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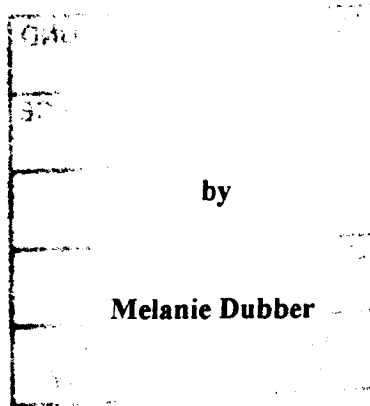
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Map p64

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Working-class Womens' Strategies against Poverty in West Oxfordshire,
c.1850-1900.



**A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of
Oxford Brookes University for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.**

October 1997

**'Making ends meet': Working-class womens' strategies against poverty
in West Oxfordshire, c.1850-1900.**

by Melanie Dubber

**A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of Oxford Brookes
University for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. October 1997.**

Abstract

This thesis seeks to contribute to two areas of historical enquiry: the history of women and the history of poverty, by investigating the strategies used by women to cope with poverty. It attempts this in a systematic way by applying a taxonomy of strategies to the case study area of West Oxfordshire from the mid-to-late nineteenth century. As such, it broadens our understanding of the lives of women living in a rural area as well as examining poverty from the perspective of the responses to it.

Three main strategies were considered; employment, household management and community strategies. General results of the analysis suggest that the strategic approach is a valuable method of examining the way poor rural women coped with poverty, highlighting the interconnections between their roles of reproduction, production and consumption. Specific results suggest that first, a radical rethink of the role and importance of the home as a female power base is required. Second, although strategies are difficult to quantify, certain strategies appear to have been more popular than others; household management emerged as the pivotal strategy

to make ends meet. Careful spending and saving and the ability to utilise a variety of resources such as animal husbandry and gardens and allotments was necessary in the fight against poverty. Employment, although of value, could not always be relied upon to provide a steady, regular income. Community strategies were of some value. They were provided informally by kin and the neighbourhood and formally by charities and poor relief. Third, certain factors were influential concerning the nature of strategies; namely duration of need, age and marital status, geographical location, seasonality and conditions for eligibility.

The organic nature of the taxonomy means that it can be expanded to include additional strategies and used to study other groups of women such as the middle-class, different historical periods and geographical locations.

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Abbreviations used for locations

B.L. Bodleian Library

C.O.S Centre For Oxfordshire Studies

O.A. Oxfordshire Archives

O.M.S. Oxfordshire Museum Store

Location abbreviations are used in the tables, figures and footnotes.

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Dedication

David Glyndwr Williams, 1913-1988

‘The problem of balancing income with expenditure, of making ends meet, is common to all societies and all classes. Resources and needs fluctuate between seasons, from good years to bad.’

Paul Johnson, *Saving and spending: The working-class economy in Britain 1870-1939*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985. (Oxford Historical Monographs), p1.

SECTION A THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Background to the thesis

The thesis stems from an initial general interest in researching female employment during the second half of the nineteenth century when continued urbanisation and industrialisation were resulting in extensive social and economic changes. I was interested to uncover to what degree the nature and extent of female employment was affected by these changes. Preliminary reading revealed a quantity of literature on female employment both of a general and urban nature but very little providing a rural dimension.¹ What there was on rural women tended to concentrate on agriculture, the retreat of women away from paid employment and into the home, and the low wages and harsh conditions under which many women worked.² Furthermore, many men, particularly agricultural labourers, also received low and irregular wages.³ I became intrigued by how families could have survived on so little money.

