

## 12.3 State assistance and self-help in the English village

Room 107

*Chair: Jeremy Burchardt*

### 12.31 Samantha Shave – The impact of Sturges Bourne’s Acts (1818 and 1819) in rural southern England

England was blighted with frequent agricultural depressions in the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth centuries. Agricultural labourers were hit particularly hard, suffering a deterioration of both their standard of living and quality of life. The crisis brought poor law reform to the parliamentary agenda and led to the passage of two non-compulsory pieces of legislation, Sturges Bourne’s Acts of 1818 and 1819. These permitted parishes to ‘tighten up’ the distribution of poor relief through the formation of Select Vestries and the appointment of Assistant Overseers. While previous studies have tended to represent the legislation as a failing reform in the shadow of the Poor Law Amendment Act (1834), little research has exposed the relief policies developed under their auspices. This paper examines the impact of the adoption of Sturges Bourne’s Acts on poor relief provision in rural communities of the south of England using parish administrative documents. Firstly, it examines the general policies released by Select Vestries and orders sent to Assistant Overseers with the aim of reducing poor relief. Secondly, the paper examines the treatment of individual relief claimants. The Acts resulted in greater surveillance of the everyday lives of the poor, which re-drew the distinction between ‘deserving’ and ‘undeserving’ poor and ultimately changed individuals’ entitlement to relief under the old poor law.

After studying geography as an undergraduate at the University of Southampton, **Samantha Shave** moved to the School of Social Sciences to further her research interests in the history of welfare provision. Samantha was awarded a 1+3 Competition Award in 2005 and has since completed an MSc in Social Policy. Samantha is currently writing a thesis entitled ‘Social Policy Reform and Innovation under the Poor Laws in the Rural South of England, c.1780-1850’. She is interested in the social science concept of the ‘policy process’ and the adoption, implementation and development of social policies under the Poor Laws during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. More specifically, Samantha is interested in the impact of scandals on the development of social policies. During the spring of 2009 Samantha undertook an ESRC internship at The National Archives to examine cases of neglect and abuse in the Victorian workhouse system. A paper examining the relief provided to individuals in the early nineteenth century was recently published in *Rural History*: S.A. Shave, ‘The Dependent Poor? (Re)constructing Individuals’ Lives ‘On the Parish’ in Rural Dorset, 1800-1832’, *Rural History* 20 (2009).

### 12.32 Shaun Morley – Social provision in a rural community: the network of voluntarism in Whitchurch, Oxfordshire, 1834–1900

This paper will survey the complex network of voluntary social provision in a rural community by utilising a case study of the parish of Whitchurch-on-Thames, Oxfordshire. Charity, subscriber institutions and mutual aid will be investigated, examining their nature and function. Utilising primary source material of local endowed charities, friendly societies and various clubs, a micro-history approach to understanding the toolbox of options available at township level will be revealed.

The research demonstrates how one community responded to the three elements of need – food, heating and clothing, and in preparation for times of crisis – sickness, maternity and burial. Membership records, accounts, rules and other contemporary sources will help understand how families both prepared for and responded to basic need. The strong element of self-help, supported by philanthropic associations reveal a reward based system.

This investigation will further examine location, complexity, typology, interdependence and multi-membership of the wide array of available options outside poor law provision. The social and

economic aspects of a community response will demonstrate the success or otherwise of such initiatives.

The paper will complement the conference objectives by demonstrating methods from history of how the poor and village elite defrayed the expenses of poor law rates and personal stigma through collaborative responses.

**Shaun Morley** is an MSc graduate at the University of Oxford in English Local History gaining a distinction in 2007. He is currently studying for his D.Phil. at Oxford, supervised by Dr Kate Tiller. His thesis concerns rural friendly societies in Oxfordshire and their position in the wider context of social welfare provision during the nineteenth century. Shaun is a part-time tutor at the Oxford University Department for Continuing Education and has tutored on the on-line Advanced Diploma in English Local History, runs a weekly class on nineteenth century English village, a summer school course and made occasional presentations on international programmes. He has contributed towards an historical atlas of Oxfordshire to be published in 2010. Having completed thirty years as a Police Officer, finishing his service as Police Commander for Oxfordshire and one year as a director at SMART!, a charitable business that delivers interventions for drug and alcohol abusers, Shaun now devotes all his time to local history.

### 12.33 Nicholas Mansfield – Paternalistic consumer co-operatives in rural England, 1870–1930

The British Co-operative movement is associated mainly with industrial areas. Where consumer co-ops existed in the countryside they were located in market towns and formed by rural trade unions, especially railwaymen, occasionally quarrymen or farmworkers. Yet the Co-operative Union membership encompassed a significant number of small single village societies founded by paternalistic gentry.

This paper draws on examples in Shropshire, East Yorkshire, Berkshire and Oxfordshire, to offer an account and explanation of the never before studied, paternalistic co-ops. Recruiting estate workers and farm labourers, individual country squires showed themselves capable of using a co-operative ideology and framework, usually associated with the labour movement, to achieve very different and paternalistic goals. The relationship between these paternalistic village societies and the wider co-operative movement both locally and nationally, will be discussed, including the company paternalism of the CWS's own farming operations. A comparison with the 'Blue co-ops' of the Lancashire Conservative dominated cotton spinners' union, will also be made.

Drawing on the author's previous work on the post Great War revival of rural cultural conservatism, the paper concludes that the failure of paternalistic co-ops to be part of this movement, was linked to agricultural depression.

**Dr Nicholas Mansfield** has been Director of the People's History Museum in Manchester since 1989. He is an honorary member of staff at five Northern universities, and has published widely on rural and other subjects, including the monograph, *English Farmworkers and Local Patriotism, 1900-1930* (2001).