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‘Not by bread only’?

Common right, parish relief and endowed charity in a forest economy, c. 1600–1800

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Overview

On 21 June 1607, Robert Wilkinson preached a sermon before commissioners assembled at Northampton to try the participants in the Midland Rising, a series of anti-enclosure protests involving as many as one thousand participants, which had spread throughout Leicestershire, Northamptonshire and Warwickshire during the spring and summer of that year. The rising had culminated on 8 June in a bloody pitched battle at the village of Newton in Geddington Woods, part of Rockingham Forest in Northamptonshire, in which some forty or fifty rebels were massacred by a gentry force under Sir Edward Montagu.¹ For Wilkinson, the rising was symptomatic of ‘tempestuous and troublesome times’ during which the ‘excessive covetousnesse of some’ had ‘caused extreme want to other, and that want, not well digested, hath rioted to the hazard of all’. Depopulating enclosure had deprived the poor of their living, Wilkinson noted, and ‘in case of extreme hunger men will not be perswaded but they will have bread’.²

As might be expected of a court preacher speaking in the presence of judges and law-officers of the crown, Wilkinson emphasised his horror that ‘mechanicall men are come to beard magistrates’. ‘It is horrible indeed’, he argued, that ‘*even the vile* ...

presume against the honourable'. Wilkinson was nonetheless surprisingly equivocal in his analysis of the causes of the rising, condemning not only 'the rebellion of the many' but also 'the oppression of the mighty'. On the one hand, he reminded 'the many' that 'man liveth not by bread only', urging them to 'be thankful for those good things we have, & waite with patience for those which yet wee have not'. This was to condemn the 'poverty without patience' which had tempted the 'mad and rebellious multitude' to use unlawful means to seek redress for their grievances. On the other hand, however, he admonished 'the mighty' that 'man liveth by bread', thereby exhorting the propertied to exercise their traditional obligations of charity and paternalism. In doing so, he actively promoted 'the cause and complaints of the expelled, half-pined and distressed poore' who had been driven to rebellion by the covetousness of the rich. 'Let it be a lesson for all states generally', Wilkinson insisted, '*not to grind the faces of the poore*'.³ The commissioners themselves, however, were evidently rather less even-handed in their interpretation of the causes of the rising, and the convicted rioters were subjected to the full rigours of the penalties stipulated by the treason statutes, their quarters bloodily exhibited both at Northampton and at the neighbouring towns of Kettering, Oundle, and Thrapston.

If the propertyless cottagers of this forest economy were not, therefore, to live 'by bread only', how else were they to live? Wilkinson's answer was, inevitably, scriptural, in the form of a quotation from Matthew 4. iv: 'man shall not live by bread only but by every word that procedeth out of the mouth of God'.⁴ The modern historian's answer to Wilkinson's question is, of course, rather less likely to turn on theological issues. Any understanding of the survival strategies of the poor of Rockingham Forest necessitates the analysis of the matrix of economic resources and welfare provision which pervaded the economy of Geddington Woods (known as Geddington Chase after disafforestation in 1676) for two centuries after Wilkinson's sermon was preached and the savage punishment of the Northampton trials meted out.⁵

Historians of early modern English welfare provision have gradually come to realise that although public bodies or officers – churchwardens and overseers of the poor – gained control of some relief funds (and indeed of the right to tax) from the late sixteenth century, 'they did not achieve a monopoly of relief, but rather joined the ranks of other official, collective and individual donors

Consequently, argues Joanna Innes, 'a "mixed economy of welfare" has persisted from that era to this, with, of course, changes both in the nature of constituent agencies and practices and in the balance between them'.⁶ This interweaving of national and parochial, and of formal and informal, networks of care created a complex pattern of resources upon which the indigent might draw in different combinations at different stages of the life-cycle. As Innes's magisterial survey reveals, contemporaries from Matthew Hale to Thomas Malthus seem either to have been resigned to, or positively appreciative of, such diversity. For historians of English *thinking* about the poor, Innes's 'mixed economy of welfare' is likely to become as solid a piece of intellectual furniture as has Olwen Hufton's 'economy of makeshifts' for the historian of the *experience* of poverty.⁷ Both concepts imply that 'legal charity' or formal welfare provided by the parish, which the historiography of poor relief has long emphasised almost by default, is uncharacteristic of the 'locus of care' as it has generally been experienced by the poorer sort of people in the English past.⁸ Each concept, moreover, invites reconstruction of the alternative survival strategies through which the poor themselves might put together a living.

As Paul Slack has demonstrated, however, such reconstructions are particularly problematic.⁹ The differing shape, size and texture of the planks in the makeshift economy of the poor render difficult any assessment of the precarious balance between them. Historians have gradually come to realise that, in shifting for themselves, the poor might combine any number of expedients: kin support and complex patterns of co-residence; gentry hospitality and communal charity; migration and mendicancy; petty theft and the embezzlement of perquisites.¹⁰ All of these, it should be emphasised, are notoriously difficult to measure. In particular, there are few reliable means of calculating the value of casual charity, the 'alms given to the poor in the yard of an inn or at a man's door'.¹¹ Although it is probably true that, by the eighteenth century at least, the recipients of such spontaneous 'hospitality' were far more likely to have been strangers than known neighbours, they were apparently numerous enough to provoke contemporary concern. Furthermore, other types of assistance to the needy are equally invisible in the historical record: foremost amongst these is kin support. Although it has recently been argued that the 'attenuated nature of the early modern English kinship system' meant that protection

had to be sought 'from within the collectivity rather than from the extended family or kin', we must nonetheless remain sensitive to the possibility that the spontaneous gift by both kin and neighbours, perhaps offered on the tacit expectation of reciprocity, played an important role in the survival strategies of the poor.¹²

These caveats borne in mind, this paper seeks to investigate the relationship between the various sources of income – common right, parish relief and endowed charity – upon which the rural poor of a seventeenth- and eighteenth-century forest economy might draw. Inevitably, the focus must be intensely local, partly because of the mysteries of source survival, partly because access to these resources was, by definition, regulated by social, economic and even moral imperatives which might vary significantly from community to community. Manorial custom, as *lex loci*, governed access to common right.¹³ Both before and after the 1662 settlement laws, the effective operation of the Elizabethan poor relief statutes presupposed that parishes would be well-defended from the threat of exploitative in-migration.¹⁴ Charitable endowments strictly regulated eligibility according to the terms set by individual testators.¹⁵ While the highly localised nature of these resources has gradually become recognised, the precise nature of their inter relationship has seldom been investigated in the local context. Furthermore, although the enclosure of the common fields and wastes undoubtedly exerted a direct or indirect influence over all three resources, its role in shaping the 'mixed economy of welfare' has generally been assumed rather than analysed in the literature. Enclosure looms large in the rural history of the particular *locale* at issue here, for Northamptonshire was *the* county of parliamentary enclosure, and the parishes of Rockingham Forest were at the heart of resistance not only to enclosure by parliamentary act but also to the less formal enclosure-agreements, however arbitrary they might actually have been in practice, which had been undertaken in the area for the preceding two centuries. The following discussion therefore has two inter-related purposes. In the first place, it is intended as a case study of Innes's 'mixed economy of welfare', and as a reconstruction (albeit impressionistic) of the 'hierarchy of resort' that existed within it.¹⁶ In the second place, however, its principal argument is that the *measurement* of provision for the poor raises far more fundamental and significant questions about the politics of *meaning* within the social economy. Accordingly, then, this chapter aims to provide a qualitative assessment

Table 2.1 Population and hearth tax exemption in three Northamptonshire parishes, 1524–1801

Parish	Population estimates			Estimated number of families		Hearth tax exemption rate (%)
	1524	c. 1670	1801	c. 1720	1801	c. 1670
Brigstock	536	872	903	160	201	42.2
Geddington	272	496	663	135	154	40.3
Stanion	228	252	248	56	61	54.0
Total	1036	1620	1814	351	416	45.5

Source: Petit, *Royal Forests*, p. 144.

of the changing significance of common right, parish relief and endowed charity in one particular local context (three parishes which intercommoned on Geddington Chase in Northamptonshire) over a long period (the two centuries after which their inhabitants had witnessed the Midland Rising and the retribution that came in its wake).

A forest economy

The economy of the three parishes central to this study, Brigstock, Geddington and Stanion, was dominated by what had originally been Crown woodland in two walks, Farming Woods, 1,100 acres north and east of Brigstock, and Geddington Woods some 1,400 acres to the west of Brigstock. The three ‘core’ parishes intercommoned on Geddington Chase, but the experience of the neighbouring parishes of Weldon and Oakley also illuminates this shady forest economy.¹⁷ As Table 2.1 shows, two of the three ‘core’ parishes experienced considerable population growth in the early part of the period: from a combined Geddington Chase population of approximately 1,000 in 1524, there was an increase of 60 per cent to approximately 1,600 in 1670. This was succeeded by a period of relatively slight demographic pressure over the long eighteenth century, with the aggregate rising only by a further 20 per cent to a little over 1800 in 1801. In the 1720s, it was estimated that the three parishes contained 351 ‘families or houses’; the census enumerators’ calculation of 416 ‘families’ suggests that only

a further fifty households had been added by 1801. Furthermore, these aggregate figures conceal the stagnation of Stanion, which was probably less densely populated in 1801 than in 1720. As we shall see, the chronology of social change in this part of Northamptonshire owed rather more to secular trends in prices than it did to demographic pressure *per se*. The various attempts to enclose Geddington Chase in the 1600s, 1630s, 1720s and 1790s did not necessarily have common roots. They nonetheless provoked both intense resentment and widespread resistance.

