

The Immediate Reaction to the Swing Riots in Surrey 1832–1834

Judith Hill

In the opinion of at least one historian of Swing, the riots ‘rocked the foundation of English landed society’, put the ‘fear of revolution into the hearts of the English governing class’ and, to many, posed a threat to social stability.¹ Of course, the agitation did not stop in 1830 and sporadic attacks on property continued into the winter of 1832, proving Hobsbawm and Rudé’s assertion that ‘not all the labourers had been demoralised by the terror of the special commission’.² Although as Figure 1 demonstrates the extent of the incidents should be revised upwards, the disturbances were neither as widespread nor marked with the same intensity of discontent as those which took place in Kent and Sussex. Nonetheless, the trauma and sense of insecurity produced by the riots affected both central and local government. This case study therefore focuses on the efforts that were made by the Surrey parish vestries to resolve or respond to the underlying problems that were responsible for the agricultural unrest of the early 1830s.

In many cases, the immediate reaction of parish authorities remains undiscovered within the parish records of villages and towns directly affected. It is only through a detailed study of these records that a comprehensive understanding of how the parishes responded to the disturbances can be established. This essay will focus on one aspect of these local records, poor relief accounts, to examine what they reveal about parochial reaction to events in the early 1830s. All of the available poor law records for the 107 rural parishes in Surrey have been consulted

1 R. Wells, ‘Historical Trajectories: English Social Welfare Systems, Rural Riots, Popular Politics, Agrarian Trade Unions and Allotment Provision 1793–1896’, *Southern History* 25 (2003), 99; S. Webb and B. Webb, *English Poor Law History Part II: The Last Hundred Years* (London, 1929), p. 45.

2 E. Hobsbawm and G. Rudé, *Captain Swing* (London, 1969), p. 283.

Figure 1: Protest Incidents in Surrey 3 August 1830 to the end of 1832

	Hobsbawm and Rudé	Revised Number
Incendiarism	23	44
Threshing-machine breaking	0	0
Strikes/wages/poor relief assemblages/assaults	6	8
Swing Letters	0	8

Source: E. Hobsbawm and G. Rudé, *Captain Swing* (London, 1969), pp.308–309; J.Hill, ‘Poverty Unrest and the Response in Surrey 1815–1834’(unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Surrey, 2006) pp. 297–306.

for the period 1815–34.³ By adopting an exhaustive method rather than merely sampling records it is possible to gain a more comprehensive picture of the administration of poor relief and to understand the range of individual and parish responses to the Swing disturbances in one county.

Recent literature and research has extended our understanding of protest and the demands made by labourers for assistance from the parish. Hobsbawm and Rudé argued that many of the Swing protests had the objectives of ‘defence of the customary rights’.⁴ E.P. Thompson addressed the issue of the ‘rights’ of the poor and developed the concept of the ‘moral economy of the poor’.⁵ Roger Wells and Peter Jones have both shown the moral economic model continued into the nineteenth century and ‘was very much alive in 1830’.⁶ David Eastwood has noted that the emphasis on providing work and wages after 1815 represented a continuing belief in both the importance and efficacy of local obligations on the part of parish officials.⁷ Increasingly after 1815 rural population growth and demobilization met with economic decline and agricultural depression and as a result confidence in the poor law system faltered.

3 J. Hill, ‘Poverty Unrest and the Response in Surrey 1815–1834’, (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Surrey, 2006).

4 Hobsbawm and Rudé, *Captain Swing*, p. 16.

5 E.P. Thompson, ‘The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century’, *Past & Present*, 50 (1971), 76–136.

6 R. Wells, ‘The Moral Economy of the English Countryside’ in A. Randall and A. Charlesworth (eds), *Moral Economy and Popular Protest Crowds, Conflict and Authority* (Basingstoke,2000), pp. 209–72; P. Jones, ‘Swing, Speenhamland and Rural Social Relations: the ‘Moral Economy’ of the English Crowd in the Nineteenth Century’, *Social History* 32 (2007), 273.

7 D. Eastwood, ‘Rethinking the Debates on Poor Law in Early Nineteenth England’, *Utilitas* 6 (1994), 106.

Ratepayers increasingly complained to the vestries about the rising level of poor rates and for the need of overseers to maintain or even reduce expenditure on poor relief.⁸ There is a clear awareness amongst historians of the importance of uncovering the realities of poverty as well as the practices that accounted for the labourers' experience of justice and inequality. Recent local studies have focused on the lives and strategies used by the poor to survive in such difficult circumstances and have shown that the poor adopted many strategies to cope with the fragility and sparseness of their material world.⁹ Immediately after the protests it is evident parish officials were anxious to contain social tensions and concerted efforts were made to combat poverty by increasing poor relief payments and providing more worthwhile labour. It was at the vestry table where 'the relationships between employer and employed and between the vestry and the labouring poor' were shaped and where parishes sought solutions to the problems of increasing poverty.¹⁰ This assessment of rural Surrey examines the labourer's increasing poverty in the context of their parish experience and the response of the parish officials immediately after the Swing protests of 1830.

I The Poor Relief System

The significance of the poor relief system in supporting the agricultural population is not always easy to determine. Recent research on the economy of makeshifts has portrayed poor relief as one element in the wider strategies deployed by individuals and families to survive.¹¹ What is evident is that the continued population growth, in conjunction with high prices, the decline of some domestic industries, the abandonment of living-in and yearly hiring practices in favour of day-labour, were significant factors in increasing the hardship of the poor. In addition, the loss of 'makeshift activities', including grazing rights, cow, pig and geese keeping, as well as fuel collection, had a detrimental effect on the

- 8 S. King, *Poverty and Welfare in England 1700–1850. A Regional Perspective* (Manchester, 2000), pp. 91–93.
- 9 S. King and A. Tomkins (eds), *The Poor in England 1700–1850: An Economy of Makeshifts* (Manchester, 2003); K.D.M. Snell, *Annals of the Labouring Poor Social Change and Agrarian England 1660–1900*, (Cambridge, 1985); T. Hitchcock, P. King and P. Sharpe, *Chronicling Poverty Voices and Strategies of the English Poor, 1640–1840* (Basingstoke, 1997), pp. 1–18.
- 10 P. Jones, 'Finding Captain Swing; Protest, Parish Relations, and the State of the Public Mind in 1830', *International Review of Social History*, 54 (2009), 453.
- 11 King and Tomkins (eds), *The Poor in England*; Hitchcock, King and Sharpe, *Chronicling Poverty*, pp. 1–18.

independence of the poor.¹² By the 1830s, the weakening of the economy of makeshifts led to more substantial life-cycle and point-in-time poverty than had previously been experienced. These changes inevitably led to a substantial increase in the proportion of labouring families dependent on poor relief. Research undertaken for Surrey supports Broad's and Steven King's argument that assistance from the parish at the beginning of the nineteenth century was increasingly important for the sheer survival of the poor.¹³

The poor laws 'were shaped by local communities' and enacted locally, 'where face-to-face negotiations determined their impact'.¹⁴ As there was considerable leeway in the interpretation of the poor laws, it was common for its implementation to vary between parishes in the same locality, as was the case in Surrey. Of course, depending both on the demand for relief and the available resources, eligibility was policed by the parishes. Broad refers to this as 'the local autonomy of need', where each parish dealt with the problems of providing for relief on a local basis.¹⁵ Hindle has commented on the 'highly localised nature of the social welfare provision'.¹⁶ Parish overseers and vestries were clearly well acquainted with the problems arising from, and dealing with, local poverty.

