THE 1832 POOR LAW COMMISSION'S *ANSWERS TO RURAL QUERIES*[1]

GOUDHURST

A CASE STUDY OF A WEALDEN PARISH

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'Our school histories, and still more so our popular historical sense, sees the nineteenth century as the century of industrialization. We inherit, almost in our blood, images of urban poverty, of factories and child labour....While there is truth in this view, for much of the nineteenth century England remained an agricultural country physically and an agricultural economy.'

From *Reshaping Rural England*, Alun Howkins 1991.

INTRODUCTION

The extent of rural poverty in the second quarter of the nineteenth century, although not admitted as such by the government of the day, who viewed poverty as a result of the poor's own indolence and indulgent relief schemes operated by individual parishes, was a reflection of the post Napoleonic Wars agricultural depression and of

[1] Answers to *Rural Queries* used for this article are contained in volumes 10-14 of British Parliamentary Papers (BPP), 1834 Poor Law Session, published by Irish University Press, Shannon, Ireland in 1970. The full report and session is contained within volumes 8-17. All of the Kent responses and the majority of those from other parts of the country, including information on a fascinating set of returns by John Denson and much of the remainder of the report can be viewed by contacting the author at the Centre for Kentish Studies, Education Resources, County Hall, Maidstone.

a desire to subject agriculture and agrarian society to the same economic realities of industry as the towns. The preoccupation with them during the nineteenth century can at least partly be seen as a conscious or unconscious awareness, that, whilst the country may still have overtly been agricultural and rural in nature, capitalism had to be as much part of the countryside as of the city – indeed, the countryside now had to feed the growing urban centres of Britain. New ways of thinking had bred capitalism just as capitalism had been responsible for shifts in attitudes and perceptions.

The wealth of quantitative and qualitative data of the *Answers to Rural Queries* form part of the Poor Law Commission's remit for 'inquiring into the Administration and Practical Operation of the Poor Laws'. The Royal Commission was set up under a Whig government in February 1832. They shared the new prevailing attitude of self-help and were expecting to find perceived 'evils' in their enquiries. It has to be stressed, however, that they attempted to make their findings as objective as possible hence their determination that all answers and findings should be published without any selection on their part.

The questions were twice revised until the Commissioners were happy with their content. They were also broken down into two sections as a respondent capable of answering one set of questions may not have been so competent with another. There was also a further set which were deemed to have no need of revision that were sent out to the towns. Some settlements appear in both 'Rural' and 'Town Queries', such as Tonbridge and Faversham.

There was no compulsion to reply to the questions and around 90 per cent of parishes did not. However, the fact that only 10 per cent of parishes did respond should not obscure the value of 'Rural Queries' as an historical/geographical source. The 10 per cent still represents about one fifth of the population and represented an overwhelming amount of raw data for the commissioners to analyse. It has to be borne in mind, however, that whilst these documents provide us with a huge amount of information regarding parish life, social structure and economy in the early to mid nineteenth-century English and Welsh countryside, the answers are given by people, usually with a 'position' in parish society; such as a farmer, lawyer, vicar, overseer, etc. They are, therefore, not necessarily representative of the whole community, especially the rural poor. Indeed, from the over 1,200 parishes that did respond only one, that of Waterbeach in Cambridgeshire, was answered by a labourer, or a 'labouring gardener' as he was titled in the response. This was a man called John Denson who had received some degree of elementary education. These set of answers are well worth reviewing but, unfortunately, this will not be possible

here but it is worth noting that whilst many of his responses often echo those answered by the ruling classes, the 'slant' of the narrative often tells a different tale.

There are further problems, apart from that of 'class bias', although that perhaps is the most important and the main ones are listed here:

1. Class bias.
2. Occasionally the problem of clustering occurs, i.e. similar answers in neighbouring parishes. Is this a question of geography or was there some collaboration amongst respondents?
3. Not all questions are free from ambiguities of meaning.
4. Why did comparatively so few parishes respond?
5. Why were certain questions completely ignored?
6. Inbuilt bias in follow up report – e.g. Westerham and Sundridge.[2]
7. Why were so many of the answers apparently ignored?
8. Leading questions.
9. Lack of quantitative assessment, whilst qualitative remarks were often 'glossed over'.
10. Short time factor for satisfactory completion of report.