As might be expected, the social and occupational structure of the region is rather more difficult to reconstruct. It has been estimated that while husbandmen and middle-sized farmers made up only 21 per cent of the early sixteenth-century population of Rockingham Forest as a whole, there was a large class, perhaps as many as 77 per cent of the total, of 'small cottagers, wage labourers and poor persons'.¹⁸ If perhaps 30 per cent of Rockingham Forest households were too poor to be taxed in 1524, almost half as many again, some 43 per cent of the population, were exempt from the hearth taxes of the late 1660s and early 1670s, a figure almost ten percentage points higher than that for non-forest villages in Northamptonshire, and substantially higher than that for most rural non-industrial parishes in England as a whole.¹⁹ Again, two of our three core parishes were typical of this pattern. Of the three, Stanion appears to have been the poorest. While 42.2 per cent of the households in Brigstock, and 40.3 per cent of those in Geddington were exempt, 54 per cent of the families in Stanion were 'poor' on this definition. Both population growth and hearth tax exemption rates are explained by the fact that whilst Stanion was the smallest of the three villages, and lacked any pasture of its own, virtually all its dwellings were ancient commonable cottages: there was, quite literally, no room for 'off-comers'. The survival of a fine series of militia lists for Northamptonshire makes analysis of the occupational structure rather easier for the mid-eighteenth century.²⁰ Of the 188 adult males listed for the three parishes in 1777, only eleven (6 per cent) were farmers. Forty-one (22 per cent) were labourers. There were, interestingly, significant differences between the three parishes: taken together the seventeen weavers and eight tailors in Geddington suggest that cloth-working accounted for over 30 per cent of the 'working population' of that particular parish at a time when the occupation went almost unrecorded in either of its

neighbours. Brigstock and Geddington each had a full complement of local craftsmen: masons, carpenters and joiners, wheelwrights, butchers, tanners and cobblers.

The three parishes were long associated if not with extreme poverty, then with substantially polarised wealth. In 1610, George Sharp, the vicar of Brigstock, felt obliged to remind the 'rich and mighty men of the town' of the presence of 'others to be pitied for their very beggarly estates'. By 1643, 128 (61 per cent) of the 210 householders in the parish were poor enough to be eligible for the Earl of Salisbury's Christmas dole.²¹ The existence of a substantial numbers of indigent residents haunted landlords well into the eighteenth century. Mr Edmunds, the Duke of Montagu's estate agent, contrasted the villages of Geddington Chase unfavourably with the Duke's own purlieu woods, bemoaning not only 'the depredations', 'ravages' and 'destructive havoc' wrought by the devouring jaws of a herd of hungry cattle, but also the 'inability of the occupier of an open-field farm to procure a sufficiency of food for their support in the winter season'. The resulting 'daily diminution in the growth of the underwood' rendered the cattle vulnerable to contagious maladies, which in turn prevented their owners from 'deriving any advantage from the commonage that year, and probably for many years to come'.²² For Edmunds, then, rural immiseration was the inevitable inconvenience which must accrue where property was 'held under a mixture of interests', especially interests 'so extremely inimical to one another as those of the commoner and the proprietor of the timber'. And the consequence of rural immiseration was desperation and disorder.²³ Most seventeenth-century observers were convinced that forests in particular were a 'nursery for the county gaols'. Thus, John Norden, writing in the early seventeenth century in a language that was to be reappropriated for similar rhetorical purposes as late as the 1780s, argued that the forests were

so ugly a monster as of necessity will breed ... more and more idleness, beggary and atheism, and consequently disobedience to God and the King ... wherein infinite poor, yet most idle inhabitants have thrust themselves, living covertly without law or religion, *rudes et refractori* by nature, among whom are nourished and bred infinite idle fry, that coming ripe grow vagabonds, and infect the Commonwealth with most dangerous leprosy.²⁴

Such fears were undoubtedly fuelled by the long campaign fought by the commoners of Geddington Chase to protect their

common rights, a campaign in which the Midland Rising was only the most violent engagement.

Common right

Although historians have recently come to emphasise the central role of customary right in the mixed economy of welfare, the study of forest rights in particular remains at a relatively preliminary stage.²⁵ Any discussion of common rights in the forest villages of Northamptonshire is indebted to Jeanette Neeson's remarkable study of the uses and management of waste, and of the richness of the economic equilibrium to which they contributed.²⁶ In Neeson's analysis, the forest economy offered not only pasture for cattle and swine on the forest commons, but also casual labour and reserves of nuts, berries, honey and game. The most significant resource of all, however, was fuel. Besides wood, forest fuel might include peat, turf, dried dung, gorse and heather. All of these might be used directly to warm a cottage, but each might equally be sold or traded for grain or other produce.

Neeson, moreover, argues against what she regards as historically uninformed models of the inevitable 'tragedy of the commons', in which poor regulation led inexorably to the exhaustion of natural resources, and seeks to demonstrate the fair and effective administration of use-rights by manorial courts.²⁷ This insight has recently been confirmed by more general surveys of the control of valuable communal resources. Donald Woodward, for instance, cites very widespread evidence of seventeenth-century by-laws identifying those who had the right to share in communal resources; stipulating the amounts which each individual could carry away and whether such material could be sold to outsiders; and determining the seasonality of the legitimate collection of materials. 'Without such regulations', he insists, 'many of the commons and wastes of early modern England would have been quickly denuded.'²⁸ The effect of these regulations, however, remains ambiguous. On the one hand, Neeson suggests that communal regulation favoured poorer rather than more affluent commoners. The management of waste fostered a fundamental social cohesion based on the ideology of custom, in which, she insists, 'the defence of common rights required the protection of lesser rights as well as greater'.²⁹ On the other, regulation was by

definition an act of exclusion which prevented not only outsiders but also the occupants of non-commonable cottages from enjoying the uses of waste.³⁰

While the evidence for the regulation of common right in our three core parishes is not overwhelming, it is nonetheless strong. In all Crown woodland, the gathering of wood for fuel was supposedly carried out only under licence from the forest officers and it is likely that the ancient settled poor of the parish would be the principal beneficiaries of such discretion: 'such only and so many of the poor persons as the verderers and woodward think meet' were to be 'admitted to gather sticks on Mondays and Thursdays only in every week'.³¹ This practice was evidently observed in Geddington and Newton, where exchequer depositions of 1608 refer to the custom that 'divers poor ... had taken thorns and bushes to burn'.³² Licensed sticking was, however, one thing, illicit 'gathering [of] sets and breaking of hedges' quite another. A crime characteristically associated with poverty, the casual pilfering of wood for fuel was a matter of national concern from the late sixteenth century, and its policing and punishment was entrusted variously to manorial juries, parish officers and the summary jurisdiction of magistrates.³³ In Geddington Chase, hedge-breaking was a matter of acute concern from as early as 1577, when more stringent restrictions on the admission of poor stick gatherers were proposed. The late Elizabethan records of the forest courts reveal an annual average number of fifty-six prosecutions for cutting greenwood or breaking hedges in the three parishes.³⁴ The very fact of poverty therefore ensured that 'there was a very fine line between the exercise of legitimate use rights and theft'.³⁵

Wood was one of the main comforts of life, and both competition over, and control of access to, this valuable resource was accordingly intense. The pasturing of cattle, sheep and swine in the open fields and forest commons required similarly strict regulation. The regulation of pasture rights in the open fields of Geddington stretches back to the late fourteenth century. In Brigstock, the seventeenth-century common rights included the driving of sheep through forest ridings to the wastes of Benefield, for which a fee of a shilling a year was paid to the ranger; the daily and overnight pasturing of sheep on the wastes in the summer; and the folding of them in the winter.³⁶ The management of the forest commons was largely carried out through forest drifts or

searches for illegally depastured animals. There were repeated complaints about the infrequency and inefficiency of these enquiries. The whole of Geddington Chase lacked a pinfold in 1598. The verderers stressed the need for one in 1602, yet a few years later it was again reported that the pound was 'very ruinous and wholly decayed. By reason whereof foreigners' cattle trespassing in the said office cannot be impounded as they should, neither yet the same driven in the time of year as it ought'.³⁷ The result of unregulated pasture was overstocking of the commons. Early eighteenth-century drift books reveal that an annual average of 217 cows and ninety-three horses were at pasture on the chase. After the 400-odd deer are taken into account, these some seven hundred animals were competing for a little over 320 acres of grazing.³⁸ Neeson's claims to the contrary notwithstanding, the resources of the forest were almost certainly approaching exhaustion.

