour. Agricultural work had a number of positive features which Hart would have probably enjoyed, the variety of tasks, relationship to the countryside and natural world and the sense of achievement gained through the sowing and harvesting of crops. In addition, the physician William Falconer writing in 1789, considered that agricultural occupations conferred other advantages to men such as Hart:

The variety is favourable ... that it is performed in the open air, which in general must be pure and wholesome ... The simplicity and uniformity of rural occupations, and their incessant practice, preclude many anxieties and agitations of hope and fear, to which employments of a more precarious and casual nature are subject.⁸²⁰

However, it is also important to remember that much of agricultural work was very physically demanding, often resulting in work-related accidents and hastening the ageing process.

Many agricultural occupations also provided the opportunity for social interaction, as observed by Jean Marchand a French agronomist in 1784. Marchand concluded after watching Suffolk farm labourers that they did, 'their work in a very casual way, taking frequent rests and talking

⁸¹⁹ Boyer, George, *An Economic History of the English Poor Law* p. 40.

⁸²⁰ Falconer, William, *Essay on the Preservation of Health*, p. 2-3.

a great deal'.⁸²¹ In fact, the social relationships formed while working would have been an important source of support and satisfaction for older men such as Hart.

Within a tight-knit community, such as East Bergholt, Hart would have been known by his occupation. Adam Smith, writing in 1793, expressed the view that, 'men were what they did,' and that, 'the understandings of the greater part of men are necessarily formed by their ordinary employments.'⁸²² While Hart worked as a farm labourer throughout his adult life and almost certainly in a reduced capacity in old age, it is probable like many aged men he would also have been 'multi-occupational', that is taking advantage of the opportunity to perform any unskilled jobs as and when they became available, in order to supplement his likely reduced income from agricultural employment as he aged. Although being multi-occupational may have resulted in achieving sustenance not being identified by contemporaries as having a 'primary' occupation would have certainly undermined Hart's identity and masculine status in the eyes of others and would have undoubtedly lowered the esteem with which he was viewed within the local community.

Hart experienced increasingly frequent bouts of illness and declining functionality while in his 40s, which were likely to have been the precursors of the on-set of old age, and ultimately found it necessary to seek support from the poor law authorities. An additional factor necessitating Hart's need for poor relief was that he was not 'kin rich' and had no family or extended kin network from which he could seek support in times of need. Although Hart's two marriages had produced a total of nine children, six died in childhood, two cannot be accounted for in the records and only one, Elizabeth, out-lived him and she would not have been old enough to have provided support to her parents in their old age. The first reference to Hart in

⁸²¹ Jean Marchand, *A Frenchman in England 1784* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1933), p. 77.

⁸²² Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into The Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations Vol 2* (Dublin: W. Porter, 1793), p. 298.

the Samford Poor Law Incorporation records appears in 1775 when at the age of 44 years he received ad hoc financial relief due to his wife Sarah's 'lying-in' which prevented her from working and contributing to the family domestic budget. The records show that Hart himself did not receive poor relief until 1781, at the age of 49, due to illness and consequent inability to work. Hart's absence from the poor law records up to this point may be interpreted as testimony to his determination to remain independent. Hart's physical decline and reduced occupational capacity is reflected in the poor law records which show that from the age of 44 years in 1776 to his death in 1793 he received a total of 37 relief payments due to, 'being ill', 'being very ill', 'continuing ill', and 'being lame', and the consequent inability to continue working. The relief provided to Hart between 1776 and 1793 took the form of a single or a series of small financial payments, typically of 2 shillings a week at times of particular hardship or illness. Given the fact that Hart had remarried the amount he received in poor relief would suggest that his second wife was working in some capacity as it is significantly lower than normally paid to elderly families or couples. Only during periods of prolonged illness in 1782 and 1789 did Hart receive a more substantial and prolonged level of relief. Even so, the level of financial relief provided would suggest that there was an on-going expectation on the part of the poor law authorities that Hart, when able would continue to work be it even in a reduced capacity.

Poverty was lifecycle related but Hart appears to have avoided certain of those stages in the lifecycle when individuals were most vulnerable and likely to be in need of assistance, such as in middle age when faced with the financial demands of a young family to support. Hart for much of his life could perhaps be best described as being 'neither-rich-nor-destitute.'⁸²³ His absence from the poor law records until in his 40s would suggest that for much of his working life he was employed on a fairly regular basis and enjoyed a degree of wage security, avoiding

⁸²³ Ibid., p. 74.

the periods of underemployment and unemployment commonly experienced by members of the casual 'day waged' agricultural workforce.

It is possible that Hart began to experience the symptoms of premature ageing in his mid-forties, a condition common among agricultural labourers, as evidenced by the frequent bouts of illness or lameness which he experienced from this time. This is, however, conjecture and the fact he appears to have been able to continue working in the last two years of his life without the need for poor relief would tend to dispel the likeliness of this possibility. The provision of small sums of financial relief which Hart received was typical of the approach increasingly adopted by poor law authorities to elderly men seeking support and which was intended to limit relief expenditure. Given the pressure being exerted on the poor law authorities due to the demographic and economic changes the county was experiencing at this time and the increasing number of elderly farm labourer's claiming relief the adoption of this approach may be seen as an attempt to limit relief expenditure in line with limited local financial resources. Whether working solely as an agricultural labourer or undertaking multi-occupational tasks the outcome of Hart's situation is likely to have remained the same, namely the experience of 'marginal poverty and the constant threat of outright destitution.'⁸²⁴

William James – Case Study

Despite the care which needs to be taken in the interpretation of pauper correspondence it does provide a telling insight into the expectations and experiences of aged farm labourers and the difficulties they faced in finding work in this period.⁸²⁵ My research of pauper correspondence revealed that William James, who lived in neighbouring north Essex, wrote over fifty letters to the overseers between 1818 and 1824, which vividly describe his experience of old age, the

⁸²⁴ Botelho, Lynn, *Old Age and the English Poor Law*, p. 79.

⁸²⁵ Thomas Sokoll, *Essex Pauper Letters 1731-1837* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

difficulties typically faced by old men in finding work, as well as the inadequacy of the income from the work which they were able to undertake.⁸²⁶ The situation experienced by James which emerges from his correspondence to the poor law authorities, although extreme, is not unique and the image of old age that emerges from his correspondence can be found in many other letters to the poor law authorities written by aged men in Suffolk and neighbouring areas.

James was an unskilled farm labourer. He was 65 years of age and his wife 70 when he wrote his first letter to the overseers in 1818. James's expectation of old age, as revealed by his correspondence, was of a very modest nature. He wished to be self-sufficient, maintain his residential independence, support his wife and care for his bedridden daughter. James was not 'kin rich' and did not have a family or extended kin network on which he could call on for support in his old age and was dependent on continued work and the support of neighbours and friends to maintain his independence.

Writing to the overseers in 1818 James described his situation in the following terms:

I am under difficulties, & distress, not having it in my power, to bring in a sufficiency for the support of myself my wife, and Afflicted Daughter, you know well the state of health my Daughter possesses ... Incapable of doing anything, or helping herself ... my Wife also have been very Ill ... in an Afflicted state ... through Infirmity and Age, is so Enfeeble as to be incapable of doing very little ... for she is now in her 70th Year of age and myself 65 ... had it not been for a kind neighbour, or two, I know not what we should have done.⁸²⁷

In common with most agricultural labourers in the region James was hired and paid on a daily basis, often moving from employer to employer and sometimes having to travel significant distances to and from work each day. James like many aged men from the lower orders was

⁸²⁶ ERO(C), D/P 178/18/23, *Overseers' Correspondence*.