Many contemporaries, including William Cobbett, regarded the old poor law as embodying traditional rights and social obligations, including 'the right in case we fall into distress to have our want sufficiently relieved out of this produce of the land'.¹⁷ Historians have observed that perhaps the poor's greatest strength was the 'depth and emotional power of their own belief in their right to relief'.¹⁸ Roger Wells and Peter Jones have both noted the importance of the moral economy that was very much alive in 1830 when the issue of a 'right to subsistence' became increasingly a contentious matter.¹⁹ At the time in rural Surrey, as in

12 P. King, 'Gleaners, Farmers and the Failure of Legal Sanctions in England 1750–1850', *Past & Present* 125 (1989), 116–50; S. Williams, 'Earnings Poor Relief and the Economy of makeshifts in Bedfordshire in the Early Years of the New Poor Law', *Rural History* 16 (2005), 22–53.

13 Hill, 'Poverty Unrest and the Response in Surrey 1815–1834'; J. Broad, 'Parish Economies of Welfare 1650–1834', *The Historical Journal* 42 (1999), 1002–05; King, *Poverty and Welfare*, p. 229.

14 L. Hollen Lees, *The Solidarities of Strangers the English Poor laws and the People 1700–1948* (Cambridge, 1989), p. 7.

15 Broad, 'Parish Economies', 1002.

16 S. Hindle, *On the Parish? The Micro-Politics of Poor Relief in Rural England c. 1550–1750* (Oxford, 2004), p. 285.

17 W. Reitzel (ed), *The Autobiography William Cobbett* (London, 1967), pp. 224–5.

18 Hitchcock, King and Sharpe, *Chronicling Poverty*, p. 10.

19 Wells, 'The Moral Economy', pp. 209–71; Jones, 'Swing, Speenhamland', 274.

other southern counties, there was seasonal unemployment, together with an expanding, casual day-labour force, which directly resulted in endemic underemployment at low wages. Parish authorities as a result came under increasing pressure to provide relief. At the same time the increased problems of managing the poor forced vestries to inaugurate policy reforms. Parish officials and magistrates in southern England tried to reduce per capita spending on relief.²⁰ As the numbers needing help increased, growing tensions can be identified between the ability of the ratepayers to pay rates and the scale of allowances provided. For example, in 1821 the overseers in the parish of Cranleigh had to report that the collection of poor rates was deficient by 'upwards of £250'.²¹ In addition many rural parishes had to revert to borrowing funds. The parish of Horley in 1824 borrowed £200 to pay the outstanding county rate and for 'the continued support of the poor'.²² Parish officials had the difficult task of treading 'a fine line between the demand of the poor for welfare and the ability and willingness of ratepayers to supply the funds to meet the demand'.²³

The appointment of paid assistant overseers and select vestries were measures introduced to achieve greater efficiency in the management of parish affairs. In rural Surrey the number of assistant overseers increased from 19 in 1819 to 40 in 1830. Charles Maclean in his report on Surrey to the Royal Commission on Poor Laws, supported the appointment of assistant overseers, finding them, 'very intelligent, zealous ... and economical to a parish'.²⁴ The appointment of select vestries also had the desired effect of reducing poor relief bills. For example in its first year of operation in 1819 the Frimley select vestry saved the parish 46 per cent in poor relief costs. The five select vestries of Abinger, Dorking, Epsom, Chertsey and Pirbright made, on average, a reduction of 33 per cent on the amount spent per head on poor relief between 1821 and 1831.²⁵ As a consequence many day labourers found themselves socially segregated

20 M. Blaug, 'The Myth of the Old Poor Law and the Making of the New', *Journal of Economic History* 23 (1963), 164–5; D.A. Baugh, 'The Cost of Poor Relief in South-East England 1790–1834', *Economic History Review* 28 (1975), 57; K. Snell, *Parish and Belonging: Community, Identity and Welfare in England and Wales 1700–1950* (Cambridge, 2006), pp. 213–14.

21 Surrey History Centre, Woking [hereafter SHC], P58/1/1, Cranleigh Vestry Minute Book, 21 April 1821

22 SHC P58/1/1, Horley Vestry Minute Book, 26 July 1824

23 King, *Poverty and Welfare*, p.52.

24 Report of the Poor Law Commission on Poor Laws 1834, Appendix A part XXVIII Assistant Commissioners' Report for Surrey C.H. Maclean p.556A.

25 Expenditure on Poor Relief for Surrey, Abstract of the Poor 1818 xix (82), 1833, xxxii (32); Brayley *History of Surrey* Appendix 2 Population Figures.

and unprotected against unemployment and price fluctuations. The rural labour force became increasingly demoralized becoming dependent on parish work, and resentful of the farmers who were not only their employers but were those who 'controlled the vestry, made poor laws policy and took decisions respecting individual claimants'.²⁶ This resentment is clearly reflected in the emigrant letters written by poor, rural agricultural labourers and provide valuable insights of the changing quality of life experienced by labourers in southern England.²⁷ The Swing disturbances also clearly demonstrate rural labourers' demands for the 'right of subsistence' which included the provision of work, adequate relief payments or charity from wealthy neighbours.²⁸ The reaction of parish authorities to the unrest of 1830–2 confirms that the demands of Swing crowds were not only heard but acted upon by parish officials with the support of ratepayers. The labourers' demands for work, minimum wages, bread, poor relief and charity were met for a short time.

II Change of Attitude

Hobsbawm and Rudé noted that 'what shocked farmers and landlords painfully was not the feebleness but the strength of the labourers' activities in 1830, and therefore the continued necessity to conciliate them'.²⁹ More recently historians have also observed that the strength and resolve of the labourers' activities' unnerved farmers and landlords.³⁰ In examining reactions to the Swing disturbances, Knott and Daunton have noted that 'the initial response to the Swing riots was to offer more generous relief ... with the expectation that it would purchase order and deference'.³¹ Newby concluded that 'many landowners acknowledged some degree of culpability and began to repair their authority by applying an analgesic to the problems of rural distress'.³² This is a view shared by Dunkley, who has stressed that landowners recognised the need to show

26 Wells, 'Historical Trajectories', 89.

27 J. Hill, 'Letters Home: Reflections from Canada on the Plight of the Poor from Rural Southern England in the Years 1832–1837', *Southern History* 30 (2008), 24–42.

28 Jones, 'Swing, Speenhamland', 277.

29 Hobsbawm and Rudé, *Captain Swing*, p. 282.

30 D. Eastwood, *Governing Rural England. Tradition and Transformation in Local Government 1780–1840* (Oxford, 1994), pp. 161–62; J. Burchardt, *The Allotment Movement in England 1793–1873* (Woodbridge, 2002), pp. 70–97.

31 J. Knott, *Popular Opposition to the 1834 Poor Law* (London, 1985), p. 51; M.J. Daunton, *Progress and Poverty: An Economic and Social History of Britain 1700–1850* (Oxford, 1995), p. 492.