The delicate social and economic balance of the forest commons is further revealed in a fragmentary series of manorial orders which survive for Geddington in the 1730s.³⁹ At first sight, the presentment and fining of five individuals in 1730 for 'unlawful encroachment on the commons' implies that resources were being tightly regulated; the fact that these same five, three of them widows, and all of them in receipt of parish charity, were presented and fined again for the same offence in 1731, 1732, 1734, 1735 and 1738 suggests that these were not marginal individuals, whose presence in the community was merely tolerated, but that these were the ancient poor of the parish whose precarious exploitation of the waste was reluctantly condoned, the fines amounting to little more than permission to retain with a rent. The trouble, of course, was that over several generations, the forest economy had come to absorb countless settlers of this kind. Squatters and other migrants were, in this sense, agents in the fabrication of their own economy of makeshifts: inventing traditions where there were none, claiming rights by virtue only of residence, manipulating custom in their own interest. Settlement at the margins of a forest economy was not, therefore, a survival *strategy* legitimately played out in the context of widely recognised ethical rules, but a survival *tactic* which ingeniously exploited the 'unstopped cracks in the wainscoting of power'.⁴⁰

Early seventeenth-century population growth, especially through immigration, undoubtedly contributed to these difficulties. Squatting and the illegal erection of cottages were, as in other forest

areas, notorious in Geddington Chase. The taking of inmates was complained of as early as 1577, several years before the statute that outlawed it. The three parishes saw the erection of at least twenty-three illegal cottages in the thirty years prior to 1637.⁴¹ The leading ratepayers of Brigstock complained in 1623 that the burden of taxes was increasing because of the multitude of poor people, 'which have and do increase daily by reason of the continual erecting of new cottages and taking in of new inmates, being at least four score families more ... in these few years than in any ancient time'.⁴² Some indication of the scale of illegal pasturing and wood-gathering is revealed by the papers relating to enclosure negotiations in 1721: the Duke of Montagu's steward drew up a list of the 116 houses in Brigstock that now claim right of common in Geddington Chase but noted that 'many of 'em examined into will be found to be tenements only, for none but ancient cottagers can be commonable'. He subsequently noted that only fifty-nine (51 per cent) of the houses could be certified as ancient commonable cottages when 'impartial' referees were invited to adjudicate the claims.⁴³

All of which brings us to the vexed question of who actually was *entitled* to common right.⁴⁴ In the early seventeenth century, at a time when there were perhaps 170 households in the parish, Brigstock possessed fifty-three suit-houses, two half, and nine quarter suit-houses, whose tenants were allowed housebote (the right to take timber for house repairs) by order of the forest courts. This amounted to the taking of about fifty trees *per annum*, and was supplemented by an annual allowance of sixty-two loads of 'suit-thorns' at concessional rates out of the ridings of Geddington Chase. Similar provisions applied in both Stanion and Geddington, though the ratio of 'suit-houses' to all residents is rather more difficult to calculate until the early eighteenth century. The papers concerning the proposed enclosure of 1720 demonstrate that the proportion of common-right cottages varied even between these three adjacent parishes intercommoning together. The proportion of legally commonable cottages to all forest dwellings ranged from 84 per cent in Stanion (47 of 56), to 36 per cent in Brigstock (58 of 160) and 34 per cent in Geddington (46 of 135). Overall, therefore, only 43 per cent (151 of 351) of the households formally enjoyed common right in Geddington Chase. As we have seen, however, virtually all residents claimed common right in practice.⁴⁵ It is therefore unsurprising that the

tenants of the ancient commonable cottages resented the poor migrants who claimed customary right simply on the basis of residence: they 'have no means to relieve themselves, there being little work to set them on, but by flocks go roving up and down the forest, parks and inclosed grounds near unto them to the great hindrance of all who have cattle and woods'.⁴⁶ For the poor migrant to the forest, therefore, custom came to be regarded not as *cohesive* but rather as a *restrictive* ideology, one of the structural constraints within, and around, which survival tactics were performed.

What is especially striking about this complex economic equilibrium is the sheer endurance of the forest itself. Despite a long-running series of attempts to enclose this part of the Northamptonshire forest, the piecemeal extinction of common right was resisted at every stage. The projected mid-sixteenth-century enclosure of Benefield in Brigstock, was, it was recalled some 160 years later, 'staved off' both 'by the prudent but chargeable methods of law' employed by the Dukes of Montagu and by the levelling of trenches by the commoners. On this occasion, the commoners' interests were apparently protected by an alliance of aristocracy and gentry.⁴⁷ By the 1590s, however, the gentry had defected from this alliance, and Sir Thomas Tresham of Newton was amongst those eleven landlords prosecuted by Attorney-General Coke for enclosure and engrossing in the reaction against depopulation after the Oxfordshire rising.⁴⁸ His long-standing abuses in this respect almost certainly explain why Geddington Chase should be the epicentre of the Midland Rising of 1607.

The Northamptonshire disturbances of that year were, as we have seen, focused on the Tresham estates in and around Newton and Geddington. By Michaelmas 1607, 143 rebels had sued for pardon: seventy-eight (55 per cent) of them came from Rockingham Forest, the vast majority of those from Geddington Chase. The character of the rising can be assessed on the basis of the social profile of those pardoned: while 43 per cent were described as labourers; and a further 38 per cent were artisans, only 15 per cent were husbandmen.⁴⁹ Essentially, it seems, this was a rising of 'propertyless cottagers from forest communities'.⁵⁰ This contention is confirmed by the content of a seditious libel, protesting against the injustice of enclosure, which was wrapped round a ball of wax, thrown into the choir of Castor church and subsequently sent to the Earl of Rutland. Entitled the 'Poor Man's Joy and the

Gentleman's Plague', it began 'yow gentlemen that rack your rents, and trow downe land for corne, the tyme wyll com that som will sigh, that ever they were borne'. Protesting that 'living the poor doth want and living they shall have', it threatened the 'bloody enterprise' of pulling down those 'haughty minds' who oppressed the commons.⁵¹ Copied in the hand of the Earl's household steward Thomas Screven, the libel almost certainly passed through the hands of his Grace's private secretary Robert Dallington, an individual of very substantial significance in the subsequent history of Geddington Chase.

Less than twelve months after the suppression of the rising, however, the commoners of Geddington sued Tresham in the exchequer for enclosing the Brand, a common disputed between the two parishes of Newton and Geddington. As late as 1610, Tresham had failed to comply with the orders of the Commissioners for Depopulation to restore some four hundred acres of land to nine 'depopulated' cottages in Newton.⁵² The recalcitrance of the rich and mighty was similarly demonstrated by the behaviour of another Northamptonshire landlord, Thomas Lord Brudenell, when he was prosecuted for the depopulation of Hougham in 1636. Brudenell indignantly defended his 'benign and charitable' intentions, and claimed that he owned 'not a mannor house without a familie, nor a messuage, less than he was left, nor a farmer without his auntient quantitie or sufficient support, nor a cottager without livelyhood and worke, nor an impotent man without reliefe'. Nevertheless, the commoners convinced Archbishop Laud and the Commissioners for Depopulation that Brudenell had 'devoured the people with a sheapheard and a dog', a complaint that was to resonate through Rockingham Forest in general, and Geddington Chase in particular, over the next two centuries.⁵³

The most significant eighteenth-century engagement in the attritional conflict over enclosure and common right was that fought between the commoners and 'Planter' John, 2nd Duke of Montagu, in 1721–23.⁵⁴ As part of very complex negotiations with the Earl of Cardigan, Montagu sent an open letter to the commoners of Geddington Chase, justifying his enclosure proposals on the grounds that ineffective management of the forest commons had led directly to increased poor rates: 'It is very well known that all Forest towns who have some privileges in the forest are thereby made the poorer and any gentleman's estate there must

be so much the worse in being charged with burthensome levies.' Furthermore, he argued

The pretence of some small privilege, as of gathering of dead wood in a forest and the like, are only cloakes for the greatest villainies in destroying the wood and the game. The children are brought up in this manner & instead of being inured to labour are accustomed to laziness which must intail poverty upon their posterity and charge upon an estate. It is therefore the interest of every person concerned to endeavour to stop the growth of such an evil not by depriving the poor of any privilege which they enjoy but by putting them into a better capacity to get their livelihood by providing of proper worke for them & take care that they be brought up to industry, & qualified to get their livinge anywhere and not to be confined to a forrest & earn their bread by pilfering and stealing.⁵⁵

The details of the proposal need not detain us here: suffice to say that common rights in the enclosed cow commons suggested by Montagu would be restricted only to those with legally commonable cottages, which (as we have seen) constituted less than half the dwellings in the three parishes. The evidence suggests that these legal commoners were, initially at least, entirely persuaded by the plan: in Brigstock, only four of the eighty-two proprietors and tenants who were consulted actually refused.⁵⁶ Nonetheless, even though a parliamentary bill was drawn up to confirm the extinction of common rights, all negotiations appear to have broken down by the mid-1720s. Patterns of persuasion, in turn creating complex loops of association among the inhabitants, apparently frustrated the plan.⁵⁷ None of this, unfortunately, is visible in the archival record: Montagu's agent could only blame 'the prejudices of some, the personal views of others, and the ignorance, mistake and unreasonableness of the rest'.⁵⁸ This was not only a narrow reading of the nature of opposition, it was also a gross underestimate of its strength. Extensive proceedings in the court of King's Bench reveal that violent protest had broken out over the proposals by the end of 1724. The riots were inspired by William Good, rector of neighbouring Weldon, who had urged his parishioners to turn their annual perambulation, the corporate manifestation of the village community which both reflected and constituted a sense of belonging, into a protest against the enclosure.⁵⁹