⁸²⁷ ERO(C), D/P 178/18/23, *William James Letter, 20th July 1818*

vulnerable to the downward gravitational pull of poverty in old age and the difficulty he experienced in achieving sustenance due to lack of work and the need to support his bedridden daughter was a matter of persistent and overriding concern to him. His concern at the lack of work available to older men is reflected in his letters to the overseers' written between 1821 and 1824 in which he makes frequent reference to his desire to work and his concern at the lack of work opportunities which were preventing his achievement of self-sufficiency and residential independence:

work having been very dead, and Slack.⁸²⁸

work being so very slack, that often I have little Employment for weeks together.⁸²⁹

I have some Jobs to do ... but not sufficient, for the support our Nature requires ... I experience the decays of Nature so much, that I cannot work as I have done.⁸³⁰

Employment continues very slack indeed at present I have very little to do... I hope work will revive, there is no prospect of it at this time.⁸³¹

Although he continued working as a farm labourer into advanced old age and doing whatever other jobs became available James makes frequent references to the inadequacy of his wages. James reduced functionality, due to increasing physical debility, prevented him from being able to undertake physically arduous work and compounded his difficulty in finding work. At one point he commented that, 'my earnings are not sufficient to procure the common necessities of Life, we have often known and felt the want of them and I now feel the decays of nature, advancing fast upon me.'⁸³² James's letter in July 1822 provides further details of his efforts to find work and the inadequacy of his earnings:

⁸²⁸ Ibid., 31st May 1821.

⁸²⁹ Ibid., 30th August 1821.

⁸³⁰ Ibid., 30th March 1824.

⁸³¹ Ibid., 18th October 1821.

⁸³² Ibid., 26th June 1823.

I have made every Effort, in my power, to procure a maintenance and support ... but amidst all Privation and Exertion, that I can use, I find I cannot, with any Effect, proceed further, work being so Slack ... I have not half employ, and in many weeks I have had nothing to do ... sometimes work and sometimes none, my Earnings have been but small, not more on Average, than six Shillings, or six, and six pence, a week ... with which we cannot procure Necessaries, to support health nor Nature.⁸³³

In the same letter James drew attention to the physically debilitating effects of old age which he was experiencing:

I find health and strength decaying fast, so that when I have a little work to do, I find myself, through Age, and fatigue incapable to perform it ... of my being ill ... I attribute this, in a great degree, to the want, of constant Nourishment, to keep up my strength, and Age added there too, being now within one Year of Seventy.⁸³⁴

In 1823 he wrote, 'My strength, and all my faculties fail me very fast', and in 1824 he wrote, 'it cannot be long, ever my head must be laid in the dust.'⁸³⁵ James also makes frequent references to illness within his family and his daughter's inability to work either at home or within the community, due to being constantly bedridden, of which his letter of 11th August 1819 to the overseer is a typical example:

Sir my Daughter have been and now is, very bad indeed, have not Able to be out since last May twelve month, she is very weak and low, Confined to her room and frequently to her bed, is the Astonishment of all who know, or see her, that she is alive.⁸³⁶

⁸³³ Ibid., 29th July 1822.

⁸³⁴ Ibid., 29th July 1822.

⁸³⁵ Ibid., 17th April 1824.

⁸³⁶ Ibid., 11th August 1819.

The situation in which James found himself was undoubtedly desperate. Yet, it was not an uncommon situation for elderly farm labourers whose options and choices for maintaining their independence and achieving sustenance were limited. Although employment opportunities receded as James aged he still sought employment taking advantage of whatever opportunity presented itself. The expectation within society that individuals would be self-supporting extended to even the most elderly who were expected to be independent until ultimately prevented by debility. Old age and the inherent physical decline it precipitated was a significant barrier to continuing employment for elderly farm labourers such as James who were handicapped not only by reduced functionality and inability to perform the more strenuous tasks but due to the competition they faced in an over-stocked labour market from younger and more physically able men.

John Hart – Case Study

For many elderly farm labourers the need to seek support from the poor law authorities increased with age. Yet, as my research findings of poor law records revealed, relief was only granted to individuals when old age coincided with other factors, such as illness, which were preventing the relief claimant from working, as in the case of John Hart an unskilled farm labourer from East Bergholt.⁸³⁷ My research of the East Bergholt parish registers together with nominal linkage with the Samford Incorporation records enabled the compilation of Hart's pauper biography.⁸³⁸ Hart was born in the parish of East Bergholt in 1712 and his marriage to Mary Lamb in 1737 is recorded in the parish registers. He was 71 years old when he first received relief in 1783 when considered by the poor law authorities to be 'infirm and unable to work'. The relief he received amounted to a total of 45 shillings between August 1783 and June 1784, which given an agricultural labourers wage in the same period would have amounted to

⁸³⁷ SRO(I), ADA1/AB3; SRO(I) ADA10/AB3; SRO(I), ADA11/AB3; SRO(I), AD7/AB4.

⁸³⁸ SRO(I), FB159/D/1/3; SRO(I), FB159/D/1/4; SRO(I), FB159/D/1/5; SRO(I), FB159/G/18/1-6

between 180 and 200 shillings, would again suggest that there was an expectation on the part of the authorities that despite his advanced age Hart should continue working, if only in a limited capacity.⁸³⁹

There are no records of Hart receiving relief prior to 1783 and despite his advanced age of 71 it was only when he was both chronologically old and considered unable to work by the poor law authorities that relief was granted. The sums he received varied between 2 and 5 shillings a week during the regular bouts of illness which prevented him from working. No explanation is provided in the poor law documentation for variations in the level of relief provided to Hart at different times. However, it is probable that the 5 shillings received in September and again in October 1783 was intended to provide relief for two weeks. Other relief payments exceeding 2 shillings were similarly intended for periods in excess of a week. Hart was aged 71 before the poor law authorities granted him relief, a situation which suggests little sympathy or benevolence existed to the plight and hardships faced by elderly men in the eyes of the poor law authorities.

Stephen Grimsey – Case Study

Stephen Grimsey was also an unskilled farm labourer from the parish of East Bergholt. He was born in 1704 and died in 1790 aged 86 years. Family reconstitution revealed that Grimsey married three times and that the marriages produced a total of eleven children, none of whom survived childhood, as shown in Table 6.2.

Grimsey had few options upon which he could call on for support in his old age, other than some additional income from his wife, as he did not have an extended kin network from which he may have received support. Grimsey, when prevented from working due to bouts of illness had little option but to approach the poor law authorities. His situation provides a further

⁸³⁹ SRO (I), FB191/D/1/10; SRO(I), FB191/D/1.

example of poor relief being granted not on account of advanced age but due to the inability to continue working.

Table 6.2. Stephen Grimsey - Family Reconstitution⁸⁴⁰

Groom	Bride	Dates	Children
Stephen Grimsey Born 1704 Died 1790 (aged 86 yrs.)	Mary Born 1705 Died 1737 (age 32 yrs.)	Married 1730- 1737	Stephen (1732-1732) Mary (1732-1732) Mary (1736-1737)
	Sarah Born 1720 Died 1750 (age 30 yrs.)	Married 1746- 1750	Elizabeth (1747-1752) Mary (1749-1750)
	Susan Born 1736 Died 1810 (age 72 yrs.)	Married 1761- 1790	Susan (1761-1765) Joseph (1764-1764) Elizabeth (1765-1766) Joseph (1767 -?) Elizabeth (1769-1773) Samuel (1770-1776)

My research of poor law records reveal that Grimsey was 73 when he first received relief in 1771. This was as a result of illness preventing him from working and not on account of his advanced age. The short-term nature of the relief received by Grimsey was typical of that provided to aged men who were considered still able to work, if only in a limited capacity, and was provided on a number of occasions between 1771 and 1780, to ‘tide him over’ prior to returning to work, as shown in Table 6.3. Only during 1781 did Grimsey receive more continuous relief due to a period of prolonged illness. The relief Grimsey received was in the form of ad hoc financial payments usually of 2 shillings a week and amounted to a total of just over 100 shillings between 1771 and 1790, and his death at the age of 86 years. The more prolonged support he received between September and December in 1781, for which he received a total of 43 shillings, was due to a bout of serious illness, which affected both him and his wife.