In spite of their many shortcomings, these documents provide an excellent opportunity to delve into those attitudes and perceptions that led to a redefining of the countryside and it's agricultural workforce.

The questions themselves can be conveniently broken down into nine sections, as set out below.

Statistical Q.A-1; Topographical Q.2; Agricultural Employment Q.4-10, 27-29; Women and Children's Work Q.11-13; Subsistence and Diet Q.14-15; Land and Property Q.3, 14-15; Workhouse and Poor Relief Q.22-26; Poor Law Administration Q.30-52; Captain Swing Disturbances Q.53.

The purpose of this essay is not, therefore, to examine what these documents do or do not reveal about the workings of the Poor Laws but rather to ascertain what use they can be in reconstructing the society of a locale or indeed the whole nation at a certain point in time. It is then, within the confines of the above categories of questions that the case study of Goudhurst shall be made.

[2] See the Poor Law report itself, contained in Volume 8 of the Irish University reprints of BPP, (1970). Also see unpublished essay by the author of this article, *The Assistant Overseer and the Parish: Westerham and Sundridge – A Kentish Comparison,* at the Centre for Kentish Studies, Education Resources, County Hall, Maidstone.

A 'SOCIAL RECONSTRUCTION' OF 1830S GOUDHURST

Goudhurst has been selected for this study not because it was the highest poor-rated parish in the county to respond to the survey, (Minster-in-Sheppey holds that 'distinction') nor was it the highest rated of the responses from the Kentish Weald – that 'accolade' falls to Ashurst. In fact, out of the fifty-seven Kent parishes which responded to the actual questionnaire, Goudhurst lies in eighteenth position in terms of poor rate per head of population and the eighth highest spender in the Weald from the sixteen parishes responding to the questionnaire from that region of Kent. The reasons for the selection of Goudhurst Parish lie in the rarity of the quantity and depth of responses, (only one question was left unanswered) plus it carries the responses of three individuals, Samuel Johnson, a churchwarden; Isaac Bates, an overseer (whose answers are always initialled jointly) and Giles Miller whose position in parish society is not stated. Questions 33, 34 and 35 are answered by Giles Miller alone and an unidentified set of initials – W.W. There is also the fascination of the supposed and justifiable reputation of the lawlessness of the Weald; its being beyond the established social, political and economic order of things.

The Statistical – Q.A-1

The Goudhurst returns included in the report are those made to the third edition of queries that were dispatched. The first four questions deal with population, poor rate expenditure, expense per head of population of the poor rate and the size of the parish respectively.

Goudhurst's population grew from 1,782 in 1801 to 2,758 in 1831 an increase of approximately 35 per cent. These figures, of course, belong to the census years and breaking them down further the population of Goudhurst rose by approximately 17 per cent between 1801-11; 23 per cent between 1811-21 but increased by only 7 per cent between 1821-31. The large rise of the inter censal years 1811-21 is perhaps the most interesting and compares with the increase for the whole of Kent, including those areas now part of Greater London, of approximately 16 per cent. These years take in the culmination of the Napoleonic Wars, in 1815, where troop movements and the boost to Wealden industries including agriculture, needed for the war effort, probably accounted for a large part of the increase, coupled with the return of soldiers from Europe, settling back into the parish after 1815. The ending of the French Wars saw the beginning of a severe agricultural depression and the much smaller population growth of

approximately 7 per cent between 1821-31 is evidence of this. Further factors, such as high unemployment in the Weald, along with the growth of urban Kent and outward migration from parishes such as Goudhurst, initiated the decline of population levels in rural Kent during this period. The rates for Kent as a whole for those years were approximately 16 per cent for 1811-21 and 12 per cent for the next decade.[3] The total spent on the poor rate itself actually fell between 1813-21 from £3,778 to £3,286 in spite of the modest increase in population although not surprisingly it was a good deal higher than the £2,217 spent in 1803. Indeed, the rate per head of population for the year 1831 of £1.3*s*.9*d*. was the lowest for the years 1803; 1813; 1821 and 1831.