Good's exhortations to resistance provide an important link between the successful anti-enclosure campaign of the 1720s, and

its futile successor of the 1790s. In 1744, Good published an open letter to the commoners in Rockingham Forest. He intended not only to prove the rights of common to which *all* tenants in the commonable woods were entitled, but also to propose a strategy for the preservation of those rights 'at a very easy expense if they will unanimously pursue it'. Common right, he argued, was granted not by the favour of the landlord, but was inherited by all residents: 'all tenants in the commonable woods in the forest have as long as they shall continue tenants there an equal right of common with those that have houses and lands of their own, and as good a right by custom, and the laws of the land, as the owners of the woods have to the timber and underwoods'. Good argued that the mutual defence of these rights between the farmers and cottagers of inter-commoning parishes could best be provided by pooling financial resources: if the two hundred cottagers gave 2s. 6d. each, and the three hundred farmers 5d. each, the sum of £100 could be invested and the issue tried at law. Furthermore, he argued, he had taken legal advice and was now convinced that such proceedings would not be liable to the statutes of champerty, maintenance and combination. Good's open disavowal of all riotous and tumultuous proceedings was no doubt expected of him: rather more surprising is his advice that 'every parish that has any right of common in the forest of Rockingham to lay up two of these letters in the parish chest, which may be a means of instructing their children and their children's children how to preserve their right in the forest for ages to come'. The advice was undoubtedly heeded, for the 'letter' was republished in the context of the enclosure protests of the 1790s.⁶⁰ The economy of makeshifts was not therefore simply subject to an ongoing piecemeal process of *practical* redefinition by squatters and migrants who exploited the interstices of local custom; it was also periodically reinvented in a *cultural* sense by propagandists who actively sought to legitimate its redefinition in the wider interest of the forest community.

The issue of entitlement to the uses of waste was finally forced by the Duke of Buccleuch in the early 1790s. In the winter of 1792, eighteen 'small proprietors of land and cottages' in Brigstock delivered the first of several petitions to the Duke, urging him to reconsider his proposals for the enclosure of Geddington Chase. 'It is with no small concern', they pleaded (in an echo of the complaint of the commoners of Caroline Hougham), 'that we see whole lordships managed by a sheepheard or two and their dogs

which in an open field state gave employ to a number of industrious families'. However much the proprietor may benefit, they insisted, enclosures

never fail to increase the price of provisions and depopulate the country by forcing the laborious peasant and his family from his peaceful home to seek a precarious living in the capital already overgrown.⁶¹

His Grace, it seems, 'did not condescend to give [the] petitioners an answer'. Instead, and only after he was provoked by a further petition to his wife, he found it expedient to donate a cash sum to the overseers and churchwardens of the Geddington Chase parishes. The parish officers of Geddington 'humbly begged leave to return [their] sincere thanks to [his] grace for [his] gracious benefaction of ten pounds which has proved a very reasonable relief to the poor during this inclement winter', declaring that they had 'the honour to subscribe [themselves] [his] graces much obliged and very humble servants'.⁶² Nevertheless, the Duke's belief that rights of common upon the chase were 'injurious' to his own interests encouraged him to draw upon his aristocratic neighbours to force through the necessary legislation. The parliamentary enclosure of Brigstock, Geddington and Stanion therefore proceeded in 1795, and proved to be one of only nine occasions when expectations of opposition provoked the House into permitting interested MPs to vote.⁶³ The avowed objective, 'to make these commons more useful to ye claimants and the woods more serviceable to himself' was rather undermined by the fact that compensation would not extend even to the Duke's own tenants. As a result, only thirty allotments were allocated to the commoners of Geddington, at a time when the parish population exceeded 660. The preamble to the Act insisted that it would be 'expedient' to make compensation 'convenient in situation and adequate in value' to the rights extinguished. The Duke appears to have been only too aware of how restricted those rights were in strictly legal terms.⁶⁴

Opposition to enclosure in the eighteenth century was entirely characteristic of forest towns like Geddington, whose economy was dominated by forest trades, some cloth and lace-making and large forest commons.⁶⁵ Diffuse rather than consolidated in their land-ownership, usually combining agricultural and manufacturing activity rather than being dependent solely on agriculture, such

villages were renowned for their spirited independence and their tradition of truculence. Those who lived there were by definition peculiarly dependent upon their own ingenuity in assembling a diversified economy of makeshifts. These were, after all, impoverished communities in which the marginal were more than usually vulnerable to indigence.

Parish relief

As to the operation of institutional poor relief in the region, the evidence is rather more formal but, sadly, only slightly less fragmentary. Although very little work has been done on the early history of the poor law in Northamptonshire, it seems that the decisive set of orders was made by the county bench only in 1625.⁶⁶ Surviving only in the churchwardens' accounts of Great Houghton, the orders stipulate the speedy execution of various statutes including '43 Eliz.', and the acts of 1607 against tippling and of 1624 against swearing, insisting on presentments of offenders to the magistrates in each hundred every three weeks.⁶⁷ Of the thirty-one surviving sets of seventeenth-century overseers' accounts from Northamptonshire, moreover, only seven date from before 1650.⁶⁸ For our three Geddington Chase parishes, overseers' accounts survive only in interrupted series for the mid-eighteenth century, and are particularly deficient for the period immediately preceding parliamentary enclosure in the 1790s.⁶⁹ As Figure 2.1 suggests, however, they do provide some impressionistic evidence of the scale of the burden of poverty, and of the remarkable increase in poor relief expenditure during and immediately after the enclosures were carried out: the open fields of Brigstock and Stanion were enclosed at the same time as Geddington Chase in 1795, the fields of Geddington itself only in 1807.

These figures must, of course, be interpreted as indices rather of *pauperism* than of *indigence*: they ignore the substantial numbers of poor people who were in need and not on regular relief. The size of this group is notoriously difficult to reconstruct, although Lee Beier estimates that they made up between 8 and 17 per cent of the populations of early seventeenth-century rural communities in Norfolk and North Yorkshire.⁷⁰ The task is made rather easier, at least for the early eighteenth century, by a series of marginal comments made by John Barton, minister of Geddington, in the

Figure 2.1 Annual poor relief expenditure in three Geddington Chase parishes, c. 1704–1817

parish register for the year 1701–2. Barton noted that while fifteen of those he baptised that year were ‘poor’, only one of them ‘receiveth almes’.⁷¹ Despite the fact that ‘the poore’ was a notoriously elastic (perhaps even a ‘gentry-made’) term amongst contemporaries, the distinction was a nice one, in that the overseers’ accounts suggest that only a very tiny proportion of the needy regularly received parish relief.⁷² In 1723, at a time when there were probably 135 households in Geddington, there were only seven regular pensioners, receiving a total of 10s. 3d. per week between them. By the 1740s, there were still only eleven pensioners, receiving a weekly total of 11s. 7d.⁷³ A similar situation prevailed in Brigstock, where a large constituency of those who received casual relief from the overseers supplemented the relatively small number of parish pensioners. In the period 1741–68, casual disbursements accounted for over 39 per cent of poor relief expenditure in Brigstock, though in one year (1743) they outweighed even regular payments, amounting to 55 per cent of the total.⁷⁴

That eighteenth-century poor relief expenditure could be kept so relatively low in a *pays* renowned for the wretchedness of its poverty might, of course, be explained by the rigour and severity of the decision-making process amongst ratepayers and parish officers, who sought to restrict entitlement in order to prevent

what they regarded as the unnecessary inflation of welfare costs.⁷⁵ But the possibility must also be considered that either the availability of common right or, less plausibly, the plenitude of charitable provision insulated the poor from a culture of dependency. One particular parish charity, founded in Geddington in 1636, is of particular interest in this respect, not least because it was endowed to provide the very commodity that had inspired Robert Wilkinson's sermon in 1607: bread.

Endowed charity

Robert Dallington was born in Geddington in 1561 'of humble yeoman stock'. A Cambridge graduate, he served as a schoolmaster in Norfolk before becoming 'travelling tutor' and 'secretary' to the Earl of Rutland, in whose service the seditious libel 'the poor man's joy and the gentleman's plague' had passed through his hands in 1607. He subsequently became an intimate member of the Godly circle surrounding Henry, Prince of Wales, and was appointed to the lucrative mastership of Charterhouse in 1624. He built a free school in Geddington in 1635, and by his will in 1636 endowed a charity with £300 'for the distribution of twenty-four three-penny loaves everie Sunday to twenty-four of the poor of the parish'.⁷⁶ The mechanics of the charity, like those of many such endowments, were intricate: the capital sum was used to purchase two closes, thirty-one acres in total, in the nearby parish of Loddington. The annual rents payable on these properties grew from £15 in the 1630s, to £19 in the 1670s, to £23 in the 1730s and £31 in the 1770s. After payment of land tax and tithe, and the provision of an annual dinner for the tenants, the bread was distributed weekly (at an annual cost of almost £16), and any remaining sums were divided amongst the twenty-four in cash at Easter: in 1745 this Easter dole amounted to £6.⁷⁷ This pattern was entirely typical of the 'charitable imperative' as it found expression in thousands of endowments across rural England.⁷⁸