⁸⁴⁰ SRO(I), AD7/AB4/1-4; SRO(I), FB191/D/1.

Table 6.3. Stephen Grimsey – Poor Relief (1771-1790)⁸⁴¹

Stephen Grimsey - Out-door Relief 1771-1781 (Shillings)								
1771	1772-74	1775	1776-80	1781	1782	1783	1784-89	1790
14	n/a	8	n/a	43	n/a	12	n/a	24

It was not uncommon for the relief provided to men, as in the case of Grimsey, to be intended for two people, husband and wife. Such cases emphasise the need for the analysis of poor law records to be approached cautiously. Identifying the named recipient of poor law relief is relatively straightforward but establishing with certainty that the individual listed in the records is actually who the relief is intended for is more problematic. The possibility of what Smith refers to as hidden dependents ‘lurking’ behind the person cited in the poor law records always exists.⁸⁴²

However, I would suggest, that it is not only the nature of the relief which Grimsey received, or the fact that he was 71 years of age before being considered eligible for relief that is noteworthy, but it is the periods of time between 1771 and his death in 1790, when he was not in receipt of relief despite his advanced age which are most striking. As Margaret Pelling noted, ‘disability altered the extent of work done, rather than the fact of working.’⁸⁴³ Despite his advanced age, Grimsey appears to have fallen victim to the tendency of poor law authorities to coerce aged men to continue working into advanced old age.

William Munt – Case Study

William Munt was an unskilled farm labourer from Holbrook. Family reconstitution based on my research of parish records and nominal linkage with the Samford Incorporation poor law

⁸⁴¹ SRO(I), AD7/AB4/1-4.

⁸⁴² Smith, ‘Ageing and well-being’, in *Old Age from Antiquity to Post Modernity*, ed. by Paul Johnson and Pat Thane, p. 71.

⁸⁴³ Pelling, Margaret, *The Common Lot*, p. 160.

records revealed that Munt was born in 1720 and was 51 years of age when he first received relief in 1772. Munt died in 1787 at the age of 64 years.⁸⁴⁴ Although the poor law records show that he was married, the process of family reconstitution which was undertaken failed to identify the existence of any children or other family members which Munt may have been able to call upon for assistance in his old age. According to the records the relief Munt received was provided at times of sickness or hardship, consisting of small financial sums, typically 2 to 3 shillings a week. The poor law records show that the higher amount provided in 1781 was due to relief he received to pay for the burial of his wife. In the nine years between 1772 and 1791 Munt received a total of 73 shillings of relief, as shown in Table 6.4.

It seems from the evidence in the poor law records that the relief afforded to Munt, in common with most other aged men, was only intended to tide him over in times of acute difficulty and in the opinion of the poor law authorities his situation did not merit any relief of a more regular long-term nature despite his advanced age. The attitude of the poor law authorities towards Munt and other case study examples appear to demonstrate a clear reluctance on the part of the poor law authorities to sanction long-term relief for elderly men. Such patterns would seem to be consistent with the view of Robert Burn, that there was an explicit obligation on the part of the poor law authorities to, ‘to maintain the poor as cheap as they possibly can.’⁸⁴⁵

Table 6.4. William Munt – Outdoor Relief (1772-1787)⁸⁴⁶

William Munt - Outdoor Relief 1772-1791 (Shillings)											
1772	1773	1774-77	1778	1779-80	1781	1782	1783	1784-86	1787	1788-90	1791
3	10	—	10	—	25	14	4	—	5	—	2

⁸⁴⁴ SRO(I), FB187/D/1-5; SRO(I), AD7/AB4/1-4; ⁸⁴⁴ SRO(I), FB191/D/1.

⁸⁴⁵ Burn, Richard, *The History of the Poor Laws*, pp. 211-12.

⁸⁴⁶ SRO(I), AD7/AB4/1-4.

Widow Cole (née Sparrow) – Case Study

Both the nature and duration of the relief provided to many aged women differed significantly to that received by their male counterparts as the example of Widow Cole demonstrates. My research revealed that the relief provided to Cole from the parish of Holbrook was typical of that provided to elderly women, especially widows and was of a very different nature and duration to that received by Hart, Grimsey or Munt. Susan Cole (née Sparrow) was born in 1721 and married Abraham Cole in 1746, who died in 1771. No evidence could be found in the parish registers of any children produced by the marriage. The first reference to Cole in the poor law records was in 1784. Although widowed in 1771, aged 50 years, she did not receive poor relief until 1784, at the age of 63, which was provided due to illness. This consisted of two financial sums of between two and three shillings a week. However, between 1785 and her death in 1789, aged 68 years, she was considered unable to maintain her independence by the poor law authorities and in contrast to aged men in the same situation was provided with regular relief until her death in 1789, as shown in Table 6.5.

Table 6.5. Widow Cole - Poor Relief (1784-1789)⁸⁴⁷

Widow Cole - Poor Relief (1784-89)						
	1784	1785	1786	1787	1788	1789
Weeks	2	38	53	42	32	36
Relief (shillings)	5	38	43	47	31	36

It is likely, that in common with her male counterparts, there was an expectation on behalf of the poor law authorities that Cole would continue to work in some capacity when able. But the relief she received amounted to a regular pension, as shown in Table 6.5. Between 1784 and 1789 Cole received a total of 200 shillings. The Samford Incorporation poor law records make

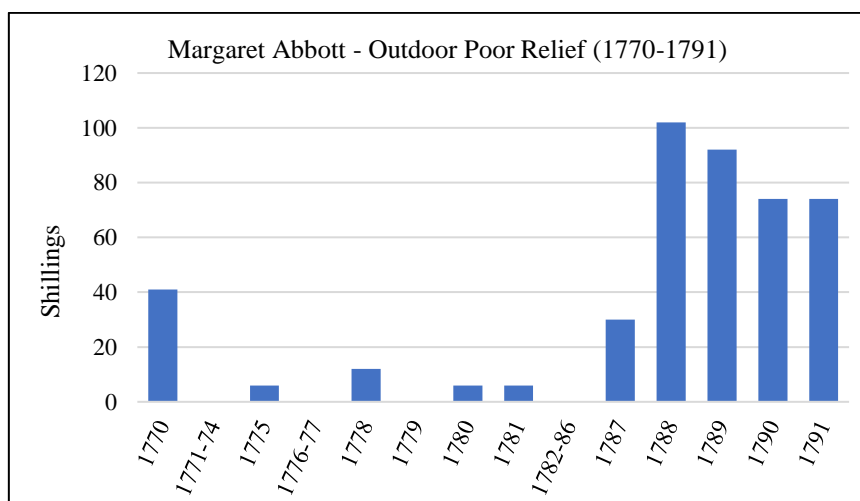
⁸⁴⁷ SRO(I), FB187/D/1-5; SRO(I), AD7/AB4/1-4.

constant references to ‘her being ill’ or ‘continuing ill’ between 1785 and 1789 and reflect the association of illness with old age which was common at this time. In certain respects it seems remarkable that given her bouts of prolonged illness and perceived inability to maintain her independence that she was not admitted into the workhouse. Her lack of admission may have been due to two factors. Firstly, her elevated and respected status within the parish as an elderly widow and secondly, for financial reasons, it was more economical for the poor law authorities to provide outdoor relief than incur the costs of admission into the workhouse which would have amounted to double that of providing Cole with outdoor relief.