The final statistical piece of information from these four queries simply asks for the acreage of the parish, to which all the respondents give as approximately 10,000 acres.

The Topographical

The Old English word *Hyrst*, such as that in Goudhurst is found predominantly within the Weald of Kent, Surrey and Sussex although it does occasionally appear in counties such as Berkshire and Somerset, amongst others and the most likely definition of the term is 'wooded hill'. The topography of the densely wooded Wealden forest, as it was at the time of colonisation, is testament to this. However, one of the foremost modern writers on place-name identification, Margaret Gelling, is unable to assign any category to the term *Goud*[4] although. Other sources have indicated that it may refer to a battle which took place on the hilltop,[5] or even a prehistoric hill fort.[6] Whatever, the literal meaning, woodland is hard to deny and even by 1832, out of 10,000 acres, two of the respondents to the Rural Query state 2,550 acres is woodland, whilst the third respondent, Giles Miller, states that 'one-third of the Parish is Wood'. Even today there are extensive amounts of woodland as is perhaps not surprising in the third most wooded county in England. In descending order the

[3] For more on this, see the paper by W. A. Armstrong, *The Population of Victorian and Edwardian Kent* in volume cxii (1993) edition of *Arch. Cant.* which served as an excellent reference source for this section.

[4] Margaret Gelling, *Place Names in the Landscape*, pbk. ed. (1993), 197-98 (first published 1984).

[5] Judith Glover, *The Place Names of Kent*, (1982 ed.), 82 (first published 1976).

[6] Alan Everitt, *Continuity and Colonisation*: The Evolution of Kentish Settlement, Leicester University Press, (1986) 294.

land is accounted for in the response by pasture; 3,600 acres, arable; 3,150 acres woodland; 2,550 acres, and hops; 500 acres.

Agricultural Employment

Goudhurst possessed approximately 400 labourers according to the respondents, 30 of which were supported by the parish. However, most probably required parochial assistance at some point, in spite of the fact that there was a high degree of piecework, which paid a higher rate than routine task work. It was possible for a labourer in constant employment to earn as much as £40 a year, but it is doubtful whether any labourer was in 'constant' employment. Indeed, it is stated that 'many, from want of employment, do not earn £20'.

Every parish would have some degree of unemployment but in the more agriculturally prosperous areas of Kent this may have been only restricted to the winter months. In the case of the Wealden parishes many had both winter and summer unemployment, as did Goudhurst. The reasons for this are both many and varied, but it is another example of the Weald's fragile economic and social situation. The nineteenth century countryside's equivalent of today's inner city.

Whilst women and children, but especially women, make up a much wider workforce than is traditionally assumed across the country as a whole, in predominantly arable Kent, their contribution can be seen as variable in quantity, seasonality and in recompense and can be considered to be no more than an irregular, supplementary income.[7] This was mainly in the hop fields and during haymaking and harvest.

A woman and child under the age of sixteen, could be expected to earn an average of 9*d.* a day in summer, a penny or two less in winter. The real money was to be found in the hop plantations, where as much as half a crown could be earned hop picking, but hops were an unpredictable crop, especially in the Weald and suffered badly from inclement weather.

Given an average amount of employment, a family of husband, wife and four children above the age of five could earn at most £12 per year. The lowest average level quoted was £8 per year.