32 H. Newby, *Country Life: a Social History of England* (London, 1987), p. 46.

interest in the welfare of labourers in southern England.³³ This greater interest and concern for the welfare of parish labourers, produced immediate wage concessions from employers and more generous relief from parish overseers.³⁴ Whether this was due to altruism or enlightened self-interest on the part of landowners, or to protect their property from attack is difficult to ascertain, but it is possible to identify a change in attitude among this sector of society. Neumann has observed that in Berkshire during the winter of 1830 'some parishes retained, or even enhanced, indiscriminate allowances which they would otherwise have discarded'.³⁵ A similar picture is evident in Surrey. In 1828 for example, Henry Drummond had reportedly stopped his own poor tenants from cutting juniper, hollies or furze on the wastes; he had intended to drive non-tenant stock off the downs and had enclosed eight acres of common land.³⁶ His attitude mellowed after the insurrections of 1830, as illustrated in a letter he wrote to William Bray of Shere in 1832:

The rising of the labourers that is taking place throughout the southern counties of England threatens the destruction of all property. They are maddened by oppression and, chiefly, from the high price of cottage rents, they are determined to take the law into their own hands and say that they prefer being hanged or shot to continuing as they are. In these circumstances it is our duty, as well as our interest, to do what we can to obviate their distemper. It is very well known that it is not profitable to build cottages to pay any interest for the money so employed and therefore that whoever does build must build at a loss. I am willing to view this loss, and if you will grant me a copyhold lease of 20 acres on Shere Heath I will build twenty cottages, which I will undertake to let only to the labourers of your parish. As it is a great point to take some step before they shall be able to say that we do this from intimidation.³⁷

The post-Swing period was a time of high social tension, with increasing unemployment and underemployment of agricultural labourers in the rural southeast. Within the parish vestries, landowners and farmers were now clearly prepared to listen and comply with labourers demands of 'bread work wages relief and charity'.³⁸ Surrey ratepayers now made fewer

33 P. Dunkley, *The Crisis of the Old Poor Law in England 1795-1834* (New York and London, 1982), p. 57.

34 A. Digby, *The Poor Law in Nineteenth Century England* (London, 1982), p. 10.

35 M. Neumann, *The Speenhamland County Poverty and Poor Laws in Berkshire 1792-1834* (New York, 1982), p. 191.

36 SHC, 1191/2, A. Brown, *Notes on the Parish of Albury 1662-1891*.

37 SHC, G52/3/4 H. Drummond Letter to William Bray, Private Papers Sir Jocelyn Bray 1820.

38 Jones, 'Swing, Speenhamland', 281.

complaints in vestry meetings about their rating bills, as they were more concerned to restore domestic tranquillity. In the short-term, ratepayers' hostility towards the rising cost of poor relief gave way to the more pressing concern to provide work and to alleviate the hardship of the poor. In his report on Surrey in 1835, Charles Mott Poor Law Commissioner for Surrey commented on the increasing burden of providing for the able-bodied poor. He noted that in Caterham, Mr Moore, the assistant overseer, grumbled that as a result of incendiary fires the rates had increased and 'the officers cannot control the money actually expended on the poor'.³⁹ In the winter of 1831 the Thames Ditton vestry established a committee of fifteen ratepayers, which organised a collection 'for the purpose of adding to the comforts of the poor'.⁴⁰

This change of attitude is also evident in the Egham vestry, which, in the winter of 1832, told the parish officials that:

although the wages should be kept down to induce these men to look out for work elsewhere, they should on no account be treated as paupers merely because they cannot find work and are therefore employed by the parish.⁴¹

The Chobham vestry made a similar statement in the winter of 1832–33, proposing to set up a subscription scheme to provide help for the many poor families in the parish. The overseers collected £13 to provide loaves of bread to 'deserving characters'. They added that others in distress who could not be considered by the overseers as deserving persons, in 'extreme cases' should be allowed small allowances.⁴² The tone of these statements is interesting. Before 1830, overseers were anxious to discriminate between the 'deserving and idle extravagant or profligate poor' when distributing relief, but now many parishes were willing to consider all claimants.⁴³ After the disturbances, many vestries recognised the need to consider the welfare of all labourers in order to avoid further trouble, although the reaction in the parishes to Swing was 'uneven and short lived'.⁴⁴ This was the case in Surrey where, immediately after the unrest,

39 British Parliamentary Papers [hereafter BBP], *First Annual Report of the Poor Law Commissioners for England and Wales* XXIX 1836 [hereafter PLCR], Evidence C. Mott Poor Law Commissioner for Surrey Report Appendix B No.8 p. 312.

40 SHC, 2568/6/1 Thames Ditton Vestry Minutes 22 December 1831.

41 SHC, 2516/2/10 Egham Vestry Minutes 2 January 1832.

42 SHC, P34/box 2 Chobham Parish Records Winter 1832–1833.

43 1819 59 Geo.3, c.12.

44 Neumann, *The Speenhamland*, p. 191.

Figure 2: Surrey Total Expenditure and Per Capita Spending
for the Years 1828–34

Year Ending 25 March	Total Expenditure on Poor Relief in Surrey (£000)	Per Capita (£)
1828–29	£243.4	0.52
1829–30	£265.5	0.56
1830–31	£265.4	0.55
1831–32	£283.3	0.57
1832–33	£278.4	0.55
1833–34	£261.5	0.51

Source: BPP, Abstract of Returns for Surrey 1834 xxxii (32) 349–350; 1834 xliii (355) pp. 402–3.

relief costs did rise, and for a short time ratepayers agreed to pay increased poor rates in return for domestic tranquillity.

In 1831 the new Whig government made it clear that they thought the protesters of 1830 had held the agrarian counties to ransom. Under threat of further violence, ratepayers, employers and parish officials had to a certain extent given way to labourers' demands by raising wages and relief allowances.⁴⁵ The Home Secretary, Lord Melbourne, had issued a series of memoranda to magistrates in 1830, warning them against setting wage rates and the use of threshing machines.⁴⁶ He expressed his concern that acquiescence by the parish authorities had 'a permanently bad effect upon the character of the agricultural population and compromised the ability of the rural leadership to govern in the localities'.⁴⁷ The economist and New Poor Law architect, Nassau Senior, also remarked that he believed agricultural property could not support indefinitely the higher wages: 'sooner or later these promises [of higher wages] must be broken and the peasantry will rise again'.⁴⁸

Question 53 which was addressed to parishes by the 'Rural Queries of the Poor Law Commission', in 1833, asked: 'Can you give the commissioners any information respecting the causes and consequences of the agricultural riots and burnings of 1830 and 1832'. Their replies clearly reveal what they believed were the reasons behind the popular

45 Royal Archives, Windsor [hereafter RA], Box 5/9 Melbourne Papers, Lord Grey/Lord Melbourne 29 August 1832.

46 HRO 10M57.03, Lord Melbourne 'Circular to Magistrates', 8 December 1830.

47 Lord Melbourne/Duke of Wellington 10 November 1832 in L.C. Sanders (ed.), *Lord Melbourne Papers* (London, 1899), p. 152.

48 S.L. Levy, *Nassau W. Senior 1790–1834* (London, 1970), p. 70.

disturbances.⁴⁹ Most of the twenty answers received from Surrey parishes mirrored national responses, namely that ‘unemployment and wage levels were the real trigger for protest’.⁵⁰ Peter Jones has noted that the emphasis made at the time on work and wages is nowhere near as straightforward as it first appears. Instead the protesters ‘expressed a series of interrelated demands’, the end of threshing machines, a minimum wage, increase in poor relief and the payment of some kind of dole to the protestors.⁵¹ At the time, recognition that these positive measures needed to be taken to alleviate the suffering of the poor was surprisingly consensual. The magistrate and Wiltshire landowner, George Poulett Scrope, for example, recognised that ‘labourers have received too little wages, and parish allowance must be immediately raised’.⁵² This was an opinion that placed him quite in line with the radical William Cobbett, whose Rotunda lecture on the condition of agricultural labourers argued that ‘no body of the people except the Irish had ever been so ill used as English labourers’ and the ‘struggle between labour and employment would never cease until the labourer got the worth of his toil’.⁵³

III The Government’s Response: Support of Allotments

After 1830, there was a marked increase in the provision of allotments. Although the idea of providing land for labourers had been mooted at the end of the eighteenth century, it had declined after 1805 and has left few traces in the archives before 1830.⁵⁴ Hobsbawm and Rudé identified direct links between the introduction of the Allotment Acts of 1831 and 1832 and the Swing outbreak.⁵⁵ This has also been recognised by Jeremy Burchardt who concluded that ‘there is little doubt that the immediate cause of the dramatic upsurge in the number of allotments was the Captain Swing riots of 1830’.⁵⁶ The incentive to increase the ‘well-being, industriousness and contentment’ of the agricultural labourer, and the need to decrease the poor rate burden resulted in a resurgence of interest.⁵⁷

49 BPP, *PLCR*, Extracts from information received by Poor Law Commissioners Rural Queries for Surrey Appendix B Part I XXX Question 53, pp. 474e–88e.