Mary Abbott (née Farding) – Case Study

Research of the East Bergholt parish registers revealed that Margaret Abbott (née Farding) was born in 1709 and was married to John Abbott in 1734. The couple had two children, Elizabeth and Sarah, both of whom died in childhood. Margaret Abbott became a widow in 1767 and began to receive relief three years later in 1770, at the age of 61, as shown in Figure 6.1.⁸⁴⁸

Figure 6.1. Margaret Abbott – Poor Relief (1770-1791)⁸⁴⁹



⁸⁴⁸ SRO(I), FB191/D/1.

⁸⁴⁹ SRO(I), AD7/AB4/1-4.

The total relief Abbott received from late 1787 to her death in 1791 amounting to 442 shillings. Although receiving relief on a continuous basis up to the age of 81 the poor law records consistently cite illness rather than her advanced age as the reason for continued support.

Conclusion

The case studies presented in this chapter highlight the age related difficulties experienced by elderly farm workers in rural Suffolk in the second half of the eighteenth century and the first half of the nineteenth century. The case studies illustrate vividly the hardships and difficulties elderly men faced in finding work due to declining functionality and competition from younger more physically able men in Suffolk's overstocked labour market, as well as the importance of marriage and the second income it provided. The case studies also reveal, as in the case of William James, that even when able to work their income was often insufficient to achieve sustenance.

The reluctance on the part of the poor law authorities to provide men with regular relief on account of their advanced age illustrates the lack of generosity and benevolence shown to elderly men by the poor law authorities in this period. In contrast, elderly women, due to their perceived vulnerability and status within the community, received more generous relief and for a much longer duration.

However, the expectation of the poor law authorities in regard to both elderly men and women in this period was that even if they were in receipt of relief they would continue to work, even in a reduced capacity. In the case of elderly men, advanced age alone, was not regarded by the poor law authorities as being a sufficient reason in itself for the provision of regular relief and reflects the increasingly gendered nature of the administration of poor relief during the late eighteenth century and into the nineteenth century.

Chapter 7. Conclusion

The aim of the thesis has been to explore the complex interaction between old age, poverty and gender adding to our understanding of the impact of old age on the achievement of self-sufficiency and residential independence for elderly poor men. The desire to remain independent throughout life and into old age was adhered to by all levels of society with almost obsessive zeal. Yet, despite the desire to remain independent in old age, for many men of the lower orders its achievement was found to be virtually impossible.

Research focused primarily on rural Suffolk between 1850 and 1834 and was conducted using an innovative methodology which combined a localized approach with the process of quantitative multiple-source linkage. Importantly, the localized approach provided precise information on the situation and lives of elderly men only achievable at the microlevel, while at the same time avoiding sweeping generalisations. Combined with quantitative analysis of archival sources using multi-source linkage facilitated the re-creation of the demographic and social lifestyles of elderly men. The rich level of detail provided into the day to day realities of old age for members of the lower orders which resulted from this approach clearly demonstrates its value to future studies.

The logical place to begin this study was an examination of societal perceptions and attitudes towards the ageing process in this period. The thesis challenges the view of Ian Mortimer that the eighteenth century was, the ‘Age of Progress’, the century of the Enlightenment, which has come to symbolise ‘all the changes that distinguish the breezy, elegant world of Jane Austen’s novels from the dark depths of the witch-burning of the seventeenth-century.’⁸⁵⁰

⁸⁵⁰ Ian Mortimer, *Centuries of Change* (London: Bodley Head, 2014), p. 199.

The concept of progress, underpinned by Enlightenment philosophy, permeated the thinking of the upper orders, the literate and the semi-literate sections of eighteenth-century society. It was, according to David Spadafora, based on the belief in an ever-continuing notion of ‘social progress ... toward a better condition and the inference that progress will continue indefinitely.’⁸⁵¹ However, it is worth noting the view of Sidney Pollard who stated that ‘the vision of progress of the eighteenth century is essentially the bourgeois vision of progress.’⁸⁵²

In common with the view of Pollard, thesis findings revealed a considerable degree of continuity in the eighteenth century and early nineteenth century with regard to social practices, perceptions and attitudes to that of earlier periods, particularly in regard to the ageing process and old age. Despite the adoption of a more positive attitude towards old age by some contemporary social commentators my research of archival sources revealed that there still existed considerable negativity towards ageing and old age in this period.⁸⁵³ Both the lifecycle and concept of climacteric years continued, as Yallop has identified, to exert significant influence in the manner individuals perceived and understood the ageing process and old age.⁸⁵⁴ However, Yallop focused primarily on the better off in society, and neglected to consider members of the lower orders, the most resistant to change, as identified by this study. Importantly, it was an overwhelmingly a masculine definition of the ageing process and old age which was prevalent throughout this period. While establishing the characteristics of gendered expectations of ageing can be problematic the existence of both common and gendered traits among the aged can be identified.

The use of 60 years to mark the on-set of old age has ‘deep historical roots’ and its usage has been reinforced by more recent historical demographic studies, most notably the work of

⁸⁵¹ . D. Spadafora, *The Idea of Progress*, p. 8.

⁸⁵² . S. Pollard, *The Idea of Progress* (London: C. A. Watts, 1968), p. 19.

⁸⁵³ Ottaway, Susannah, *The Decline of Life*, p. 6.

⁸⁵⁴ Yallop, Helen, *Age and Identity*, p.7.

Wrigley and Schofield.⁸⁵⁵ However, its usage to delineate a universal threshold of old age fails to adequately take into account the existence and impact of regional demographic, economic and social differences. Accordingly, by taking into account the economic and social setting of rural Suffolk the lower age of 50 is considered a more appropriate age to mark the on-set of old age for labourers, for the purpose of this study. Defining 50 as marking the on-set of old age takes full account of the arduous and strenuous nature of agricultural employment, premature ageing and the derogatory effects of inadequate diet and poor accommodation experienced by many farm labourers. This is in contrast to Ottaway who largely discounts the impact of occupation and social status on the ageing process, old age and life expectancy.⁸⁵⁶ Importantly, the frequent references to 'illness' and consequent inability to work cited in poor law records, of men in their late 40s and early 50s, are indicative of the physiological decline and the early symptoms of old age suffered by many men employed in agriculture. In fact, many agricultural labourers may have had a chronological age in their mid-forties but a physiological age and appearance of a man very much older.

A clear link existed between masculinity and the capacity for physical labour. The masculine identity of farm labourers was defined by factors such as strength, physical prowess, self-mastery, integrity and individual responsibility rather than by chronological age. The inability of elderly men to achieve self-sufficiency and maintain residential independence marked the onset of old age in the eyes of an individual's contemporaries. An inability to undertake the strenuous and arduous physical demands of many agricultural occupations resulted in dependency and loss of independence in old age for many men. Elderly men were faced not only with having to seek alternative forms of work but also having to re-define their role and status in the community, as well as coping with the insecurity that inevitably arose.