The terms for entitlement to the charity set by Dallington and his trustees, publicly declared in their 'directions for the choosing and well governing of the poor', were, however, quite extraordinary.⁷⁹ Their rigour might partly be explained by Dallington's own religious commitment or by his previous experience of administering discretionary charity at Charterhouse.⁸⁰ Local knowledge,

however, almost certainly played its part. Dallington was doubtless aware of the long-standing concerns about immigration and lawlessness in this part of Northamptonshire. This was an exclusive charity in every sense of the word: its compassion had a hard edge. 'Deserving' persons were to be selected by the trustees, 'and then to draw lots till they have [the bread]'. The three basic requirements for eligibility range from the all-too-predictable to the very surprising: it is little wonder that 'the honest number of twenty four shall not contain any who has made himself poor by idleness, drunkenness or disorder', or that a discriminating attitude should be applied to incomers and strangers. Such provisions echo those of many a rural charity.⁸¹ Dallington's criteria of residence were, however, extreme: recipients must be either born in Geddington 'or have dwelt in the town in good behaviour at least fourteen years before'. This extended time period is significant because it excludes servants, apprentices and young married couples. The third, and most surprising, clause states that 'if any have consumed their estates by giving away their estates to their children or by buying or building houses they shall not be partakers of this charity'. The attempt to prevent the elderly from receiving charity after they have passed property to their children implies that those very children should maintain their parents. The willingness of the trustees to locate charitable relief in the context of the transmission of property in the parish is among the more far-reaching provisions of any endowment in this period, and supports the recent claim that 'in providing welfare payments and services, seventeenth- and eighteenth-century overseers of the poor and charity trustees were not undermining inter-generational support within the family but in certain key respects were attempting to preserve or foster it'.⁸²

Preliminary eligibility was, however, only the tip of an iceberg of other stipulations, which amounted to an extensive system of penalties and forfeitures. Recipients of the dole might have their loaf indefinitely withheld if they allowed 'married folk ... strangers or children' into their houses, or if they 'let part of their houses whereby the poor are increased and the town overcharged'. One week's provision would be forfeited by any of the twenty-four 'found begging, either at home or abroad', by any heard 'lying, scolding or slandering', and by any failing to attend church on Sunday morning. A whole month's entitlement would be withheld if any of the twenty-four or their families indulged in hedge-breaking.

fence- and gate-smashing or unauthorised gleanng, a provision whose severity explicitly reflects the immediacy of memories of the 1607 rising. Perhaps most significantly, concern with youth unemployment and overpopulation was manifested in the most draconian of the terms: any of the twenty-four could be (permanently) 'displaced and another put in their room' if they 'kept more children at home than is needful for their use'. As in other forest economies, the authorities aimed 'to prevent young people staying at home (where they had to be supported from the poor rates) and to force them to find work, preferably elsewhere'.⁸³ The Geddington case anticipates by some seventy years the drastic order of the Buckinghamshire justices that the poor parents of those children in the forest parish of Brill in Bernwood who refuse 'to go out and hire at service' should have their parish relief or collection withheld until they forced their children into service.⁸⁴ Indeed, such orders became increasingly common throughout rural England, especially after the ambiguous apprenticeship clauses of the Elizabethan poor laws had been clarified by a statute of 1697.⁸⁵ The demeanour of recipients was also powerfully insisted upon by the trustees: no bread was to be received at all 'if any of the twenty-four do proudly or stubbornly refuse their penalty and do not meekly make their submission for their offence until that be done'.⁸⁶

Painted on the charity board on the chancel wall at Geddington, the 'orders and directions' both symbolised the social discipline exercised by the trustees and advertised the ethical norms to which recipients of the charity were expected to conform. The discriminatory terms of the charity were not, however, simply symbolic. The regulations imply very active networks of policing and information into which both chief inhabitants and prospective applicants would be drawn. The absence of the early administrative records of the charity regrettably renders problematic the extent to which the rhetoric of the regulations was actually carried through to rigorous enforcement. The fragmentary surviving eighteenth-century trustees' orders suggest a *sporadic* pattern of social discipline imposed for *exemplary* purposes.⁸⁷ There were, inevitably, individual exclusions, both threatened and actual. Jonathan How, for instance, was to 'have no more benefit from the charity till he put his family into better order'. John Chapman Jr and John Clipshoe were, furthermore, 'admonished about attending church and if it be not reformed that they be excluded from the

twenty-four. There were also general trustees' orders which actually modified the terms on which bread was to be allocated. From the 1770s, 'younger persons' were denied access to the charity 'when they have constant collection of the parish'. The trustees were also required to maximise the revenue from the endowment: investigating whether the leases to their present tenants were binding; temporarily suspending the allocation of a half-guinea for the tenants' dinner 'considering the hardness of the times'; and enquiring whether they could sell wood from the Loddington closes without injury to the farm. The fact that these restrictive orders date from the late eighteenth century in general, and from the 1790s in particular, when the parish officers were struggling to cope with rising relief expenditure, is hardly coincidental.

By definition, the economic significance of the charity is extremely difficult to reconstruct. From the point of view of the trustees, overseers and ratepayers, the relative yield of the endowment was certainly diminishing over time. Although there is no basis for calculating poor relief expenditure in Geddington at the time the charity was endowed, it is likely that the £15 yielded annually in the 1630s looked very generous in the context of the burden of parish relief. By the 1770s, however, when the endowment was yielding about £31 annually, about *six times* that sum was annually being expended on the poor by parish overseers. It seems likely that the symbolic significance of the charity had declined accordingly. The calculation of the contribution of a weekly loaf in the budgets of the rural poor is beyond the scope of this analysis. In terms of its sheer longevity, however, the charity certainly came to form a central and robust plank in the social and political structure of the village; it survives to this day, and the church still contains a shelf for Dallington's loaves. The profile of its recipients is revealed by a list of the 'twenty-four' surviving in the parish register for 29 September 1735: twenty of the twenty-four were female, sixteen of them widows.⁸⁸ At first sight, then, the life-cycle seems to have been as decisive in the practicalities of entitlement to charity as it was to poor relief itself.⁸⁹ This assessment ought to be at least slightly qualified in the light of the existence of a further list of twelve individuals, including only two widows and ten adult males, who were considered deserving under the terms of the charity but were awaiting admission to the twenty-four. There seems, however, to have been considerable overlap between those in receipt of a parish pension and

those who partook of Dallington's bread: eight of the eleven regular pensioners in 1743 had been among the twenty-four in 1735.⁹⁰ Impressionistic though it is, this is exactly the sort of analysis that must be conducted if historians are ever to understand the mechanics of the economy of makeshifts at the individual level.

The foundation of a second, and less well-documented, Geddington parish charity coincided with both the relatively high levels of relief expenditure in the late 1710s and early 1720s and with Duke of Montagu's enclosure proposals. In anticipation that Montagu's project would succeed, Samuel Lee endowed a trust with £100, intending that the proceeds be distributed to the poor of Geddington every Christmas day. As his Grace's Ranger on Geddington Chase, Lee was well familiar with the appalling levels of poverty in the parish. The charity was targeted 'on every such poor inhabitant of the parish as by age and infirmities should be reduced to want and necessity'. The trustees, then, were expected to give preference 'to poor widows and aged and infirm persons'. In practice, however, sums ranging from one to three shillings were distributed among 'all the poor persons belonging to the parish except such as partake of Dallington's charity'. The reference to the prior endowment, confirming that Lee's bequest was residual, emphasises the symbolic and practical significance of its predecessor. It is also a cogent reminder that, from the perspective of the propertied, if not of the poor, the planks of the economy of care should ideally *interlock* rather than *overlap*.

Conclusion

What, then, does the experience of the Geddington Chase parishes tell us about the hierarchy that existed within the 'mixed economy of welfare' in a seventeenth- and eighteenth-century forest environment? Three sets of conclusions suggest themselves: the first relates to the changing material significance, and in turn to the social and political meanings, of each of our three components, and especially of the Dallington charity, over time; the second to the relationship between enclosure and endowed charity; and the third to the characterisation of the 'mixed' economy as 'makeshift'. The following discussion will explore each of these issues in turn.

In the early seventeenth century, the value of Dallington's bread

must have been relatively substantial in both material and symbolic terms. Over time, however, the very limited scope of the charity, hemmed in as it was with conditions and demands, must surely have become more apparent. Such charitable provision appeared token and conditional, resonant of that 'public theatre' of paternalism described by Edward Thompson.⁹¹ While charity bread might be ranked ahead of, or (at the very least) alongside, the parish dole – though both were undoubtedly less significant than common right – at the beginning of our period, therefore, their relative importance had almost certainly been reversed by its end. Relative to the burden of the parish rate, twenty-four loaves did not represent a substantial cost by the late eighteenth century, but then they did not, by that time, buy much deference either. All of this suggests that common rights were the fundamental element in the matrix of resources, that the poor themselves recognised this fact, and that their long battle to defend them was justified. These suspicions are confirmed by the very substantial increase in poor relief expenditure in the years after enclosure took place.