This led me to a broader exploration of rural poverty. I was keen to discover the nature and extent of rural poverty during the Victorian period and in particular to examine the relative significance of wage determinants for the condition of poverty. I found that it was not until the late nineteenth and early twentieth century that the question of poverty was addressed with any scientific precision. Charles Booth's detailed study of poverty in London, Life and labour of the people in London, the first volume of which was published in 1889, was followed by another 16 volumes which appeared over the next 14 years. This study, along with B.S. Rowntree's research on York, Poverty: a study of town life, published in 1901, provided an urban dimension. Rural poverty was not addressed by a similar study

until 1913, with the publication of How the labourer lives, a collaborative study by B.S. Rowntree and May Kendall.⁴

Both Charles Booth and B.S. Rowntree suggested wage determinants for defining the extent of poverty. Charles Booth proposed an income of around 18-21s.(90p-£1.05) per week for a 'moderate family', while B.S. Rowntree calculated an income of 21s 8d (£1.07) per week for a family of two adults and three children.⁵ Yet from initial reading, I found that agricultural labourers during the mid- to- late Victorian period appeared to earn far less than these amounts. For example, George Swerford, who was born in the village of Filkins, Oxfordshire, in 1887 recalled: 'The labourer's wages when I first remember were ten shillings (50p) a week and cottage, the shepherd, cowman and carter three shillings (15p) extra'.⁶ Although living standards rose in the late nineteenth century when the prices of manufactured goods stabilised, and those of food fell, rural wage rates often seemed well below Charles Booth and B.S. Rowntree's determinants of poverty.⁷

This provided me with the core conundrum for my research; if rural wages were so low, then how did families, and in particular women, try to make ends meet? Michael Rose suggested that the weekly budgets of working-class wives '... were miracles of domestic management which only highlight the artificiality of the social surveys' poverty line'.⁸ I pondered on the fact that wages might not have been an accurate economic indicator of poverty, although they are commonly used by researchers to determine standards of living. However, some recent research appears to recognise the need for a broader view.

Women's access to economic resources did not always readily translate into wages. Indeed, controlling resources can be concerned with budgeting, looking after children or the sick, or managing a piece of land. None of these is readily measured in terms of economic indicators. Instead we need a much broader definition of employment than for men.⁹

I concluded that although I needed to know what wages poor people received and therefore look at employment in depth, I also needed to see whether there were additional resources at the disposal of families. From this point I formulated my research problem: what resources were available to poor rural women, as the main household managers, to help them to make ends meet in the mid- to- late nineteenth century, circa 1850-1900.

1.2 The research problem

The nature of the research problem appeared to have two strands. First, I needed to explore in greater depth the nature and extent of rural poverty in the period 1850-1900. I needed to discover what resources, other than employment, were available to women to help them to successfully manage their households. In order to do this I would need to examine contemporary studies of rural poverty; looking at the theoretical concept of poverty as well as its applications to specific geographical locations. Preliminary research also involved a study of how other researchers have responded to this problem. Having targeted a collection of relevant resources, I then needed to find the most useful way of examining them systematically.

The first stage was to examine how contemporary researchers defined and measured poverty in order to shed some light on my research problem. Defining poverty is not an easy task as Michael Rose suggests:

One of the major problems involved in any study of poverty, even at the present day, is that of definition. Poverty might be said to consist of a lack of the basic necessities of life, but the things thought to be necessary for a minimum standard of civilised life vary widely from society to society and from age to age.¹⁰

As poverty is difficult to define, it is hard to find an agreed yardstick by which to measure it. Samuel Mencher suggests there are two basic issues that need to be addressed: '... the establishment of a sound theoretical or conceptual framework and the employment of valid and reliable techniques for the collection and organisation of the relevant data'.¹¹

I was able to identify three major phases in the history of redefining poverty. The first phase, which extended to around the mid- to late- nineteenth century, defined poverty largely in moral terms. The second phase, occurring around the late nineteenth to early twentieth century, marked a more scientific approach to poverty and suggested a stronger economic determinant to the causes of poverty. The third phase, stemming from the 1970s, puts forward a dimension of cultural relativism in defining poverty. All three phases have resulted in different approaches to social policy towards the poor. The findings of the researchers associated with these redefinitions have all, to varying extents, helped to inform my research problem. In particular, they have shown that poverty is a complex concept, that still in the 1990s raises controversy when attempts are made to define and measure it.¹²