⁸⁵⁵ Wrigley, Edward and Schofield, Richard, *English Population History*.

⁸⁵⁶ Ottaway, Susannah, *The Decline of Life*, 61

By the end of the eighteenth century, according to Wrigley, the proportion of individuals aged sixty or more comprised between 7% and 10% of the total population of England and Wales.⁸⁵⁷ However, this analysis was based on the assumption that old age commenced at 60. The study's adoption of the lower age of 50 naturally results in an increase in the estimate of the size of the elderly population to between 9% and 11% of the total population of Suffolk. However, it is when we consider the representation of those over 50 in the adult population that their presence within the community is fully revealed. There was no rarity value for the aged in this period and those aged 50 or over were a significant and very visible presence within the rural population and represented 16% of the adult population (those aged over 15 years) of the region in 1781 and 19% by 1821.

Chapters 3 and 4 focused on the demographic, economic and social changes which Suffolk underwent in this period which is considered essential to an understanding of the situation faced by elderly men and provides the means to build on King's regional analysis of regional poverty and Boyer's economic analysis of the poor law.⁸⁵⁸ In addition to revealing the extent to which demographic, economic and social changes undermined the well-being of elderly men in this region it also revealed the importance of taking account of the existence of regional differences in economic options and social structure in the study of old age.

The growth of manufacturing in the north and north-west of England began early in the seventeenth century and accelerated as the eighteenth century progressed. However, this process of industrialization passed East Anglia by and was the primary cause of the transformation of Suffolk from one of the most economically advanced to one of the most

⁸⁵⁷ Edward Wrigley, 'British population during the "long" eighteenth century, 1640-1840, in the *Cambridge Economic History of Modern Britain*, ed by R. Floud and P. Johnson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 103-142.

⁸⁵⁸ King, Steven, *Poverty and Welfare in England*; Boyer, George, *Economic History of the English Poor Law*.

backward areas in England. Rather than undergoing the industrialisation and accompanying urbanization taking place in the north and north-west of England Suffolk underwent a process of de-industrialisation. A comparison of the situation and growth of manufacturing activities in the north and north-west of England, identified by Adrian Green's study of commercial agriculture in the north east, revealed a wide range of alternative roles existed in industry and manufacturing to traditional agricultural occupations. This was in direct contrast to the situation in Suffolk with agriculture remaining the primarily source of employment in Suffolk, and with few alternative options throughout this period.⁸⁵⁹

The absence of non-agricultural employment in this region was due to the decline of the textile industry and failure to develop alternative proto-industrial options. In the seventeenth century and early eighteenth century the textile industry and agriculture had previously been complimentary, providing work for unemployed agricultural workers during the slack times in the agricultural calendar. The protracted decline of the textile industry through the eighteenth century reduced opportunities for employment which in turn exacerbated the problem of rural underemployment due to the nature and seasonality of agricultural employment.

Building on the work of Sharpe and McEwan and contrary to the commonly held view which considers farm labourers to have been an homogenous group, my research revealed labourers in rural Suffolk were a diverse group and not all were exposed to the vicissitudes and seasonality of arable farming and dependency on poor relief.⁸⁶⁰ Research of farm accounts and pauper inventories identified that while the majority of agricultural workers were unskilled 'day waged' labourers there was always a minority of skilled workers employed on better

⁸⁵⁹ Adrian Green, 'Durham Ox: Commercial Agriculture in the North East' in *Economy and Culture of North East England 1500-1800*, ed. by A. Green (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2018), pp, 44-67, p.46.

⁸⁶⁰ Sharpe, Pamela and McEwan, Joanne, *Accommodating Poverty*, p. 4.

terms. The majority of farm workers, however, were casual unskilled agricultural workers who were employed by the day and vulnerable to seasonal under-employment and insecurity.

Quantitative analysis of the demographic and economic changes experienced by Suffolk in this period revealed the extent of Suffolk's economic decline as well as highlighting the vulnerability of many men to the downward gravitational pull of poverty in old age. The region's over reliance on agriculture as a source of employment with few alternative occupations proved to be extremely detrimental to the well-being of elderly men. Elderly men, faced significant work-related age constraints and an inability to perform the more arduous tasks in agriculture due to reduced functionality which resulted in reduced earning potential. If employed to perform the less demanding tasks elderly men would usually be paid at two-thirds of the full daily wage. This usually amounted to in the region of 4 shillings a week in the winter and up to 5 shillings a week during the summer months.

In some of Suffolk's rural parishes over 70% of men over the age of 20 were employed in agriculture. In contrast, less than 1% were employed in manufacturing activities compared to the national average of 42% at the end of the eighteenth century. The rise in population Suffolk experienced until mid-nineteenth century led to an overstocked labour market, made more problematic due to the seasonal nature of agricultural work and resulted in significant unemployment, particularly among older labourers. Responses to the Rural Queries of the Poor Law Commissioners revealed, that nearly 20% of farm labourers in Suffolk were typically unemployed in the winter but significantly that unemployment was also an issue for many in the summer months. Findings which add weight to the view of Boyer that a major function of poor relief in Suffolk during this period became the provision of 'unemployment benefits to seasonally unemployed agricultural labourers.'⁸⁶¹ Importantly, rising unemployment and the

⁸⁶¹ Boyer, George, *Economic History of the English Poor Law*, pp. 10-23.

subsequent increased demand for poor relief from elderly farm workers did, however, have an important corollary and resulted in changes to social welfare policies and the adoption of a more 'hawkish' approach to the provision of poor relief, to the detriment of elderly men.

Self-help, however, played a key role in the achievement of independence in old age, an area largely neglected by previous studies. The expectation and experience of old age of the lower orders was largely determined by the limited nature and range of lifecycle options which an individual may have been able to draw upon in their old age. The expectation of old age for men of the lower orders was found to be modest, as revealed by my analysis of pauper correspondence. Men wished to be 'actively' independent, achieve self-sufficiency and remain useful to family and neighbours, as revealed by pauper correspondence. As Sokoll has identified, and this thesis confirms, analysis of pauper correspondence is essential to an understanding of the poor law and situation of the elderly.⁸⁶²

The thesis challenges the view of historians who have regarded the manner in which lifecycle options were exercised as amounting to a considered strategy.⁸⁶³ Rather, it is suggested here that the lifecycle options available to poor old men could more aptly be described as amounting to short-term 'coping tactics' with the goal of merely 'getting by' rather than elements in a deliberate long-term strategy. Elderly men from the lower orders attempted to achieve sustenance not from a single source but by exercising a number of lifecycle options. These included, continuing to work into old age, undertaking multi-occupations, as well as marriage and remarriage on the death of a spouse.

Cavallo and Warner's research of the domestic division of labour in early modern and eighteenth century households in England has highlighted the importance of marriage in the

⁸⁶² Sokoll, Thomas, *Essex Pauper Letters*, p. 3-9.

⁸⁶³ Graham Crow, *The Use of the Concept of Strategy in Recent Sociological Literature*, *Sociology*, 23, (1989), 1-24.

achievement of self-sufficiency and residential independence.⁸⁶⁴ The thesis builds on this earlier work and addresses the importance of marriage specifically for men of the lower orders in rural Suffolk. My research of the responses of Suffolk parishes to the Rural Questionnaire of the Poor Law Commissioners (1832) revealed the importance of marriage to the maintenance of residential independence and as the means to avoid becoming dependent on their children in old age. Responses to the Rural Queries of the Royal Commission revealed the significant financial contribution a wife's earnings could make to the overall domestic budget. Thesis findings revealed that a wife's annual income could be in the region of £10, which when added to her husband's likely income would result in a joint annual income of £41.