As well as measuring the economic dimensions of this matrix of resources, historians might also usefully reconstruct its social and political significance. If there was a politics to the poor rate, to endowed charity, or to common right, it was 'a politics of meaning'.⁹² To those who enjoyed it, of course, common right was symbolic of independence. But to those who were denied legitimate access, customary rights might be just one more example of the politics of exclusion through which the local hierarchy of belonging was constructed. There is a very real sense in which Robert Powell's famous condemnation of the depopulating enclosures of the 1630s holds true for the piecemeal regulation of rights throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as a whole: these were, indeed, 'stinted times' during which the poor were not only *hedged* out of the local community by enclosure, but *stinted* out of the customary economy by the increasingly aggressive regulation of rights.⁹³ The parish pension was itself a product of a culture of dependence and exclusion, often awarded only after protracted negotiations between the prospective pauper, the parish officers and the magistracy, during the course of which the poor were frequently reminded that they were not entitled to relief.⁹⁴ These exclusionary processes were in some sense mutually reinforcing: the regulation of common right and the allocation of

parish pensions, for instance, might interact to encourage many parishes to export young people in order to prevent them from becoming a burden to the local community.

Endowed charities were also by their very nature exclusive. In this sense, Robert Dallington's church loaves had a 'value' far in excess of their nutritional contribution to the bellies of the Geddington poor. To the trustees of the charity, the recipients were 'bread people', a designation of dependency as well as of diet. Whether or not the poor read the 'orders and directions' in the same way is open to question. Robert Dallington's charity may well be a classic example of an endowment designed to ensure social conformity to new canons of respectability. As recent studies of the popular mentalities of subordination suggest, however, the deferential imperative might well have been a matter of public performance rather than of private conviction.⁹⁵ Was the deference and respectability expected of the 'bread people' always as forthcoming as the trustees expected?

Part of the answer to that question may well lie in the ability of the poor of Geddington Chase to supplement their income with the use-rights of the forest. Up until enclosure, common right might insulate the poor from the monopolistic pretensions of the trustees and parish officers. This tendency is neatly encapsulated in the objection of the vestrymen of Coton, Cambridgeshire, to the magistrates' decision in 1662 that they pay a pension to an ancient resident, complaining that he abused the officers, that he never came to church, that he spent any money he had in the alehouse, and that he did not need the money anyway as he had a cow and a calf.⁹⁶ After enclosure had removed the grazing rights for the cow and the calf, the bleak vision of 'nuclear family hardship', in which tiny households were saved from extinction only by overseers of the poor and the trustees of endowed charity, seems all the more compelling.⁹⁷ To this extent it is particularly unfortunate that Neeson's marvellous study of the impact of parliamentary enclosure in Northamptonshire paid so little attention to poor law materials, a *lacuna* which this essay is intended, at least in part, to fill.⁹⁸

The second implication of the foregoing discussion relates to the relationship between endowed charity and enclosure. As Buchanan Sharp has noted, 'it was axiomatic among statesmen and social commentators that unimproved waste and pasture fostered a population of idle, disorderly and beggarly poor'.⁹⁹ This belief

was used to justify enclosure that aimed to extend tillage, and in the process not only eliminated disorder and idleness but also reformed the manners and behaviour of the poor who obtained allotments of land as compensation for loss of access to the commons. The deployment of this instrument of reformation is perhaps most clearly seen in those instances of enclosure where the compensation for the poor commoners, directly or otherwise, took the form of the endowment of town and parochial charities managed by the better sort of the community.¹⁰⁰ At first sight, the experience of Geddington Chase seems to confirm Sharp's assessment, with Dallington's bread charity stipulating some of the most severe restrictions on eligibility yet discovered by historians of rural paternalism. Yet it must be remembered that Dallington's charity, endowed as early as 1636, *predated* the enclosure of Geddington Chase by over 150 years. Indeed, it is an extraordinary testament to the 'fierce and upstanding forest folk' (as the Reverend J. E. Linnell called them) that enclosure was staved off for so long.¹⁰¹ In its own way, however, Dallington's charity actually sought to reinforce legalistic definitions of common right, for its establishment helped close the parish to those outsiders who might have been inclined to exploit the commonable resources of the Chase. In imposing order – 'in the choosing and well governing of the poor' – Dallington both sought to settle memories queasy at the carnage of 1607 and to stabilise population levels in a region notorious for its in-migration.

Finally, what does the experience of Geddington Chase tell us about the place of common right within the mixed economy of welfare? Modern historians, despite some fascinating experiments, have found it no easier than contemporaries to put a realistic value on rights lost at enclosure. They have been most successful with respect to grazing rights: Shaw-Taylor has estimated that cows kept on common land by poor people in the late eighteenth century could produce dairy products worth £7–10 per annum, perhaps as much as 40 per cent of an agricultural labourer's annual income.¹⁰² But the value of forest rights is much more difficult to calculate, partly because of the extraordinarily diverse resources available in a forest economy. Even so, it has been estimated that fuel-rights in the late eighteenth century could have been worth between £2–5 per annum or 10–20 per cent of the earnings of an agricultural labourer.¹⁰³

It is, accordingly, tempting to include common right in the

'economy of makeshifts', that series of sources of income – day labour, by-employment and casual jobs, charitable doles, neighbourly and/or kin support, loans and begging – on which the poor could draw to support themselves. To regard the exploitation of common right as a 'makeshift' strategy is, however, to misunderstand the highly diversified economies of those parts of England which failed to conform to the arable regime of sheep-corn country which has become the standard point of reference in most discussions of poverty. The drawing of one's livelihood from many different natural sources was far from 'precarious and uncertain', whatever the Duke of Buccleuch's estate agent might argue to the contrary, and had considerable merits, many of which might (in certain economic conditions) be far superior to wage labour, let alone to the parish pension.¹⁰⁴ From this perspective, the 'economy of makeshifts' is perhaps better described as an 'economy of diversified resources', an economy whose products arrived just as regularly and seasonally, if less visibly in the historical record, as corn, sheep and cattle.¹⁰⁵

The economy of diversified resources practised on Geddington Chase was therefore a matrix of overlapping – though sometimes mutually exclusive – expedients, governed by a complex pattern of rights and obligations, claims and counter-claims. To understand it requires detailed consideration not only of the management of common right, but also of the operation of the poor law, and of the administration of endowed charity. In turn, it seems essential to take a long view of the significance of customary practice, for the battles to defend common right were often protracted, prolonged by the plebeian desire to preserve custom for posterity. The artificial periodisation – in Keith Wrightson's terms, the enclosure of English social history – has done us no favours in this regard: studies of opposition to enclosure in eighteenth-century Northamptonshire seem to have been written in ignorance of the long tradition of resistance to depopulation in the forest parishes discussed here. Furthermore, the disentangling of the validity of common right is a project which the commoners of the 1720s found essential and modern historians are at long last beginning to take seriously.¹⁰⁶ Finally, to attempt to study the dynamics of provision for the poor, either through parish pensions or endowed charities, in the absence of any consideration of common right seems fundamentally misguided. Robert Wilkinson was, in a sense which he failed to recognise, speaking the truth:

man does not live 'by bread only'. In practice, it seems clear that the survival of the indigent and their families owed rather less to faith, charity and hope, or even to their deferential deportment to win a weekly hand-out from overseer and trustee, and rather more to the tenaciously-defended uses (and, inevitably, the abuses) of waste. In Geddington Chase, wood rather than bread proved to be the staff of life.

Notes

- 1 For the Midland Rising, see E. F. Gay, 'The midland revolt and the inquisitions of depopulation of 1607', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, new ser., 18 (1905); J. E. Martin, *Feudalism to Capitalism: Peasant and Landlord in English Agrarian Development* (London, Macmillan, 1983), pp. 159–215; and R. B. Manning, *Village Revolts: Social Protest and Popular Disturbances in England 1509–1640* (Oxford, Clarendon, 1988), pp. 229–46. For Montagu's role, see E. S. Cope, *The Life of a Public Man: Edward, First Baron Montagu of Boughton, 1562–1644* (Philadelphia, Philadelphia University Press, 1981), pp. 50–4.
- 2 Robert Wilkinson, *A Sermon Preached at North-Hampton the 21 of June Last Past Before the Lord Lieutenant of the County and the Rest of the Commissioners There Assembled Upon Occasion of the Late Rebellion and Riots in Those Parts Committed* (London, J. Flasket, 1607), sigs. A3–3v, D3. For Wilkinson himself, see J. A. Venn, *Alumni Cantabrigienses: A Biographical List of All Known Students, Graduates and Holders of Office at the University of Cambridge from the Earliest Times to 1900, Part I: From the Earliest Times to 1751*, 4 vols (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1922–27), IV, p. 411. For the commissioners at the 1607 trials, who included several Northamptonshire landlords notorious for their enclosing activities, see Public Record Office (hereafter PRO) C181/2, fol. 32v.
- 3 Wilkinson, *A Sermon*, quotations at sigs. A4, B1v, B2, C4v, D2, F4 (emphasis in original).
- 4 *Ibid.*, sig. B1. For other examples of clerical insistence on patience and forbearance even in the face of oppression, see J. Walter and K. Wrightson, 'Dearth and the social order in early modern England', *Past and Present*, 71 (1976).
- 5 For clarity and convenience, Geddington Woods will be referred to as Geddington Chase throughout the remainder of this chapter.
- 6 J. Innes, 'The "mixed economy of welfare" in early modern England: assessments of the options from Hale to Malthus (c. 1683–1803)', in M. Daunton (ed.), *Charity, Self-Interest and Welfare in the English Past* (London, UCL Press, 1996).