50 M. Holland, ‘The Captain Swing Project’ in M. Holland (ed.), *Swing Unmasked the Agricultural Riots of 1830 to 1832 and their Wider Implications* (Milton Keynes, 2005), p. 20.

51 Jones, ‘Swing, Speenhamland’, 275.

52 G. Poulett Scrope, *County Chronicle*, 14 December 1830.

53 W. Cobbett, *Brighton Herald*, 18 December 1830.

54 Burchardt, *The Allotment Movement*, p. 51.

55 Hobsbawm and Rudé, *Captain Swing*, p. 296.

56 Burchardt, *The Allotment Movement*, p. 70.

57 *Ibid.*, p. 46.

Speaking in the House of Lords on 11 November 1830, Lord Sheffield emphasised the effectiveness of allotments in keeping down poor rates while in the other chamber, an M.P. for Surrey, John Briscoe also advocated the provision of allotments.⁵⁸ Later in the month (22 November) the Marquis of Salisbury moved for the appointment of a Select Committee to inquire into the present state of the Poor Laws. He complained of the break up of small farms and the enclosure of wastelands, as well as the lack of sedentary employment for the wives and children of the peasantry. In doing so, he 'appeared to attribute to those causes much of the deterioration which the class of labouring population hourly exhibit'. His recommendation was that 'the hopes of the labouring poor should be raised and the original intention of the Poor Laws should be carried into effect'.⁵⁹ The government responded to this Tory initiative, with the establishment of a select committee to investigate social welfare.⁶⁰ The committee considered the plight of the agricultural labourer, and in his report on Surrey, Thomas Chapman, a land agent and surveyor, commented that if labourers were given between two and four acres of land to cultivate, it would enable them to feed their families and decrease their dependence on the poor rates.⁶¹ The published report supported both allotments and the parochial resort to labour rates.

In the summer of 1831, Parliament expressed concern that high levels of rural unemployment could result in further discontent during the coming winter. The response was the passing of three separate Acts relating to allotment provision and parochial employment by spade husbandry. The first of these amended the 1819 Sturges-Bourne Select Vestries Act, and extended the enclosure limit from twenty to fifty acres. Overseers and churchwardens could now rent or hire land not exceeding fifty acres for cultivation by the poor or for leasing to them as allotments. They could also enclose for the same purpose (with consent of the lord of the manor, or other persons) any portions of waste or common land (in or near the parish) 'to any poor and industrious inhabitant or inhabitants of the parish' with the proviso that the latter could not gain settlement by leasing the land.⁶² The second allowed parish authorities to enclose crown land up to 50 acres (with the consent of the Treasury) for the

58 BPP, Lord Suffield Parliamentary Debates, 11 November 1830 3rd Series i col 375 and J. Briscoe 19 November 1830 3rd Series I col 600.

59 BPP, Marquis of Salisbury 1830 House Lords Proceedings 22nd November 1830.

60 BPP, Select Committee of the House of Lords on the Poor Laws VIII [hereafter SC] 1830-1.

61 BPP, SC of the House of Lords on the Poor Laws VIII 1830-1, Evidence for Surrey T. Chapman p.338.

62 59 George III Cap xii 1819; 1 and 2 William IV C 42 1831

benefit of the settled poor of the parish.⁶³ In 1832 a further act authorised parishes to let such land (at a fair rent and in small allotments) to 'industrious cottagers of good character'. These were portions of land made over in trust to the poor collectively to compensate for lost rights of fuel gathering as a result of enclosure.⁶⁴ In Surrey, the only two early allotments directly linked to this legislation appear to be those in Walton-on-Thames, where between one quarter of an acre to one acre were rented out on a yearly basis to 'industrious cottagers of good character, being day labourers or journeymen legally settled in the parish'.⁶⁵ At Chobham, the vestry converted thirty-two acres of wasteland, partly into a parish farm or allotments, to be let out to poor labourers of the parish.⁶⁶ The churchwardens and overseers 'set out for the said poor labourers who applied for the same and were found proper persons, to have such parcels of waste land, most of half an acre, at an annual rent 1s. per rod'.⁶⁷ In his report, Maclean noted that about fifty labourers worked these allotments of half an acre of wasteland.⁶⁸ The committee set up to manage the Chobham allotments, aware that in the first season the labourers had 'no funds in hand to crop it', proposed to raise a sum of approximately £30 by voluntary subscription to manure and plant the land.⁶⁹

IV Co-operative Action

Burchardt has identified this upsurge of interest in co-operative activity after 1830, which resulted in the formation of the Labourers' Friend Society to promote allotment provision, and the founding of the Agricultural Employment Institute.⁷⁰ The aim of the Agricultural Employment Institute was to purchase land and let it to labourers, while the Labourers' Friend Society was 'instituted in hope of improving

63 1 and 2 William IV c 59 1831

64 2 William IV c 42 1832

65 SHC, 605/1/1 Walton on Thames Allotments Orders 1 June 1832 also confirmed R. Ruegg work on FACHRS Allotment project 10th May 2004; Onslow, *Landlords and Allotments* (London, 1886).

66 Act 59 George III Cap xii 1819; 1 and 2 William IV C 42 1831; SHC, P34/box 2 Chobham Poor Land 6 January 1832; SHC, P34/box 2 32 acres enclosed 1832 and 10 acres 1842.

67 BPP, PLCR, Extracts from information received by Poor Law Commissioners Rural Queries for Surrey Appendix B Part I XXX, Reply to Question 20 Chobham p. 477c.

68 BPP, PLCR, Appendix A part 1 XXVIII Assistant Commissioners' Report for Surrey C.H. Maclean p. 577A.

69 SHC, P34/box 2 Chobham Poor Land 6 January 1832.

70 Burchardt, *The Allotment Movement*, pp. 51–52.

conditions of labourers generally, and of providing those in agricultural districts with small allotments of land'.⁷¹ It sought to persuade landowners to let land to labourers for spade husbandry, with the intention of reducing or eradicating poor law dependency. Although the Institute failed in 1834, the Labourers' Friend Society, which held their first public meeting on 18 February 1832, continued to prosper, and obtained royal patronage and support from the landed elite. The Labourers' Friend Society published a monthly magazine that contained detailed information about allotments, and this was directed at landowners and clergymen.⁷² They also employed G.W. Perry as an agent, to contact potential supporters, lecture on the benefits of allotments, form local societies and gain new subscribers. He travelled extensively on behalf of the society, visiting Surrey, Sussex, Hampshire and Wiltshire in 1832.⁷³ The 1834 report recorded visits to Berkshire, Oxfordshire, Gloucestershire, Buckinghamshire, Essex, Suffolk, Norfolk, Northamptonshire, Surrey and Sussex over the course of the year.⁷⁴