The potential of a second income was instrumental in the decision of men to marry, to remarry on the death of a spouse and to continue to remarry into old age. Case studies included within the study demonstrated both the importance of marriage as well as the frequency with which men tended to remarry on the death of a spouse, often on a number of occasions. Interestingly, eighteenth-century social principles condemning marriages of unequal age were not adhered to by men of the lower orders in rural Suffolk. Not only was it common for men to continue to marry and remarry into old age, it was also common for men as they aged to marry women significantly younger than themselves. In such cases it can only be presumed that these marriages were of a symbiotic nature. Marriage provided financial security and often physical support in old age and differed from the support provided by kin as it allowed an elderly couple to remain independent of both family and parish. However, it is considered that the incidence and rationale of unequal marriages has largely been neglected by previous studies and so provides an opportunity for further research.

⁸⁶⁴ Sandra Cavallo and Lyndon Warner, eds. *Widowhood in Medieval and Early Modern England* (London: Longman, 1999), p. 10.

The thesis challenges the view of Tim Wales of the inevitability of dependency and abject poverty in old age and his view that for the majority of the aged the only respite to long-term relief was death.⁸⁶⁵ In fact, my research of the poor law records of Suffolk's rural incorporations revealed that many men from the lower orders were not recipients of poor relief during their lifetime. In the region of 50% of male parishioners, in Suffolk's rural parishes, over the age of 50 were found not to have been recipients of poor relief in their lifetime and were able to achieve sustenance and maintain residential independence. However, for many men even though not dependent on poor relief, old age would likely to have been characterised by what has been aptly described by Botelho as, 'a precarious balance of resources and resided on the knife's edge of self-sufficiency.'⁸⁶⁶

Alongside the economic insecurity suffered due to the seasonality of agricultural employment and lack of alternative forms of employment labouring families also suffered from the inflationary impact of the Napoleonic Wars and the volatility and rise of wheat prices at the end of the eighteenth century and beginning of the nineteenth century. The thesis revealed the detrimental impact of inflation and associated significant price rises, as identified by Feinstein, which were compounded by both low wage levels and decline in the value of poor relief in the face of price inflation. For instance, the cost of supplies purchased by the Carlford and Colneis House of Industry intended for workhouse inmates, doubled between 1758 and 1800.

The elderly were susceptible to being pushed to the margins of the communities in which they may have once played a prominent part, as a consequence of the rise of individualism and increased self-interest in this period. However, in order to arrive at a more nuanced view of the circumstances of elderly men, it is considered important to consider the experiences and

⁸⁶⁵ Tim Wales, 'Poverty, poor relief and life-cycle', in *Land, Kinship and Lifecycle*, ed. by Smith, p. 385

⁸⁶⁶ Botelho, Lynn, *Old Age and the English Poor Law*, p. 70.

situation of the old from a wider perspective than is usually the case. While recognizing the hardships faced by many elderly men it is also important to acknowledge the friendships and support provided within Suffolk's rural parishes to its elderly members.

By simply focusing on the aged's need to continue working to achieve the goal of self-sufficiency and residential independence we neglect considering other important aspects of their life, particularly the opportunities for social interaction and leisure. Leisure activities and pastimes provided the opportunity for relaxation and respite from often repetitive and arduous daily work. Importantly, they also provided the means for elderly men to maintain a visible presence within the community. My research findings revealed that recreational activities were a keystone in the building of relationships between members of a parish of all age groups but were particularly important for the old, providing them the opportunity to maintain their identity, authority and status in the community.

The physical evidence of the accommodation occupied by elderly farm labourers is scarce. However, the view of Steve Hindle that lack of evidence prevents us gaining a telling insight into the accommodation inhabited by the poor and the quality of life it afforded, is not considered to be the case.⁸⁶⁷ This viewpoint is considered to neglect the value of pauper inventories together with the views of local contemporary commentators which provide a telling insight into the material well-being of the elderly who were able to live independently either up to the time of their death or possibly admittance to the workhouse. The thesis builds on Harley's analysis of the material lives of the poor and as well as providing an insight into the accommodation and material well-being of the lower orders, importantly also revealed the existence of a significant degree of diversity within the aged population which has been largely

⁸⁶⁷ Steve Hindle, "'Without the Cry of Any Neighbours': A Cumbrian Family and the Poor Law Authorities c. 1690-1750", in *The Family in Early Modern England* Henry Berry and Elizabeth Foyster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 126-5 (p, 154).

ignored in previous studies. Analysis of pauper inventories from a number of Suffolk parishes revealed that not all aged men would have been considered poor or destitute and the poverty that did exist within the aged population was experienced in different ways and to varying degrees and the notion that all aged men lived in abject misery found to be far from the case.

While Harley's study of pauper inventories has added to understanding of the material lives of the poor it neglects to recognise adequately the significant diversity which existed in the material lives and living environment of aged men within the region.⁸⁶⁸ Pauper inventories provide evidence both of the range and nature of household goods and importantly reveal the stratification and diversity which existed within the lower orders of rural Suffolk. The increasing inclusion of 'semi-luxury' goods in a significant number of inventories indicating an improvement in the material lives of the poor as the eighteenth century progressed. Pauper inventories, however, have been under-utilised in previous studies and provide a significant opportunity for further research on the stratification and diversity which existed within the lower orders.

Tomkins study contrasting almshouse accommodation with that of inhouse relief and Ottaway's recent study of workhouses have added to our understanding of the nature of institutional accommodation. While the thesis builds on the views of Ottaway and Tomkins, rather than focus on the design and physical features of either institution, as has often been the case previously, the thesis focused on the potential loss of freedom and personal independence for almshouse residents and workhouse inmates.

Despite continued working into old age residential independence was not easily achieved and many elderly men were faced with having to surrender part or all of their independence and personal freedom in their pursuit of accommodation. For those men unable to achieve

⁸⁶⁸ Harley, 'Pauper Inventories, Social Relations', 375-398.

residential independence or live with family members the alternative was either to seek accommodation in an almshouse or be admitted to the workhouse. The accommodation provided to both almshouse residents and workhouse inmates was probably superior to that which an elderly man would have experienced previously. The likely loss of independence experienced by elderly men living in almshouse accommodation was negligible and probably more than compensated for by the additional benefits provided to almshouse residents.⁸⁶⁹ In addition, almshouse residents were not subjected to an overly strict management regime. In contrast, my research of Suffolk's workhouses revealed admittance resulted in inmates having to adhere to a strict management regime based on adherence to workhouse rules, orders and regulations.

Significantly, while the elderly population of Suffolk's workhouses were predominantly male, in contrast to the findings of Ottaway and Williams, the number of elderly men admitted did not increase significantly as the century progressed.⁸⁷⁰ In fact, the number of elderly men in the Carlford and Colneis Incorporation workhouse in the closing decade of the eighteenth century, in common with other workhouses in the region, was found to be lower than when the workhouse first became operational in 1758. The poor law authorities admitted elderly men primarily due to their inability to cope independently and their reluctance to admit elderly women can only be assumed was due to prevailing social attitudes that opposed such action. However, the 'social politics' which underlay what could be considered to be a gendered admissions policy is an area which has been under-explored in previous studies and merits further investigation.

⁸⁶⁹ Tomkins, 'Almshouse versus Workhouse', 45-58; Susannah Ottaway, 'The Elderly in the Eighteenth-Century Workhouse', in *Medicine and the Workhouse*, ed. by Jonathan Reinartz and Leonard Schwarz, *Studies in Medical History* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2013), 40-57.