I briefly examine the three phases surrounding what was referred to in the Poor Law Report of 1834 as: 'The mischievous ambiguity of the word *poor*'.¹³ The first phase is marked by the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834. It broke with the traditional approach of considering the poor en masse and instead emphasised a division between the pauper and the poor. The result of this was that: 'The 'stigma' of pauperism, which was meant to differentiate the pauper from the poor, had the perverse effect of stigmatising the entire body of the poor...' suggests Gertrude Himmelfarb.¹⁴ Although the concerns surrounding poverty merged with other related issues such as female labour and education, from whatever viewpoint poverty was examined, it was seen as a moral problem.¹⁵

The idea of poverty as a moral problem was reinforced by the findings of Henry Mayhew, whose London Labour and the London Poor (1851-1861) put forward what he called a distinctive 'culture' associated with the poor. Although he revealed gross inequality between rich and poor, the problem of poverty was viewed as a lack of 'connection' and a 'feeling of alienation' between classes.¹⁶ Despite interest in the problem of the poor, the idea of poverty was not examined in a rigorous way. Indeed, for the first two decades after mid-century, Gertrude Himmelfarb argues that: 'the idea of poverty became normalised and 'moralised'... whatever stigma [attached to poverty] that remained, was reserved for the dependent and unrespectable poor...'¹⁷

However, economic depression brought the question of poverty to the fore once more and this marks the second phase of the redefinition of poverty, where an attempt was made to establish a sounder theoretical framework for the concept of poverty, largely due to the researches of Charles Booth and B.S. Rowntree. Rowntree's work with May Kendall on the rural labourer and his family has been particularly useful in informing the research problem.¹⁸

Using farm labour books from Oxfordshire, I found wage rates were often well below what Rowntree termed the 'poverty line' of 21/8, and families must have used additional non wage resources to help them to manage. In York, Rowntree found 27.84% of the total population to be suffering from poverty. This figure was similar to that found by Charles Booth; 30.7% of the population of London he judged to be below his poverty line. However, B.S. Rowntree took the concept further by drawing a distinction between what he defined as 'primary poverty' and 'secondary poverty'. Primary poverty occurred in 'families whose total earnings were insufficient to obtain the minimum necessities for the maintenance of physical efficiency'. Secondary poverty occurred where '... the total earnings of a family

would have been sufficient for the maintenance of merely physical efficiency were it not that some portion of it was absorbed by other expenditure; either useful or wasteful'.¹⁹ Research by E.H. Hunt suggests that: 'For every family in poverty, because their income was absolutely insufficient, there were about 20 other families whose suffering might have been averted by better management'.²⁰ The importance of efficient household management- a female task- is explored in the main part of the thesis.²¹

Furthermore, B.S. Rowntree explored the change and continuity associated with poverty. He found that poverty tended to be correlated with the lifecycle; people could expect periods of want and plenty and he identified key periods of want. He suggested that childhood, parenthood with young children and old age were particularly difficult times.²² The fact that Rowntree argued that poverty was a dynamic concept contributed to my awareness that resources used to help make ends meet might change or need to be changed at different lifecycle points. Also, my analysis needed to take account of the fact that there might be external fluctuating determinants as well, such as seasonal employment changes.

The final theme that I found of relevance in the work of B.S. Rowntree was his case study approach in How the labourer lives (1913). These individual case studies show that families often needed to put together a matrix of employments to keep them in work and that other non-employment resources could be vital in the battle against poverty. Some of the resources he included were charities, poor relief, tending gardens and allotments, animal husbandry, credit, the support of neighbours and kin. and the careful household management of the wife. Rowntree was convinced that such resources were very important in helping families to manage.²³ Using his case studies and the work on rural areas carried out by other researchers listed below, I was able to compile a list of resources that I would need to examine in the rest of my thesis.