Some Surrey landowners were closely involved with the society. In February 1832, two Surrey M.P.s, J.I. Briscoe and W.J. Denison, were appointed as vice presidents of the Labourers' Friend Society, and in August the Hon. Rev. Arthur Onslow from Clandon became a vice president. Briscoe commented that he believed the society 'is calculated to confer benefit on the landlord and tenant of the soil as well as the labourer'.⁷⁵ Landowners from across rural Surrey contributed to the association and local societies sprang up in the Guildford, Farnham, Godalming, Bagshot and Epsom areas, to promote and circulate information on the best methods of establishing allotments for the labouring classes. In Bagshot, Maclean reported that the 'liberality of His Royal Highness the Duke of Gloucester has enabled this society to commence its benevolent intentions'.⁷⁶ The society offered labourers between forty and fifty rods of land and advanced money to them to purchase manure and seed.⁷⁷ When the society was formed in Epsom in 1834, twenty-one large landowners met under the chairmanship of Henry Gosse to support the granting of allotments, 'a system by which the moral

71 London Metropolitan Archive, London [hereafter LMA], Acc/3445/SIC/01/05, Proceedings of the Labourers' Friend Society 1832–36, pp. 7–8.

72 LMA, *Facts and Illustrations later Labourers' Friend Magazine*.

73 Burchardt, *The Allotment Movement*, p. 88.

74 LMA, Acc/3445/SIC/01/05, 'Proceedings of the Labourers' Friend Society 1832–36'.

75 LMA, Acc/3445/SIC/01/05, 'Proceedings of the Labourers' Friend Society 1832–36', p. 19.

76 BPP, PLCR, Appendix A part 1 XXVIII Assistant Commissioners' Report for Surrey C.H. Maclean p.576A.

77 Ibid.

and physical condition of the labouring classes may be raised and ameliorated through the medium of their own exertions'.⁷⁸ In his report on Surrey, the Poor Law Commissioner Ashurst Majendie praised the acquisition of allotments by labourers as beneficial to 'their character and conduct' and warned 'the denial of land to them will constantly produce an increase of ill-feeling on their part'.⁷⁹

V The Need for the Vestries to Provide Worthwhile Labour

In numerous parishes in Surrey, vestries also took positive action to try and alleviate the suffering among the unemployed poor and provide employment. Various minute books report on urgent parish discussions concerning the matter. After the unrest, many parishes realised that setting men to work on the roads and in the gravel pits to solve the problem of surplus labour only demoralized the rural workforce. In Majendie's view, the poor referred to such work as 'convict-labour'.⁸⁰ Instead of just providing work on the roads and in gravel pits, parishes increasingly considered the viability of offering more worthwhile work, such as spade labour, on parish land or on land leased by the parish.

It is possible to identify the existence of some grants of land, from the replies to the Rural Queries and from references in vestry minutes.⁸¹ In Farnham, a 'considerable land is let to poor men in quantities of half an acre to two acres at £2 to £5 an acre' and a few farmers also gave permission for men to grow potatoes on their land.⁸² In Godalming, the vestry set aside fifteen acres for rent by forty tenants, and the Mickleham vestry apportioned allotments on the church land which they offered to thirteen paupers to be 'cultivated with spade husbandry and cropped with potatoes'. In November 1831 the Caterham vestry agreed to employ the poor in digging and trenching ground for the planting of potatoes. Thomas Ellis, a farmer, declined to 'set out land without receiving £4 in addition to the rent', but the issue was resolved by Mr Pinder Simpson

78 Epsom meeting, 17 March 1834, *Labourers' Friend Magazine* (London, 1834), p. 81.

79 BPP, *PLCR*, Appendix A part 1 XXVIII Assistant Commissioners' Report for Surrey A. Majendie p.170A.

80 BPP, *PLCR*, Appendix A part 1 XXVIII Assistant Commissioners' Report for Surrey A. Majendie p. 170A.

81 BPP, *PLCR*, Extracts from information received by Poor Law Commissioners Labour Rate Schemes Poor Appendix D xxxviii Surrey pp. 55D–73 D.

82 BPP, *PLCR*, Extracts from information received by Poor Law Commissioners Rural Queries for Surrey Appendix B Part I XXX, Evidence Farnham Question 20 p.480c; BPP *PLCR*, Appendix A part 1 XXVIII Assistant Commissioners' Report for Surrey C.H. Maclean p. 576A.

who had been a victim of the Swing protests. During the disturbances at his farm 'two stacks of wheat, three barns, a large building, two or three stacks of barley and oats and a quantity of threshed wheat in the barns' were destroyed.⁸³ Simpson agreed to set apart one field for the employment of the poor and agreed to receive no rent.⁸⁴ Thomas Drewitt a Guildford farmer reported in 1833 that Guildford farmers were now 'more willing to grant land' to labourers, but he gave no further details, only stating that, as a proprietor, he allowed his labourers 'between 30 and 60 roods'.⁸⁵ Smallpiece reported three years later that in the Guildford area 'we have more spade husbandry and we have allotments of land for the poor in many instances, and the cultivation of potatoes has enabled them to keep a pig or two and that has increased their comfort'.⁸⁶ Figure 3 provides an indication of the land that was provided by the parish vestries of Banstead, Cranleigh, Dorking, Esher and Egham.

The same sense of urgency to provide work can also be seen in Godalming, where parish officials, anxious to find work for unemployed labourers during the ensuing winter, held a special vestry meeting in November 1830 to discuss the best methods of employing the poor. They also asked landowners to make jobs available and seven landowners offered work ranging from grubbing and digging to work in a stone pit.⁸⁷ In the large parish of Egham where several farmers had experienced a number of incendiary fires in May 1831 a committee was appointed with the task of finding land in the parish for the employment of the poor, while the overseers applied to certain landowners to rent small pieces of land to the parish. By the autumn of 1831, small pieces of ground had been obtained across the parish. Labourers grew potatoes for the use of the parish on some of this land and these were later sold at public auction.⁸⁸ The Egham vestry reported in December 1831 that wage rates for labour 'on the poor allotments was as low as possible' and only labourers with no other work were to be employed, an encouragement for labourers to find their own work before reverting to the parish for assistance. Owing to insufficient employment opportunities on the allotments, the overseers had to continue employing some men on the roads and in digging gravel.

83 BPP, HO 52/10, 5 November 1830.

84 Wells, 'Historical Trajectories', 103; SHC, MIC/9/2 Mickleham Vestry Minutes: 24 March 1832, LA2/2/21 Caterham Vestry Minutes: 28 November 1831.

85 BPP, SC on Agriculture V 1833, Evidence T. Drewitt Question 10249 p. 479.

86 BPP, SC on the Causes and Extent of Agricultural Distress VIII 1836, Evidence of G. Smallpiece Question 3075 p.150.

87 SHC, 2253/11/1 Godalming Special Vestry Minutes: 24 November 1830.

88 SHC, 2516/2/10 Egham Vestry Minutes: 16 May 1831, 3 October 1831, 5 December 1831 and 2 January 1832.

Figure 3: The Provision of Spade Labour by Surrey Parishes 1830–1834

Parish	Date	Provision
Banstead	1834	3 acres set aside attached to workhouse
Cranleigh	1833	150 acres of wasteland
Dorking	1829	Discussed the possibility of providing land
Esher	1832	Completed a parish survey of wasteland
Egham	1831	In the Autumn: Pieces of waste ground obtained across the parish, 4 acres in Knowle Hill area, Egham Field, 8 acres at Shrubs Hill

Source: SHC 2375/2/1 October 1834 Banstead Vestry Minutes, P58/1/1 16 September 1833 Cranleigh Vestry Minutes, DOM/9/3 27 October Dorking Special Vestry Meeting 1829, 238/ES/9/3 12 April 1832 Esher Vestry Minutes, 2516/2/10 16 May 1831, 3 October 1831, 5 December 1831, 2 January 1832 Egham Vestry Minutes.