Queries 17, 28 and 29 are concerned with how this money was paid and were there any systems in place designed to occupy or employ men, such as the 'Roundsman system'. This was not

[7] For a more in depth analysis of women's work in the countryside, see Alun Howkins, *Reshaping Rural England: A Social History 1850-1925* (1992) pbk. ed. (first published 1991).

practised in Goudhurst but essentially, where it was in place, a labourer would go from farm to farm during the course of a day and request employment. If no work could be found, farmers would have to sign a document to that effect and at the end of the day the labourer would report back to the overseer who would pay him the going agricultural rate minus a couple of pennies. Neither was there a Labour Rate. Under this system labourers would be given work by a farmer and be paid by him, irrespective of the farmer's actual requirements. This would be calculated against some scale – such as acreage, number of horses kept for tillage or by the farm rental. This was subsidised by an additional rate or by general agreement amongst those who did not employ their full complement of labour. The commissioners considered these practices counter-productive. They also considered that paying married and unmarried men a different wage lead to improvident marriages at as younger age; once again Goudhurst denies operating such a system. This 'Malthusian' conclusion has been convincingly undermined by James Huzel, who, by comparing parishes with operating systems which favoured the married man, led him to suggest that any allowance system only functioned by reducing infant mortality, not by encouraging early marriage.[8]

Subsistence and Diet

There is some disagreement amongst the respondents as to how well a family could live on the wages discussed above. In answer to query 14, 'could the family subsist on those earnings? and if so, on what food?' the churchwarden and the overseer answer quite starkly with the word 'barely'. The third respondent, Giles Miller, is much more sanguine about the whole affair and responds by saying, 'The standard of comfort being high with us, the food of a labouring Man is almost universally meat and bread, and members of his family, good wheaten bread, with butter and cheese.' However, all three are in agreement that it is impossible to save any of the family income. William Cobbett on his 'rural ride' through Goudhurst stopped at a Methodist meeting house, where in the absence of the minister the schoolmaster was reading to the assembled Sunday school children. He remarks: 'This Schoolmaster was a *sleek*-looking young fellow: his skin perfectly tight: well fed I'll warrant him: and he has

[8] James P. Huzel, 'Malthus, the Poor Law, and population in Early Nineteenth-Century England,' *Econ. Hist. Rev.*, 2nd series, xxii (1969).

discovered the way of living, without work, on the labour of those that do work. There were 36 little fellows in smock-frocks, and about as many girls listening to him; and I dare say he eats as much meat as any ten of them'.[9] Clearly, Cobbett was not particularly impressed by dietary standards of Goudhurst. He also commented on the huge parish church and challenged any 'Parson Malthus' to tell him that 'this church was built for the use of a population not more numerous than the present?' Even given that the labouring classes barely attended church any more, Cobbett could only count about ten, it was still too large for statements concerning unprecedented population levels to have any truth about them.

Land and Property

Although there has been much debate in recent years regarding the importance of land ownership and its social effects on individual parishes, there is little doubt that concentration of land in the hands of one or very few individuals, gave them the potential for enormous power within the community, if they chose to use it. These parishes where land was consolidated in this fashion were termed 'close' parishes, for in theory the landowner could cut off the outside world and control his own 'mini empire', from within. The opposite of these were the 'open' parishes where land ownership was scattered amongst several or many individuals, the power manifested in land ownership was thus diffuse and control by any one individual, unlikely. Extremes of parish types in Kent are Pluckley (close) where at one point 85 per cent of the land was held by the Dering family and Brenchley (open) where the land in this large Wealden parish was split between perhaps as many as 75 to 100 individuals. The answers given in *Rural Queries* show, that Goudhurst fitted into the latter, 'open' category.

Cottage accommodation was unlikely to be particularly salubrious, although it is reported that most cottages possessed gardens. However, none or very few labourers owned their homes and no land was let to them in order that they could supplement their meagre incomes. The rent of these tenant cottages averaged at £4 per year. Nevertheless, the majority of labourers were exempt from paying rates, that would have been tantamount to robbing Peter to pay Paul. Families with more than three children were often assisted by the parish in payment of rent. Giles Miller informs us that 'the occupier

[9] William Cobbett, *Rural Rides*, pbk. ed. (1967), 179. (First published 1830).

of a cottage, being a settled Parishioner, is never charged with Poor Rate' and that 'during the last four years Rents have been paid according to an average of 175*l.* per annum, about 5 per cent, on the whole expenditure: the practice is rather decreasing'.