⁸⁷⁰ Ottaway, Susannah, *The Decline of Life*, pp. 247-277; Samantha Williams, 'Crisis of the English Poor Law', in *Population, Welfare and Economic Change in Britain 1290-1834*, ed. by Briggs, pp. 129-154.

Suffolk's incorporation workhouses displayed dual and somewhat contradictory aims. Although having the objective of providing accommodation and care to the elderly and vulnerable, workhouses had at the same time a responsibility of maintaining strict discipline. Undoubtedly, for elderly inmates the loss of freedom and personal independence would have been almost total, due to the highly regulated and communal environment which they had to endure. However, the role of the workhouse and rationale behind its use in this period merits further research. There is a need to re-examine the commonly held perception of these institutions and the contradiction which exists between viewing them as 'the ultimate system of neglect and despair for the old sunk in poverty', or as places in which, 'the ancient shall be provided for according to their wants', in order to arrive at a more nuanced view.⁸⁷¹

While the establishment of the incorporation's workhouses succeeded in replacing the squalid parochial poorhouses, and although the material conditions within them were better than the elderly would have enjoyed in their own homes and included specialist medical facilities, admittance to the Houses of Industry was resisted by the elderly due to the constraints of institutional life they would experience as inmates. Because they deprived the poor of their traditional social right to be relieved in their own homes many of the labouring poor regarded them as little better than prisons.

Chapters 5 and 6 analyse the extent to which the ambiguous nature of the 1598-1601 poor law legislation, demographic and economic pressures, changing societal attitudes contributed to the poor law authorities providing differential treatment based on a claimant's gender. Many thesis findings concur with the findings of Smith's study on aging and well-being in early Modern England.⁸⁷² In common with Smith thesis findings revealed the disproportionate amount of

⁸⁷¹ Webb, Stanley and Webb, Beatrice, *English Poor Law History*, p. 117.

⁸⁷² Richard Smith, 'Ageing and well-being', in *Old Age from Antiquity*, ed. by Johnson & Thane, pp. 64-95.

poor relief received according to their number and that relief was intended to supplement other earnings and that continued work into old age was expected. The thesis builds on Smith's study, however, while although identifying a gender bias in the provision of poor relief does not seek to explain the reasons behind what appear to be the adoption of gendered welfare policies, which are specifically addressed in this thesis.

In fact, the level of sentiment and benevolence expressed by Suffolk's poor law authorities towards aged male paupers was at times highly questionable. My analysis of poor relief provision across a number of Suffolk's rural parishes, typical of the region as a whole, revealed the difference in both the amount and the duration of poor relief typically provided to aged men compared to their female counterparts. While it was common practice for poor law authorities to provide relief to elderly women for prolonged periods on a regular basis, men on the other hand, typically received relief for much shorter periods of time and of lesser value, with the intention of merely tiding them over until they could resume work, even in advanced old age.

Significantly, the establishment of rural incorporations in Suffolk initiated changes to the manner welfare policies were administered within the region and resulted in a greater level of bureaucracy in the manner decisions were made regarding the eligibility and provision of relief, an area largely neglected in previous studies. Economic change and rising population exerted acute pressure on poor law authorities as the demand for relief continued to increase in the second half of the eighteenth century and in the first half of the nineteenth century which resulted in a change to the manner in which welfare policies were administered and the basis on which decisions regarding the provision of relief to claimants were made. An increasingly bureaucratic approach was adopted by Suffolk's rural incorporations, often to the detriment of a male pauper's eligibility for relief and the duration and level of relief provided.

Welfare policies became increasingly gendered from mid-eighteenth century. Age and gender increasingly influenced decisions on the nature, level and duration of relief provision,

ultimately to the disadvantage of aged farm labourers in need of welfare support. However, while it is often argued that aged women, in particular widows, were treated with more generosity than their male counterparts the term 'generosity' needs to be treated with a degree of care. While women were more likely to receive relief at a younger age than men, for a longer duration and of greater value, its 'generosity' is questionable. Although often provided on a regular basis and for significant periods of time the value of relief was such that it cannot be assumed that it replaced the need to work, at least in some capacity. Findings would suggest that while receiving relief elderly women were still expected by the poor law authorities to continue working and that relief was intended merely as a supplement to other earnings. However, It seems probable that the reason for the preferential treatment provided to women was due to a belief on the part of the poor law authorities of their economic vulnerability. That aged men were not thought to exhibit the same degree of vulnerability can only be assumed was due to the adherence of patriarchal ideals on the part of the poor law authorities, however, this is an area which I consider merits further investigation.

Decision making within the incorporations became increasingly determined by local economic and social expediency rather than by legislation. The establishment of rural incorporations, each with its own House of Industry capable of housing significant numbers, also had a significant economic impact on the wider community. However, the establishment, operation, economic and social impact of the poor law incorporations on their wider locality remains relatively neglected by historians and consequently provides an opportunity for further study.

The complex interaction between age, poverty and gender together with the significant demographic and economic changes which Suffolk experienced in the second half of the eighteenth century and in the first half of the nineteenth century had a profoundly detrimental impact on the experience and situation of poor old men. Poor law authorities adopted an increasingly 'hawkish' attitude towards the provision of poor relief, intended to constrain

expenditure in response to increasing demands for poor relief, in particular from elderly farm workers who were most vulnerable both to the seasonality of agricultural employment and due to age constraints which limited the work they were able to do and their earning capacity. In contrast, due to prevalent social attitudes and to an extent the somewhat ambiguous nature of the 1598-1601 legislation, women received more sympathetic and benevolent treatment from the poor law authorities as a result of welfare policies becoming increasingly gendered to the detriment of old men.