Even after this concerted effort, the overseers nonetheless reported to the vestry in February 1832 that there still remained a ‘large body of labourers out of employ’.⁸⁹ With the greater availability of summer farm work, parish officers informed labourers in June that they now had to find their own employment. In the autumn of 1832, the vestry again discussed the employment of labourers for the coming winter. It not only decided to use the same three sites as the previous year but also tried to obtain land in the Englefield Green area to employ men of that district. The vestry also confirmed they would follow the policy of the previous winter ‘of finding work for all able-bodied labourers instead of giving parochial relief’ as they believed such a system deterred the idle from applying for parochial assistance ‘when they found they must work for it’.⁹⁰

Unfortunately, although it appears that many parishes did introduce some type of land provision immediately after the Swing protests, they did not all survive for long. In 1843 Henry H. Vaughan Assistant Commissioner of the Poor Law Commission reported that land grants had been tried in most parts of Sussex, Surrey and Kent but now ‘few [districts] in which they can be said to be general’.⁹¹

89 Ibid., 6 February 1832.

90 Ibid., 5 December 1831, 6 February 1832, 4 June 1832 and 16 November 1832.

91 BPP, SC on the Employment of Women and Children in Agriculture XII 1843, Evidence H. H. Vaughan for Surrey p.143.

VI The Labour Rate

The introduction of the labour rate was another method used to employ surplus labour.⁹² Although variations of this device were in use before 1832, it was not until August of that year that Parliament gave parishes the statutory power to levy a labour rate. The scheme, introduced for the better employment of labourers in agricultural parishes, was to run until 25 March 1834. Roger Wells has seen this as 'one of the few measures directly addressing Swing's grievances' and a stop-gap measure by the Whig government before the reform of the poor law system.⁹³ The Labourers' Employment Act of 1832 provided a statutory framework for vestry adoption of labour rates, although on a temporary basis. In order for a parish to adopt the labour rate, three quarters of ratepayers in a parish had to agree to the introduction of the measure 'solely for the purpose of employing or relieving the poor of the parish'.⁹⁴ The act stated that 'whereas in many parishes ... it has been the custom to pay to labourers and others less than the common rate of wages for their labour and to make up the deficiency from the poor rates', the authorities now viewed this practice as unacceptable.⁹⁵ Parish officers calculated the labour rate, estimating the cost of relieving the able-bodied unemployed for a period of time set by the vestry. Each ratepayer then had the option of paying the rate or employing men at the specified wage. At the end of the period the wage bill was compared to his assessment, and if he had paid in full his assessment for the labour rate in wages, he was excused payment of the rate. If there was a shortfall, he was required to pay the balance to the overseer.

J.P. Huzel points out that in 1832 the labour rate was more prevalent than either the Speenhamland or roundsman systems, and 'especially in rural southern counties'.⁹⁶ Approximately twenty per cent of the grain producing parishes that responded to the Rural Queries acknowledged that they had used labour rates during the winter.⁹⁷ The Surrey poor law commissioners reported the full details of some schemes, as at Albury, Great Bookham, Bletchingley, Cranleigh, Elstead, Farnham, Frensham,

92 J.P. Huzel, 'The Labourer and the Poor Law 1750-1850' in G.E. Mingay (ed.), *The Agrarian History of England and Wales 1750-1850* 6 (Cambridge, 1989) p. 782.

93 R. Wells, 'Migration, the Law and Parochial Policy in Eighteenth and Nineteenth-century Southern England', *Southern History* 15 (1993), 117.

94 2nd and 3rd William IV 1832 c.96 for the better employment of labourers in agricultural parishes p. 2

95 Ibid.

96 Huzel, 'The Labourer', p. 782.

97 M. Blaug, 'The Poor Law Report Re-examined', *The Journal of Economic History* 24 (1964), 236-37.

West Horsley, Worplesdon, Woking, Send and Ripley.⁹⁸ There were many others operating in the county. Careful examination of vestry minutes and accounts indicates that the parishes of Abinger, Betchworth, Ewell, Godstone, Godalming, Horley and Shere also participated. Most schemes ran for periods of six weeks and, where necessary, continued sometimes on different terms. It has been possible to identify 19 labour schemes in Surrey, but there may have been more, for, as Maclean observed a 'great portion of the distressed agricultural parishes' had introduced the labour rate.⁹⁹

The management of such schemes was extremely onerous and time consuming to administer; there were problems of enforcement and they were subject to considerable abuse. In agricultural parishes where large farmers relied on unskilled labour, they benefited both from a cut in their wages bill and a reduction in their poor rates. Some parishes, as at Cranleigh, made concessions to smaller farmers by allowing them to employ their sons as day labourers. However, small tradesmen, who used only family labour, did not benefit. Maclean recognised this point, commenting in his report that the labour rate 'created extreme dissatisfaction among the tradesmen, tithe-owners, householders, a class of ratepayers who have no opportunity, means or necessity to employ much labour'.¹⁰⁰ Although there was criticism of the scheme in the short term, it did possess many positive advantages. For example in Farnham in the winter of 1831-32, 196 men were being relieved by the parish. In January-February 1833, when the labour rate was operating, only twelve men were chargeable; a saving of £584 in eight weeks for the parish. In 1833, Thomas Drewitt reported that the poor rates in the Guildford area, hitherto increasing, were now in decline because of the introduction of the labour rate.¹⁰¹ Similarly, Smallpiece observed that 'we have none unemployed now; it has relieved a great many of our worst parishes very much' and labourers are no longer 'lying about upon the roads; they are now employed to some purpose'.¹⁰² Perhaps the reason for such widespread support was summed up by Maclean who observed that since

98 BPP, *PLCR*, Extracts from information received by Poor Law Commissioners Labour Rate Schemes Poor Appendix D xxxviii Surrey pp. 55D-73D.

99 BPP, *PLCR*, Appendix A part 1 XXVIII Assistant Commissioners' Report Maclean p. 554A.

100 BPP, *PLCR*, Appendix A part 1 XXVIII Assistant Commissioners' Report for Surrey C.H.Maclean p. 554A.

101 BPP, *SC on Agriculture V* 1833, Evidence T. Drewitt Question 10210-15 pp. 477-78.

102 BPP, *SC on Agriculture V* 1833, Evidence G. Smallpiece Question 12872, 12875, 12876, p. 616.

the introduction of the labour rate 'no fires, no depredations and no disturbances have occurred'.¹⁰³ This must have been a key factor for parish support.