- 7 O. Hufton, *The Poor of Eighteenth-Century France* (Oxford, Clarendon, 1974), pp. 25–68.
- 8 For this formulation, see P. Horden and R. Smith, 'Introduction', in P. Horden and R. Smith (eds), *The Locus of Care: Families, Communities, Institutions and the Provision of Welfare Since Antiquity* (London, Routledge, 1998), p. 1.
- 9 P. Slack, *Poverty and Policy in Tudor and Stuart England* (London, Longman, 1988), pp. 163–72.
- 10 The most important discussions of the resort to these expedients during the seventeenth century are I. Krausman Ben-Amos, "'Good works" and social ties: helping the migrant poor in early modern England', in M. C. McClendon, J. P. Ward and M. MacDonald (eds), *Protestant Identities: Religion, Society and Self-Fashioning in Post-Reformation England* (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1999), pp. 125–40; I. Krausman Ben-Amos, 'Gifts and favors: informal support in early modern England', *Journal of Modern History*, 72 (2000); J. Boulton, "'It is extreme necessity that makes me do this": some survival strategies of pauper households in London's west end during the early eighteenth century', in L. Fontaine and J. Schlumbohm (eds), *Household Strategies for Survival, 1600–2000: Fission, Faction and Cooperation* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2001); J. Walter, 'The social economy of dearth in early modern England', in J. Walter and R. Schofield (eds), *Famine, Disease and the Social Order in Early Modern Society* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 75–128; J. Walter, 'Subsistence strategies, social economy and the politics of subsistence in early modern England', in A. Hakkinen (ed.), *Just a Sack of Potatoes? Crisis Experiences in European Societies, Past and Present* (Helsinki, Studia Historica 44, 1992), pp. 53–85; P. G. Lawson, 'Property crime and hard times in England, 1559–1624', *Law and History Review*, 4 (1986); J. Styles, 'Embezzlement, industry and the law in England, 1500–1800', in M. Berg, P. Hudson and M. Sonnenscher (eds), *Manufacture in Town and Countryside Before the Factory* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 173–210.
- 11 For an attempt, see S. Hindle, 'Dearth, fasting and alms: the campaign for general hospitality in late Elizabethan England', *Past and Present*, 172 (2001).
- 12 D. Cressy, 'Kinship and kin interaction in early modern England', *Past and Present*, 113 (1986), p. 69; Walter, 'The social economy', p. 82. For two early and very influential statements of the relationship between kinship networks and welfare systems, see P. Laslett, 'The family and the collectivity', *Sociology and Social Research*, 63 (1979) and P. Laslett, 'Family, kinship and collectivity as systems of support in pre-industrial Europe: a consideration of the "nuclear-hardship" hypothesis', *Continuity and Change*, 3 (1988).
- 13 For the early modern period, see A. Wood, 'The place of custom in

plebeian political culture: England, 1550–1800’, *Social History*, 22 (1997). For the eighteenth century, see J. M. Neeson, *Commoners: Common Right, Enclosure and Social Change in England, 1700–1820* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 110–57. Also Leigh Shaw-Taylor, ‘The management of commons in the lowlands of southern England, c. 1500–1850’ (unpublished paper, 2001). I am grateful to Leigh Shaw-Taylor for a sight of this paper in advance of publication.

- 14 For regulation before 1662, see P. Styles, ‘The evolution of the laws of settlement’, *University of Birmingham Historical Journal*, 9 (1963) and S. Hindle, ‘Exclusion crises: poverty, migration and parochial responsibility in English rural communities, c. 1560–1660’, *Rural History*, 7 (1996). The post-1662 situation remains controversial amongst historians who disagree over the relationship between settlement and welfare legislation. For the view that settlement was regulated irrespective of potential liability, see N. Landau, ‘The laws of settlement and the surveillance of immigration in eighteenth-century Kent’, *Continuity and Change*, 3 (1988); N. Landau, ‘The regulation of immigration, economic structures and definitions of the poor in eighteenth-century England’, *Historical Journal*, 33 (1990); N. Landau, ‘Who was subjected to the laws of settlement? Procedure under the settlement laws in eighteenth-century England’, *Agricultural History Review*, 43 (1995). For the contrary position, see K. D. M. Snell, ‘Pauper settlement and the right to poor relief in England and Wales’, *Continuity and Change*, 6 (1991) and K. D. M. Snell, ‘Settlement, poor law and the rural historian: new approaches and opportunities’, *Rural History*, 3 (1992).
- 15 W. K. Jordan, *The Charities of Rural England, 1480–1660: The Aspirations and the Achievements of the Rural Society* (London, Allen and Unwin, 1961).
- 16 Quoting P. Horden, ‘Household care and informal networks: comparisons and continuities from antiquity to the present’, in Horden and Smith, *The Locus of Care*, p. 27; also the recent comparative discussion of three case studies provided in J. Broad, ‘Parish economies of welfare, 1650–1834’, *Historical Journal*, 42 (1999).
- 17 For the local economic context, see P. A. J. Pettit, *The Royal Forests of Northamptonshire: A Study in Their Economy, 1558–1714* (Gateshead, Northamptonshire Record Society 23, 1968), pp. 141–82; B. Bellamy, *Geddington Chase: The History of a Wood* (Irthlingborough, privately published, 1986); Neeson, *Commoners*; R. Moore-Colyer, ‘Woods and woodland management: the bailiwick of Rockingham, Northamptonshire, c. 1700–1840’, *Northamptonshire Past and Present*, 9 (1996–97); R. Moore-Colyer, ‘Land and people in Northamptonshire: Great Oakley, 1750–1850’, *Agricultural History Review*, 45 (1997); and *idem*, ‘The small land occupier in east Northamptonshire, ca. 1650–1850’, *Midland History*, 23 (1998).

- 18 PRO E179/155/160, analysed in Pettit, *Royal Forests*, p. 143.
- 19 See the findings of Tom Arkell reported in D. Levine and K. Wrightson, *The Making of an Industrial Society: Whickham, 1560–1765* (Oxford, Clarendon, 1991), p. 157, in which the exemption rates in rural (i.e. as opposed to either 'urban' or 'industrial') areas appear to be far lower than those in Rockingham Forest, ranging between 19.0 and 38.6 per cent. The dangers of using the hearth tax as an index of poverty in isolation from other sources are emphasised in T. Arkell, 'The incidence of poverty in England in the later seventeenth century', *Social History*, 12 (1987).
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- 21 Pettit, *Royal Forests*, p. 175 n. 2.
- 22 The report of Mr Edmunds of Boughton House is printed in J. Donaldson, *A General View of the Agriculture of the County of Northampton* (Edinburgh, 1794), pp. 37–42.
- 23 The classic study of forest disorder in the early modern period remains B. Sharp, *In Contempt of All Authority: Rural Artisans and Riot in the West of England, 1586–1660* (Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1980). But now see also C. Harrison, 'Fire on the Chase: rural riots in sixteenth-century Staffordshire', in P. Morgan and A. D. M. Philips (eds), *Staffordshire Histories: Essays in Honour of Michael Greenslade* (Keele, Staffordshire Record Society, 19, 1999), pp. 97–126.
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- 31 Pettit, *Royal Forests*, pp. 162, 193, appendix III, clause 10.
- 32 Northamptonshire Record Office (hereafter NRO) Montagu (B) 10.24 (Brand Depositions).
- 33 For manorial jurisdiction over hedge-breaking, see M. K. McIntosh, *Controlling Misbehaviour in England, 1370–1600* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 84–8; for the discretionary power of overseers of the poor, see S. Hindle, 'Exhortation and entitlement: negotiating inequality in English rural communities, 1550–1650', in M. Braddick and J. Walter (eds), *Negotiating Power in Early Modern Society: Order, Hierarchy and Subordination in Britain and Ireland* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 112–13; and for the summary jurisdiction of magistrates, see J. A. Sharpe, *Crime in Seventeenth-Century England: A County Study* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 170–1. For the later history, emphasising the significance of the statute 15 Charles II, c. 2, see R. W. Bushaway, 'From custom to crime: wood gathering in eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century England: a focus for conflict in Hampshire, Wiltshire and the south', in J. Rule (ed.), *Outside the Law: Studies in Crime and Order, 1650–1850* (Exeter, Exeter University Press, 1982),