Workhouse and Poor Relief

In 1722 a Kent M.P. and magistrate, Sir Edward Knatchbull, succeeded in passing a somewhat harsh law, which, amongst other things, enabled a parish to possess its own workhouse. Neighbouring Cranbrook acquired one the following year, it took Goudhurst a further twenty-three years, when it finally opened its doors in 1746. In 1782, Thomas Gilbert, M.P. for Lichfield passed a further Poor Law Act which repealed many of the more unsavoury parts of Knatchbull's original act but expanded the provision for workhouses to be grouped in unions.[10] This idea went much further, of course, after 1834 when the Poor Law Amendment Act consolidated the union idea and removed its administration from individual parishes and handed the powers over to Boards of Guardians.

Of overriding importance to the government of the day was the prevention of outdoor relief, although this was never totally achieved and prior to the Amendment Act, which enshrined this, the returns for Goudhurst's own workhouse show that it contained about 100 paupers receiving indoor relief but as many as 829 individuals, including wives and children, receiving outdoor relief. A little under a third of its total population for 1831.

In addition to the above figures about 180 families also received relief in the form of an allowance scale. This generally began with the fourth child. Giles Miller was particularly scathing about such a system and wrote 'The word "*scale*" is unknown, but the thing exists as effectually as if it were published at every Petty Session. Every Parish Officer and Pauper knows that a Man with a Wife and three Children is entitled to have his wages "*made up*" (such is the phrase) to 12*s.* a week; and is entitled to 1*s.* 6*d.* per week for every Child beyond three; and without entering into any very rigid account as to the average of his earnings. Extra receipts are supposed to go for clothes and extra payments: in reality, they often go to the beer shop.' The parochial administrators hardly disguised their frustration with

[10] *Parish Affairs: The Government of Kent Under George III*, Bryan Keith-Lucas, (1986), 110-17.

the magistrates, who, it seemed were very liberal in their awarding of relief without ever taking into account the applicant's character. The magistrates probably had other interests at heart, namely law and order and the so called Captain Swing riots of 1830-31 were still fresh in their minds. Keeping the peace, as far as they were concerned, was probably worth an escalation in poor relief.

Poor Law Administration

As mentioned in the introduction to this article, this assessment of a *Rural Query* questionnaire does not undertake to probe too deeply into the workings of the Poor Laws. The purpose is to see how effective these particular documents are in the hands of historians and historical geographers in 'reconstructing' a past community. Therefore, questions 30 to 52 are only significant to this analysis when they illuminate something which fits that criterion.

Question 32 asks: 'Have you a Select Vestry and Assistant Overseer; and what has been the effect?' Goudhurst had both.[11]

An assistant overseer was paid for his role and most pursued their tasks with vigour. There was often much antagonism between parishioner and assistant overseer and they were frequently the targets of abuse and sometimes violence or attacks upon their property.[12] The respondents in Goudhurst were happy with theirs and reported that his presence had 'good effect'.

Possibly one of the pivotal questions in the survey is number 36, which asks: 'Is the Amount of Agricultural Capital in your neighbourhood increasing or diminishing? And do you attribute such increase or diminution to any cause connected with the Administration of the Poor Laws?' This question was certainly fundamental to the Commission's remit and logic would seem to dictate that it should be the one to which most attention was paid. The response from Goudhurst was interesting. Both Samuel Johnson, the churchwarden and Isaac Bates, the overseer, considered that agricultural capital was diminishing and that the

[11] The more relevant to a change in the nature of parochial affairs in Kent, is the assistant overseer. For more detailed information on the assistant overseer and the Select Vestry, a board given powers by the parish to administer poor relief, created by act of Parliament in 1818 and not to be confused with the original select vestries consisting of all rate payers, see Keith-Lucas (1986), 104-5 and 126-27.