Not all supported the scheme, and it was never renewed after 1834. The poor law commissioners thought the labour rate so pernicious that they issued the early publication of a report designed to secure the abandonment of the practice.¹⁰⁴ The commissioners viewed the scheme as supporting the tenant farmers (who controlled most vestries in rural Surrey):

The country is now aware that the great motive to the maladministration of the poor laws is the desire of the farmers in the country to throw part of the wages of their workmen on those who are not direct employers of labour.¹⁰⁵

They added that the poor now perceive their wages 'are not a matter of contract but a matter of right'.¹⁰⁶ In his report on Surrey, Majendie declared that it was 'decidedly wrong in principle as interfering with the market for labour and imposing the employment of labour on those who do not require it', but at the same time accepted it was useful as a 'temporary expedient'.¹⁰⁷

In 1832 the percentage of labourers aided by their parishes in the south was far greater than in the industrial midlands and the north-west, as can be seen from Figure 4. This was because of the lack of employment opportunities, and for many parishes in the period after 1830 these responsibilities were overwhelmingly shouldered by local government.¹⁰⁸

VII Emigration

After the turmoil of the Swing protests, more contemporaries favoured emigration as a solution to the unrest and a way to alleviate the problem of poverty, by removing surplus labour and the disorderly. The large market town of Dorking had one of the highest poor relief expenditures in rural Surrey.¹⁰⁹ By 1830, the town was experiencing considerable

103 BPP, *PLCR*, Appendix A part 1 XXVIII Assistant Commissioners' Report for Surrey C.H. Maclean p. 552A.

104 BPP, *PLCR*, Extracts from information received by Poor Law Commissioners Labour Rate Schemes Poor Appendix D XXXVIII including Surrey pp. 55D-73D.

105 BPP, *PLCR*, Concerning the Labour Rate XXXII p. 278.

106 *Ibid.*,

107 BPP, *PLCR*, Appendix A part 1 XXVIII Assistant Commissioners' Report for Surrey Evidence A. Majendie p. 166A.

108 Eastwood, *Governing Rural England*, pp. 171-73.

109 April 1830-March 1831 £3,835 per annum

Figure 4: Abstract of poor returns for five counties for 1831–32

Region	Per-capita Expenditure On Poor (£)	% of Poor Rate expended In Employing Poor On Roads	Total % of Poor Rate Spent On All Parish Work Schemes	Total % of Poor Rate Spent On Employing Poor	% of Population Occupied On Parish Work Schemes
Surrey	0.57	5.83	1.35	7.18	1.91
Oxfordshire	0.88	8.0	3.92	11.9	2.1
Buckinghamshire	0.97	6.5	4.28	10.8	2.2
Nottinghamshire	0.33	3.8	0.22	4.1	0.25
Lancashire	0.22	1.0	0.68	1.7	0.08
Abstract of poor returns nationally for 1831–32					
England	0.50	3.6	1.31	5.2	0.52

Source: Abstract Poor Rates Returns year to 25 March 1832 and 1833 xxxii (32) pp.16–17

unemployment which was of great concern to the select vestry. The issue of pauper unemployment was discussed at numerous special vestry meetings between 1828 and 1830. In 1830 the Swing disturbances directly affected Dorking, for a crowd of eighty or more attacked the Red Lion Inn where magistrates were meeting. In addition several farmers in the vicinity were victims of incendiary attacks. As a result of increasing unemployment, a special vestry meeting held on 10 February 1832 decided ‘to encourage emigration of persons receiving relief from the parish’.¹¹⁰ The motion, proposed by Charles Barclay, chairman of the select vestry, and seconded by William Crawford, declared that:

the number of labourers in this parish has for many years so far exceeded the number required for the cultivation of the land and for other purposes, that the overseers have been constantly under the necessity of employing a great many upon public works at a very considerable expense beyond the value of their labour.

Barclay also recognised that:

there is no prospect of any improvement in the condition of these supernumerary labourers from any future increase of employment in this

110 SHC, Dom/9/3 Dorking Select Vestry: 10 February 1832.

parish, the only mode of affording them permanent relief is by giving encouragement to such of them as are willing to emigrate with their families to our colonies in North America.¹¹¹

In 1832, emigrants were usually required not only to pay their fares but to provide clothing and provisions for the long sea journey, as well as the costs of transportation on arrival in the new country. People emigrating would have to forgo earnings for one to three months and so emigration of the poor agricultural labourer without assistance was extremely difficult. As Eric Richards has pointed out, the poor were not well placed to raise the costs: 'instead, the poor usually came last in the sequence of emigration'.¹¹² Therefore, typical self-financed emigrants tended to be substantial tenant farmers, skilled industrial workers or village craftsmen with some savings.

The scheme adopted by many parishes after 1830 was to encourage poor emigration by financing the journey of individuals or small family groups, although once at their destination, the emigrants were required to support themselves. For example in April 1832, the Esher vestry agreed to pay for the emigration to America of five single men and one family of six.¹¹³ The parish of Thames Ditton assisted Henry Ratcliffe to leave for America.¹¹⁴ All these schemes involved very small numbers and proved to be far less of a financial and administrative burden than organising large-scale emigration, although after 1830 there were agents, who wrote to parish overseers offering their services to organise parish emigration 'at the lowest possible rates'.¹¹⁵ Nonetheless, large-scale emigration from Surrey was only organised from Dorking in 1832, the parish using the agent E.M. Mitchell of London. The Dorking scheme followed large-scale parish schemes such as those operating in the Kent parishes of Headcorn and Beneden. The Petworth Emigration Committee in Sussex from 1832 to 1837 assisted 1,800 men, women and children to leave England for Upper Canada on ships chartered by the committee, which sailed from Portsmouth every summer.¹¹⁶ The Petworth emigrations took place under the patronage of the earl of Egremont who encouraged them by assuming the financial risk of chartering ships and other expenses. He also paid for

111 SHC, Dom/9/3 Dorking Select Vestry: 10 February 1832

112 E. Richards, 'How did Poor People Emigrate from the British Isles to Australia in the Nineteenth Century', *Journal of British Studies* 32 (1993), 250.

113 SHC, 238/ES/9/3 Esher Vestry Minutes: 12 April 1832.

114 SHC, 2568/6/1 Thames Ditton Vestry Minutes: 13 May 1832.

115 SHC, FP1/3/3 File 2 Farnham Vestry: Letter from William Canon 6 February 1833.

116 West Sussex Record Office, Chichester [hereafter WSRO], SRO PHA 137,140, Goodwood MS 1473, 1474; W. Cameron and M. McDougall Maude, *Assisting Emigration to Upper Canada: the Petworth Project 1832-1837* (Montreal, 2000).

the full passage of emigrants sent to Upper Canada from parishes where he owned all the land and part passage where he owned some of the land. The committee was also prepared to take people from neighbouring counties whose passage was paid by their own parish or by some other scheme, as was the case for the Dorking emigrants.¹¹⁷

An analysis of the records (Figure 5) reveals that in the short term, the Dorking emigration scheme of 1832 did alleviate the strain that had been put on ratepayers to provide for the poor. In 1833 Charles Barclay made clear reference to the problems of the winters of 1831 and 1832, when the parish had to find employment for between 70 and 80 persons, either upon the roads or in the gravel pits. ‘This year’, he wrote ‘there have been only 40 or 50, showing a difference about equal to the number of the labourers who emigrated to Canada’. He further acknowledged that, ‘by the assistance afforded to those who have emigrated we may also contemplate the improved situations of those who remain’.¹¹⁸ If we compare the costs paid out in Dorking for employing the poor and providing casual relief before the emigration of 1832 and 1833, and the costs after those dates, there was a significant saving.

Figure 5: Dorking Poor Relief Payments 1830–1834

Date	Casual Relief	Employing Poor	Total
September 1830–March 1831	£316	£540	£856
March 1831–September 1831	£291	£338	£629
September 1831–February 1832	£285	£671	£956
February 1832–September 1832	£326	£384	£710
September 1832–March 1833	£343	£416	£759
March 1833–September 1833	£280	£164	£444
September 1833–March 1834	**	**	**
March 1834–September 1834	£269	£91	£360
September 1834–March 1835	£174	£195	£369
March 1835–October 1835	£225	£128	£353
October 1835–February 1836	£200	£211	£411

** Spoiled Record

Source: SHC, DOM9/3 part 3: Dorking Vestry minute Book 1830–1843.