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- 42 Pettit, *Royal Forests*, pp. 170–1. This formulation, even down to the (possibly formulaic?) number of poor immigrants, is intriguingly almost identical to that used in the Hertfordshire parish of Layston in 1636: Hindle, 'Exclusion crises', pp. 133.
- 43 NRO Brudenell MS I, vi, 60.
- 44 For the optimistic reading, emphasising widespread access, see Neeson, *Commoners*, pp. 55–80; for the pessimistic reading, based on a highly legalistic interpretation, see Shaw-Taylor, 'Labourers'.
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- 53 M. E. Finch, *The Wealth of Five Northamptonshire Families, 1540–1640* (Oxford, Northamptonshire Record Society 19, 1956), pp. 162–3. For other uses of this idiom, see Wilkinson, *A Sermon*, sig. C4v; and R. Powell, *Depopulation Arraigned, Convicted and Condemned By the Laws of God and Man* (London, 1636), pp. 54–5.
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- 55 NRO Brudenell MS I, vi, 59 (Some Reasons Offered to Such Persons as Have Common Right in Geddington Chase, c. 1721).
- 56 NRO Montagu (B) Box 10.25 (A Particular of the Persons Who Have Been Acquainted With His Grace's Proposals).
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- 58 NRO Montagu (B) Box 10.25 (J. B. to the Earl of Cardigan, 27 November 1721).
- 59 Thompson, *Customs*, pp. 98–9; Hindle, 'A sense of place?', p. 108.
- 60 The following quotations are drawn from the copy in the Bodleian Library, Oxford (Northamptonshire Gough 10): *A Letter to the Commoners in Rockingham Forest Wherein is Briefly and Plainly Shewn the Right of Common They Are Intitled to in the Forrest and a Method Propos'd By Which They May Preserve Their Rights at a Very Easy Expense If They Will Unanimously Pursue It By a Commoner* [Ms: 'i.e. the reverend Mr Good of Weldon'] (Stamford, printed by F. Howgrave, 1744) [price three pence] pp. 4, 12–13, 18.
- 61 NRO Montagu (B) 10.26 (Petition of the Inhabitants of Brigstock, 30 November 1792). Cf text at note 53, p. 51.
- 62 NRO Montagu (B) 10.26 (The Small Proprietors of Brigstock, Stanion and Geddington to the Duchess of Buccleuch, July 1794); 10.26 (Churchwardens and Overseers of Geddington to the Duke of Buccleuch, 26 July 1795).
- 63 Neeson, *Commoners*, p. 273, n. 44.
- 64 Shaw-Taylor, 'Labourers'.
- 65 Neeson, *Commoners*, p. 281.
- 66 For recent pessimism about the speed with which the Elizabethan legislation was introduced in the parishes, see P. Slack, *From Reformation to Improvement: Public Welfare in Early Modern England* (Oxford, Clarendon, 1998), p. 67, n. 55. For the more optimistic reading see S. Hindle, *The Birthpangs of Welfare: Poor Relief and Parish Governance in Seventeenth-Century Warwickshire* (Warwick, Dugdale Society Occasional Papers 40, 2000), pp. 9, 22.
- 67 NRO 175p (Great Houghton Parish Papers)/28 (Churchwardens's Account Book, c. 1634–98), unfol.
- 68 Based on an analysis of the parish papers held in the NRO.
- 69 This discussion and Figure 2.1 are based on an analysis of the overseers' account books of Brigstock: NRO 48p/34 (1738–50), 65 (1751–56), 36 (1764–70), 38 (1770–80), 39 (1790–1800), 55 (1800), 40 (1800–1), 32 (1803–7), 37 (1807–10); of Geddington: NRO 133p/80 (1715–23), 82 (1743–51), 83 (1752–65), 84 (1765–74), 86 (1774–83), 91 (1783–87), 93 (1794–98), 95 (1800–8), 97 (1808–13),

- 99 (1813–17); and of Stanion: NRO 298p/25 (overseers' and churchwardens' accounts, 1701–20), 34 (overseers' and churchwardens' accounts, 1736–54), 30 (overseers' and churchwardens' accounts, 1784–95), 28 (1795–1801), 35 (1801–5).
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- 71 NRO 133p/2(1) (Parish Register 1700–45), unfol.
- 72 For the loose use of the term in the eighteenth century, see F. M. Eden, *The State of the Poor*, 3 vols (London, 1797). For 'the poore' as a 'gentry-made' term, see Thompson, *Customs in Common*, p. 17.
- 73 NRO 133p/80 (unfol.), 82 (unfol.).
- 74 NRO 48p/34 (unfol.), 65 (unfol.), 36 (unfol.). In early seventeenth-century Warwickshire, casual relief accounted for less than 10 per cent of expenditure on the poor: Hindle, *The Birthpangs of Welfare*, p. 16.
- 75 This was, of course, one of the avowed intentions of the Elizabethan poor laws: Hindle, 'Exhortation and entitlement', p. 110.
- 76 For Dallington himself, see Karl-Josef Holtgen, 'Sir Robert Dallington (1561–1637): author, traveller, and pioneer of taste', *Huntingdon Library Quarterly*, 47 (1984); *idem*, 'The English reformation and some Jacobean writers on art', in U. Broich, T. Stemmler and G. Strätmann (eds), *Functions of Literature: Essays Presented to Erwin Wolff on his Sixtieth Birthday* (Tübingen, Niemeyer, 1984), pp. 119–46; R. Strong, *Henry Prince of Wales and England's Lost Renaissance* (London, Thames and Hudson, 1986), pp. 30–1; and S. Porter, 'Order and disorder in the early modern almshouse: the Charterhouse example', *London Journal*, 23 (1998). Copies of Dallington's will, dated 20 April 1636, survive as PRO PROB 11/176; NRO 133p/158–9, 166–68.
- 77 These details on the mechanics of the charity are drawn from NRO 133p/160–64.
- 78 Quoting C. Jones, *The Charitable Imperative: Hospitals and Nursing in Ancien Régime and Revolutionary France* (London, Routledge, 1989), p. 1. Despite its notorious limitations as a source for the scale of philanthropy, Jordan, *The Charities*, remains invaluable as a study of the texture of endowed charity.
- 79 All quotations from the charity regulations in this and the subsequent paragraphs are taken from NRO MISC Photostat 1610.
- 80 Porter, 'Order', pp. 8–9.
- 81 For striking examples of discriminatory endowed charities, see K. Wrightson and D. Levine, *Poverty and Piety in an English Village: Terling, 1525–1700* (2nd edn, Oxford, Clarendon, 1995), p. 179

- (Henry Smith in Terling, Essex, in 1612); and H. M. Wood (ed.), *Wills and Inventories from the Registry at Durham, Part IV* (Newcastle, Surtees Society 142, 1929), pp. 18–19 (Gilbert Spence in Tynemouth, Durham, in 1607).
- 82 Horden and Smith, 'Introduction', p. 6.
- 83 J. Broad, 'The smallholder and cottager after disafforestation – a legacy of poverty?', in J. Broad and R. Hoyle (eds), *Bernwood: The Life and Afterlife of a Forest* (Preston, University of Central Lancashire, 1997), p. 102.
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- 85 8&9 Will III c. 30 (1697). See S. Hindle, "'A troublesome and difficult business": pauper apprenticeship under the Elizabethan poor laws, c. 1598–1700', in P. Lane, N. Raven and K. Snell (eds), *Much Toil and Little Hope?: Work, Gender and Wages in England, c. 1600–1830* (Woodbridge, forthcoming, 2003).
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- 89 T. Wales, 'Poverty, poor relief and the life-cycle: some evidence from seventeenth-century Norfolk', and W. Newman-Brown, 'The receipt of poor relief and family situation: Aldenham, Hertfordshire 1630–90', both in R. M. Smith (ed.), *Land, Kinship and Life-Cycle* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1984); L. Botelho, 'Aged and impotent: parish relief of the aged poor in early modern Suffolk', in Dauntton, *Charity*; and R. M. Smith, 'Ageing and well-being in early modern England: pension trends and gender preferences under the English Old Poor Law, c. 1650–1800', in P. Johnson and P. Thane (eds), *Old Age From Antiquity to Post-Modernity* (London, Routledge, 1998); also B. Stapleton, 'Inherited poverty and life-cycle poverty: Odiham, Hampshire, 1650–1850', *Social History*, 18 (1993).
- 90 Levine and Wrightson, *The Making of an Industrial Society*, p. 355, found that only thirteen (10 per cent) of the 126 parish pensioners in Whickham were in receipt of funds from the endowed parish charities in 1743.
- 91 Thompson, *Customs in Common*, pp. 42–9, especially p. 45.
- 92 Wrightson, 'The politics', pp. 31–7; also C. Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (London, Basic, 1973), pp. 311–26.
- 93 Quoting Powell, *Depopulation Arraigned*, pp. 50, 77. These ideas are developed at greater length in Hindle, 'A sense', pp. 96–114. For

the view that stints were more effective than hedges in the politics of exclusion, see Shaw-Taylor, 'Labourers', p. 126.

- 94 For recent pessimism over the extent to which the poor were entitled to relief, especially in the seventeenth century, see Hindle, 'Exhortation and entitlement', p. 113.
- 95 For an assessment of the usefulness of the distinction between the 'public' and the 'hidden transcript' of social relations, see J. Walter, 'Public transcripts, popular agency and the politics of subsistence in early modern England', in Braddick and Walter, *Negotiating Power*. For the distinction itself, see J. C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1990).
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- 97 Laslett, 'Family'.
- 98 A criticism made forcefully by Roger Wells in his review of *Commoners*. See *Southern History*, 16 (1994) pp. 202–4.
- 99 B. Sharp, 'Common rights, charities and the disorderly poor', in G. Eley and W. Hunt (eds), *Reviving the English Revolution* (London, Verso, 1988), p. 108.
- 100 Broad, 'The smallholder'.
- 101 J. E. Linnell, *The Old Oak* (London, Constable, 1932).
- 102 Shaw-Taylor, 'Labourers'.
- 103 Humphries, 'Enclosures', pp. 53; Neeson, *Commoners*, p. 165.
- 104 Woodward, 'Straw'.
- 105 For a classic example, which demonstrates the enduring capacity of such a lifestyle to support individuals and families, see E. H. Whetham, 'The waygoing', in E. H. Whetham, *The Agrarian History of England and Wales, Volume VIII: 1914–39* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1978), pp. 321–2.
- 106 Shaw-Taylor, 'Labourers'.