[12] For a more detailed examination of assistant overseers and their role in parish life see unpublished Bagshaw, (1996).

administration of the Poor Laws was crucial in this regard. The next response, which although not initialled on this occasion, was presumably that of Giles Miller, states. 'The prevailing opinion is, that agricultural capital is diminishing. I doubt the fact, at least to the extent to which it is supposed, if capital is, as it ought to be, measured by bushels of wheat, and not by pounds sterling. I can find ample cause for all diminution which may have taken place, from the style of legislation on the Currency and Corn Laws for the last 15 years. My local experience would lead me to say, that a desire in many Farmers to oppress the Tithe-owner, *per fas atque nefas*, has had more to do with the diminution of capital than the administration of the Poor Laws, however faulty. The retrograde movement of some Parishes compared with others possessing no greater advantages, natural or acquired, can only be accounted for by the cause last mentioned.'

The remaining answers to questions concerning the administration of the Poor Laws are too lengthy and also too complex to be given a full account of here, so a summary of the key questions and responses, will, unfortunately have to suffice.

A good deal of the questioning revolved around the power or otherwise of the vestry. In most instances, the magistrates possessed ultimate power in parochial affairs, especially in decisions concerned with the awarding of poor relief. This was greatly resented by the parish authorities. The magistrates, of course, were keen, to placate the angry or impoverished labourer and so avoid a repeat of the disturbances of 1830-31. The overseers, etc., had to look after the parish purse and were ratepayers in the parish themselves, both sufficient motive to keep the rate low. They were keen for the Select Vestry to have the final say in poor relief and character was much talked about. The magistrates took too little notice of this, according to the respondents. Giles Miller considered that the denial of giving allowance to individuals whose earnings could not meet the needs of themselves or their families, would initially perhaps be very distressing and therefore possibly, immoral but in the long term 'would again make Labour a marketable commodity' and Character a thing of value to the Agricultural Labourer, no less than the other classes of society.' The remainder of the questions relating to the administration of the Poor Laws and amendments to them are much in the same vein and cover issues such as emigration provided for by the parish, bastardy and technical financial responses on questions such as auditing and the publications of parish accounts. Goudhurst answers these very fully and a study of the document is worth undertaking for those interested in the minutiae of the Poor Laws and

what they reveal about contemporary attitudes regarding, character, morality and such like.[13]

The 1830-31 Agricultural Disturbances or 'Captain Swing' [14]

Question 53 asks: 'Can you give the Commissioners any information respecting the causes and consequences of the agricultural Riots and Burning of 1830 and 1831?' The so called *Captain Swing* riots, given the name from the pseudo signature which often used to accompany the notes posted, warning of trouble if certain conditions were not met by landowners and their ilk, began on the Downland Ward of east Kent and spread throughout most of England. Initially, the events occurred in the shape of the destruction of the newly invented, steam-powered, threshing machine; depriving many labourers of scarce winter employment. However, when the disturbances spread to the Weald, arson was the most common method of destruction and the causes changed from protests against threshing machines to those concerning tithes, taxes and so on, although threshing machines were destroyed here, too.

The 'subversive' Weald is rather silent on its involvement in these affairs in respect of the *Rural Queries* and even those that did respond, such as Goudhurst, which gives a lengthy response, deny or play down the extent of trouble in their own parish.

The churchwarden and overseer of Goudhurst were quite content to state 'No, unless caused by the pernicious publications which Labourers read much more now than formerly'. Giles Miller, however, gives a fuller answer, but is bewildered that any protest at all should occur in the parish. Perhaps he had forgotten that half the population of the parish at this time were paupers.[15] The point was of course, that such disturbances were more likely to happen in parishes like Goudhurst. High rate of unemployment and pauperism, lack of real social cohesion, with no dominant landowner or individual enabled such disturbances to take place. The poor, trapped in a web of unemployment little likelihood of work, dependence on the parish and a new mood of defiance against the causes of this rural misery

[13] For more on these attitudes and their relationship with those which inspired the Poor Law Amendment Act, see David Roberts, *Paternalism in Early Victorian England*, (1979), esp. ch. 4.