¹¹⁷ Emigrants from Hampshire, Somerset, Hereford, Norfolk, Cambridgeshire, Wiltshire.
¹¹⁸ C. Barclay, *Address to the inhabitants of Dorking and Letters from Dorking Emigrants* (Dorking, 1833), p. 6.

Even so, in the short term, the emigration costs had to be considered. These amounted to £3 10 15s. from the poor rates and £4 15 17s. 6d. raised by subscription (which was not repaid). Members of the select vestry and subscribers accepted these immediate costs on the basis of the long-term saving and hoped more people would emigrate. The cynical approach would be to view emigration in the short term as being partially successfully in 'shovelling out paupers' as emigration was not considered in Dorking as a long-term solution to the problem of rural unemployment.¹¹⁹ This may well have been because of the cost factor. As the Reverend Sockett commented to Charles Barclay, 'I am too well aware of the extreme difficulty that exists in some parishes in raising the money for sending out emigrants'.¹²⁰ To set up and administer such a scheme took considerable time and energy on the part of Charles Barclay and the select vestry. The immediate affects of the Swing disturbances in Dorking most definitely acted as a spur to encourage parishioners to contribute to the emigration scheme.

VIII Post Swing

Increasingly, after the disturbances of 1830, parish vestries found themselves providing the traditional allowances of pensions, clothing, sickness benefits and so on and, increasingly, wages for the unemployed poor labourers working on the roads and implemented labour schemes. At the same time vestrymen were now anxious to leave the business of administering poor relief, and supervising labour schemes to their paid officials. For example the assistant overseer in Godalming continually requested landowners to make jobs available to unemployed labourers and in Egham the assistant overseer continually applied to certain landowners to rent small pieces of ground.¹²¹ Eastwood has noted, instituting a system of salaried officers changed the character of parish government. In parishes with assistant overseers, the routine financial management passed from elected overseers to appointed assistant overseers. After the unrest 'vestrymen were even more keen to leave the distasteful business of administering inadequate relief regimes, and supervising stringent make-work schemes, to their paid officials'.¹²²

119 Hansard, C.Buller, 1843: col.522.

120 WSRO, Goodwood 1464, Letters from the Reverend Sockett to Charles Barclay.

121 SHC 2253/11/1, Godalming Special Vestry minutes November 1830; SHC 2516/2/10, Egham Vestry Minutes 16 May 1831, 3 October 1831, 5 December 1831 and 2 January 1832.

122 Jones, 'Swing, Speenhamland', 285.

Ameliorative action was not left exclusively to local authorities however, for central government too was now, as Dunkley puts it ‘groping for some response’. For Peter Mandler this was as a ‘quest for administrative solutions’.¹²³ By the end of 1830 the government believed that the administration of the present relief system was generating distress by promoting able-bodied pauperism, depressing wages and encouraging population growth.¹²⁴ It was now time for central government to intervene to reduce relief expenditures. The view that the poor law had destroyed the work ethic within the labouring classes had gained more general acceptance. Senior criticised the use of allowances in parishes as causing ‘idleness and improvidence occasioned by making up wages out of rates’.¹²⁵ Furthermore, he agreed with Lord Holland that the present poor law system was responsible for much of the distress in the countryside.¹²⁶ Lord Holland also informed Grey in 1830 that the southern and midland counties ‘cannot remain as they are and nothing can cure the evil but a speedy and effectual revision of the poor laws’.¹²⁷

From its inception in 1830 the Whig government was also ‘receiving advice that indicated a direct link between the administration of relief and social disruption in the South’.¹²⁸ Now there were those in government who believed that the present relief system was inadequate to safeguard society, and it was accepted that ‘idleness, disaffection and dependent poverty were corroding the foundations of social stability’.¹²⁹ In parliamentary circles, the poor law was increasingly seen as a threat rather than a prop to social order. Lord Lansdowne directly attributed the unrest of 1830 to the precarious economic conditions of the agricultural labourer.¹³⁰ Many landowners viewed the popular protests as a signal that

123 P. Dunkley, ‘Whig and Paupers: The Reform of the English Poor Laws 1830–1834’, *The Journal of British Studies* 20 (1981), 127; P. Mandler, ‘The Making of the New Poor Law Redivivus’, *Past and Present* 117 (1987), 149.

124 University College, London [hereafter UCL], Brougham Papers, Lord Holland to Lord Grey 26 November 1830; University of Durham, Durham [hereafter UD], Lord Grey Papers Box 34/File 2, Lansdowne to Lord Grey 2 January 1831 also Box 38/File 10, Lord Goderich to Lord Brougham 28 December 1830.

125 RA, Melbourne Papers Box 35/91, Memo by N.W. Senior 31 January 1831.

126 N.W. Senior, *Three Lectures on the rate of wages: delivered before the University of Oxford in Easter term 1830: with a preface on the causes and remedies of the Present disturbances* (London, 1831); UCL, Brougham papers, Lord Holland to Lord Brougham 31 December 1830.

127 UD, Grey Papers Box 34/File 2, Lord Holland to Lord Grey 26 November 1830.

128 Dunkley, ‘Whigs and Paupers’, 127.

129 Eastwood, *Governing Rural England*, p. 163.

130 The National Archives, London, Box 8/86 Melbourne Papers, Lord Lansdowne to Lord Melbourne 3 November 1830.

the parish administration of poor relief was badly mismanaged and no longer a guarantor of social stability.¹³¹

IX Conclusion

The 1820s was a period of deepening economic and agrarian crisis when parish officials 'began to pull back from many of the commitments they had made over the previous thirty years'.¹³² The poor adopted many strategies to cope with the fragility and sparseness of their material world but found themselves more dependent on poor relief when the economy of makeshifts weakened. As a result the Swing disturbances may have been symptomatic of the widespread prevalence of low wages, unemployment and underemployment in southern England, deriving from adverse economic conditions. It is apparent that after the Swing protests the parish officials were anxious to contain social tensions. Local parish officers supported by ratepayers now tried to restore social equilibrium by making concessions. However this explanation alone is too simplistic. It is clear that in Surrey, as Peter Jones has also shown, the response of local vestries after 1830 shows the importance of the 'right to subsistence'. During the unrest the linkage made by labourers between the demands for work, wages and relief 'continued to be shared (or, at the very least acted upon in practice) by parish authorities' immediately after the agricultural protests.¹³³ Increased relief allowances, the introduction of the labour rate, the desire to provide more constructive outdoor employment such as spade husbandry, and sponsored emigration were just some of the immediate solutions introduced by parishes in rural Surrey. Of course these measures were not unique to this county, as numerous parishes across southern England attempted to resolve the underlying problems that had resulted in the Swing protests. However, beside the range of responses pursued by the vestries in Surrey, this analysis has also illustrated in some respects the changing attitudes towards the poor after Swing as well as how the increasingly complex arrangements that were put in place passed into the hands of paid officials. The response to Swing amongst the Surrey vestries therefore revealed not only the significance of the 'moral economy' but also the growing bureaucratisation of government within the parish.

131 G. Bowyer, *An Economic History of the English Poor Law 1750-1850* (Cambridge, 1990), p. 198; Knott, *Popular Opposition*, p. 51.

132 Jones, 'Swing, Speenhamland', 283.

133 *Ibid.*, 280.