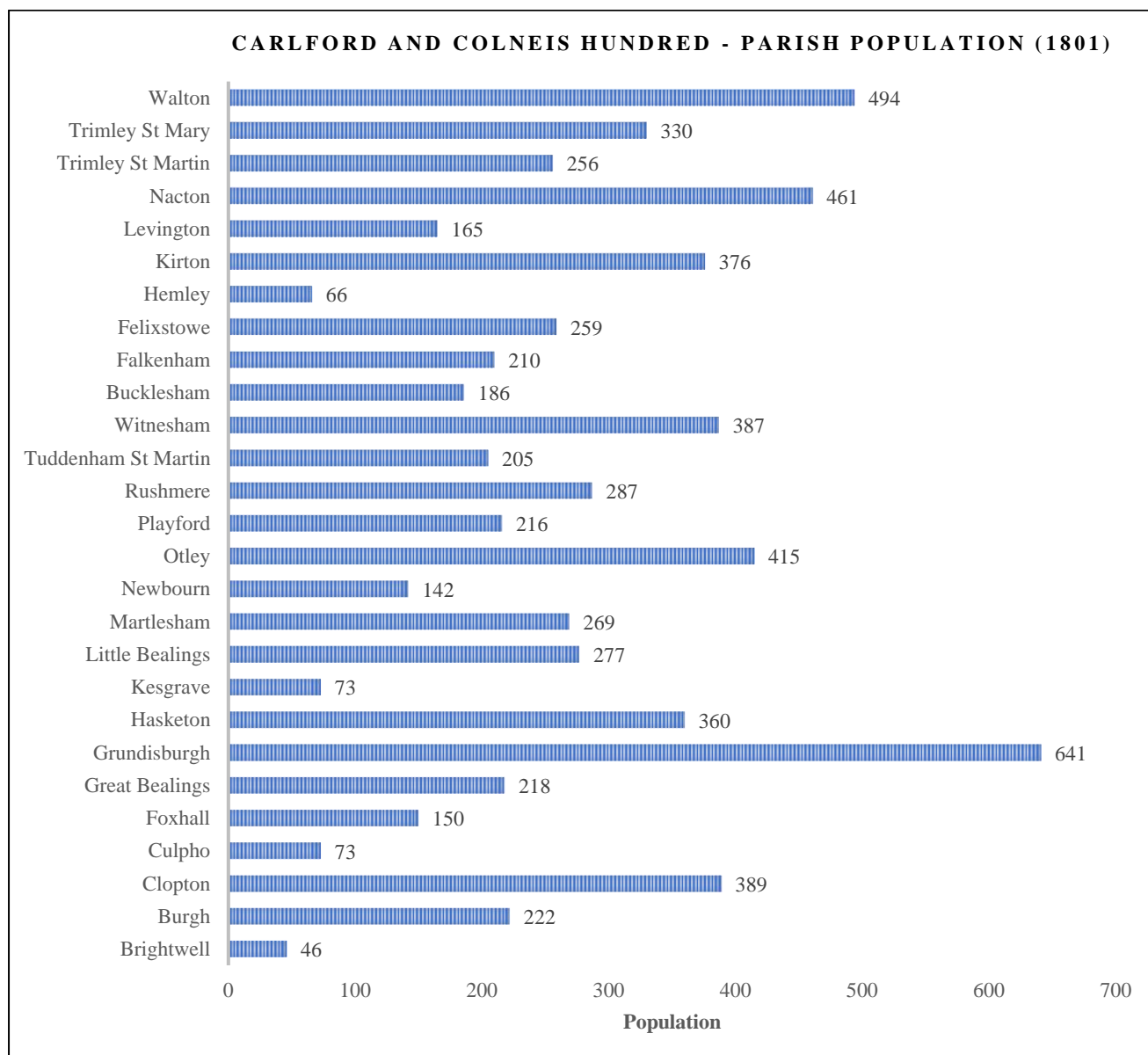
However, there remain a number of areas which merit further research including, how local politics influenced welfare policy making decisions and in particular the economic and social impact of the establishment of rural incorporations in the region. There is still much we do not fully understand about the complex interaction of old age, poverty and gender in this period and several areas identified in my study for further research provide an opportunity to understand old age in this period on a much deeper level.

Wordcount - 78,313

Appendices

Appendix 1.

Carlford and Colneis Incorporation – Parish Population (1801)⁸⁷³



⁸⁷³. W. Goult, *A Survey of Suffolk Parish History: East Suffolk Vols. 1 & 2* (Ipswich: Suffolk County Council, 1990)

Appendix 2.

Suffolk Incorporated Hundreds - Demographic Profile Analysis (1781)⁸⁷⁹

Incorporated Hundreds	Pop.	0-14 yrs.	%	15-49 yrs.	%	50+ yrs.	%
Blything	17,830	6,900	39%	9,292	52%	1,640	9.2%
Bosmere and Claydon	10,446	3,749	36%	5,696	55%	1,001	9.6%
Carlford	4,222	1,473	35%	2,336	55%	412	9.8%
Colneis	2,874	1,114	39%	1,472	51%	287	10.0%
Cosford	6,897	2,552	37%	3,662	53%	683	9.9%
Loes	8,132	2,488	31%	4,851	60%	793	9.8%
Mutford and Lothingland	7,774	3,023	39%	3,955	51%	797	10.3%
Samford	8,366	3,053	36%	4,485	54%	828	9.9%
Stow	5,395	2,131	40%	2,795	52%	469	8.7%
Wangford	9,602	3,504	36%	5,157	54%	941	9.8%
Wilford	4,486	1,745	39%	2,292	51%	449	10.0%
	86,024		37%		53%		9.7%

⁸⁷⁹SRO(I),HD2448/4/2/2/4, 1801 Census; Stephen Thompson, 'Population Growth', in *Population, Welfare and Economic Change in Britain 1290-1834*, ed. by Chris Briggs, pp. 189-226.

Appendix 3.

Table showing the ratio of inhouse to outdoor relief recipients in Suffolk parishes which retained their autonomy and provided relief as originally intended in the 1598-1601 legislation.

Suffolk Non-Incorporated Hundreds – Inhouse/Outdoor Relief.

Non-Incorporated Hundreds	1803			1814		
	No. of persons receiving inhouse relief	No. of persons receiving outdoor relief	Ratio of outdoor to indoor provision	No. of persons receiving inhouse relief	No. of persons receiving outdoor relief	Ratio of outdoor to indoor provision
Babergh	406	5308	1:13	325	3279	1:10
Blackbourn	217	1784	1:8	77	1347	1:17
Hartsmere	216	2069	1:9	231	2499	1:11
Hoxne	298	2321	1:8	283	1665	1:6
Lackford	83	909	1:11	85	725	1:8
Plomesgate	151	1161	1:8	155	939	1:6
Risbridge	243	2676	1:11	158	1853	1:12
Thedwestry	74	1450	1:19	93	1143	1:12
Thingoe	75	781	1:10	63	871	1:14
Thredling	53	542	1:10	70	218	1:3
Ipswich Borough	170	1074	1:6	185	1378	1:7
Sudbury Borough	58	385	1:7	35	286	1:8
Bury St. Edmunds	189	1097	1:6	106	857	1:8

Appendix 4.

Table showing the ratio of inhouse as opposed to outdoor relief for a number of Suffolk's autonomous non-incorporated parishes. The ratio of inhouse to outdoor relief recipients in the parishes listed below varied between 1:13 and 1:3 in 1803 and 1:18 and 1:2 in 1814. The average ratio of inhouse to outdoor recipients in 1803 being 1:6 and in 1813 1:5.

Table 4. 11. Non-Incorporated Parishes – Inhouse/Outdoor Relief Ratio⁸⁸⁰

Non-Incorporated Parishes	Hundred	1803			1814		
		No. of persons receiving outdoor relief	No. of persons receiving indoor relief	Ratio of outdoor to indoor provision	No. of persons receiving outdoor relief	No. of persons receiving indoor relief	Ratio of outdoor to indoor provision
Cavendish	Barbergh	43	290	1:7	18	198	1:11
Stoke Nayland	Barbergh	22	84	1:4	21	210	1:10
Ixworth	Blackbourn	18	61	1:3	21	74	1:4
Hepworth	Blackbourn	12	52	1:4	n/a	n/a	n/a
Mendlesham	Hartsmere	40	109	1:3	29	70	1:2
Wortham	Hartsmere	29	102	1:4	30	546	1:18
Metfield	Hoxne	12	67	1:6	16	96	1:6
Wingfield	Hoxne	15	134	1:9	15	46	1:3
Brandon	Lackford	23	106	1:5	11	53	1:5
Mildenhall	Lackford	42	194	1:5	42	137	1:3
Glenham Mag.	Plomesgate	10	81	1:8	14	40	1:3
Saxmundham	Plomesgate	25	167	1:7	19	80	1:4
Haverhill	Risbridge	25	195	1:8	31	143	1:5
Stradishall	Risbridge	11	74	1:7	8	49	1:6
Rougham	Thredwestry	24	111	1:5	13	142	1:11
Whepstead	Thingoe	5	65	1:13	14	77	1:6
Debenham	Thredling	31	128	1:4	32	61	1:2

⁸⁸⁰ *PP. 82, 1804*, pp. 477-500; *PP. 175, 1815*, pp. 425-441.

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