[14] For differing hypothesis on the spread of the 'Captain Swing Riots', see E. J. Hobsbawm and George Rude, *Captain Swing*, (1969) and Andrew Charlesworth, *Social Protest in a Rural Society*, 1979, Hist. Geog. Res. Ser. No.1.

[15] Hobsbawm and Rude, *op. cit.* 75.

could vent their anger in these socially, uncontrolled parishes. Given that there may have been orchestrated incitement as well, all lends credence to the conclusion that it would have been surprising if there had not been disturbances.[16]

Problems and Limitations

There are three major problem areas in analysing one parish in this way, in addition to those mentioned earlier, which apply to the *Rural Queries* as a whole. These are 1. The Picture that emerges is largely static. It provides very little evidence in the way of everyday human and class relationships. We can only guess at what the actual *poor*, essentially the subject of the survey, thought and felt about their lot, about their parish, about what they thought of the Poor Laws. 2. A single parish analysis can not present a truly informative picture of the state of the community within or their relationship with the outside world. Comparisons are needed, especially in a county such as Kent with its many geographical regions. To do justice to Goudhurst, other parishes need to be investigated and responses compared with responses. 3. We have to take on trust the respondent's narrative and assessment of things. This human evidence needs to be balanced with those of others. Goudhurst to some extent offers this in that three respondents give lengthy answers, even here though other sources need to be consulted, as occasionally they have been in this piece. More primary source data also needs to be examined, for further comparisons, to either support or bring into question the opinions of the respondents.

These limitations notwithstanding, to the use of the *Rural Queries* in this way, namely, that the questionnaire here, has been used largely for a purpose for which it was not designed; the answers, either individually and especially when used comparatively, are a valuable source of information in providing a 'snapshot' of parish life, social structure and economy in the early to mid nineteenth-century English countryside.

[16] For breakdowns and assessments of the 'Swing' riots in Kent, see Hobsbawm and Rude, *idem*. Also Shirley Burgoyne Black, *Swing: The Years 1827-1830 As Reflected in a West Kent Newspaper* found in Arch. Cant. (1989), 89-106. For a graphic breakdown and assessment of the *Answers to Rural Queries* responses see unpublished work by Peter Bagshaw, *Parish, Pays and Poor Law: A Question of Perception? Kent – a Case Study*. (1995), in the Centre for Kentish Studies, Education Resources, County Hall, Maidstone.

Conclusion

A seventeenth-century observer when describing the Weald saw it as a 'dark country in which is the receptacle of all schism and rebellion.'[17] By 1830, we have 'The Weald was a powder keg (and) surely had one of the highest proportion of paupers in the country.'[18] From the responses given, Goudhurst is typical of the large, Wealden parish, in its nineteenth century, rural poverty. The question now remains how successful has this document been in helping to reconstruct the parish in the 1830s?

Essentially, it has thrown up little in the way of surprises. On the other hand, it has helped to confirm many things. Whether this is in the region of population trends, unemployment, women's and children's work, attitudes to the poor and poor relief and so on. However, there are two points of interest which occur in many other responses to the *Rural Queries*, certainly in the Kentish responses, which are also suggested by the Goudhurst returns. These refer to the question of agricultural capital and *Captain Swing*. On both of the these pivotal questions, the administration of the Poor Laws is not cited as a major cause of either the diminution of capital or the upsurge in rural unrest. If the Goudhurst responses are typical in this respect, then these two central elements were ignored by those who had already decided upon the further degradation of the rural poor.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

An abridged version of this article can be found in the September 1998 edition of the *Cranbrook Journal*. I would like to thank Peter Allen, as joint Editorial Adviser of that periodical, for his hard work in producing the abridged version and for his helpful comments on the full article.

[17] D. C. Coleman, *The Economy of Kent Under the Later Stuarts*, (1951), unpublished Ph. D thesis, cited in Peter Brandon and Brian Short, *The South East from AD 1000*, pbk. ed. (1990), 235.

[18] Brandon and Short, *ibid.*