Although the work of B.S. Rowntree provided the core information on the nature and extent of poverty and so was of primary importance in illuminating the nature of my research problem, I complemented these by using the writings and researches of other contemporaries. Of particular help was the work carried out by Maud Davies on the village of Corsley in Wiltshire in 1905-1906. Her research has been called: 'One of the first social surveys of a rural community'. It was a detailed study of 202 households by house to house enquiries. She found many resourceful women making ends meet by such activities as making jam, market gardening and animal husbandry.²⁴

Within both these phases of poverty redefinition occurred the research of 'social explorers'; people keen to uncover something of the nature and extent of poverty at first hand. Although many of their findings were unscientific, moralistic and anecdotal, I found them to be of some use in showing the way poverty was perceived, the nature and extent of rural poverty and the difficulties faced by rural women in making ends meet and the resources they used to help them. In particular I referred to the works of Alex Somerville, Richard Jefferies, Richard Heath, H. Rider Haggard and Edwin Grey.²⁵ A modern researcher, Michael Pickering, commented:

What must continually be a matter of surprise and admiration to anyone who studies the old village life is how the ordinary labourer's wife managed to maintain herself and her family from week to week while beleaguered by poverty on every side.²⁶

Samuel Mencher, in working towards a modern definition of poverty concludes: '...the real standard of living of an individual or a family comes from many sources, both public and private; it is their total which should define the extent of wealth or poverty'.²⁷ I found the dimension of poverty to be fluid and so not easy to gauge

accurately. However, economic causes clearly emerge as a key variable from contemporary studies, and in particular the rural labourer's inadequate or irregular earnings. It is also clear that poverty was extensive since both Booth and Rowntree suggested that around one third of the population at any one time suffered from poverty. A modern researcher goes further in suggesting that: '...most members of the working-class were likely to experience poverty at some period in their lives'.²⁸

The second phase of redefining poverty had revealed its scale and nature to a greater extent than ever before. In its aftermath there was a preoccupation with trying to improve the welfare of the poor generally through service provision. At this point Gertrude Himmelfarb suggests that: '...The concept of welfare might have displaced the idea of poverty...', however, there was a third phase in the redefinition of poverty.²⁹ This embraced the idea of poverty in relation to cultural deprivation and the key exponent was the sociologist Peter Townsend. He suggests:

Poverty can be defined objectively and applied consistently only in the terms of the concept of relative deprivation. Individuals, families and groups in the population can be said to be in poverty ... when their resources are so seriously below those commanded by the average individual or family that they are, in effect, excluded from ordinary living patterns, customs and activities.³⁰

Thus he criticises Booth, Rowntree and subsequent studies because their view of poverty was based on resources and in particular the application of absolute levels of minimum needs. He suggests measuring all types of public and private resources which contribute to standards of living. Yet this concept of relative deprivation, tantamount to the concept of inequality, appears to make it even more difficult to define poverty. His approach appears to give poverty changing boundaries. 'We constantly manufacture new forms of poverty as we drive forward the living standards of the majority', is the suggested outcome of this approach.³¹

The defining of poverty still appears to be a controversial subject. Definitions provide varied dimensions to the concept, rather than an agreed standard. Historical explorations of poverty are restricted by the problems created by sources and this will be explored more fully later in the chapter. My approach has been to start with wage levels but to move on to a broader examination of poverty from the point of the response of the rural poor to the difficult financial circumstances they experienced. Finally, the researches on poverty that I examined highlighted a number of resources available to the poor to help them to cope. I then needed to put them together in a systematic way to form the core of my thesis. The organisation of these resources formed the second part of my research problem.³²

Preliminary work also involved a study of how other researchers have explored the ways women made ends meet, and in particular how they wove the different resource strands into a coherent picture. I did not find the historiography associated with women 'making ends meet' to be clear cut; the subject seems to have been approached in an indirect way. First, through studies examining the nature and extent of poverty; second, through studies of specific resources such as employment and third, through a general examination of the lives of women.³³ This has resulted in a piecemeal, rather fragmented account of how women managed.

The seminal studies for this section of the research problem have been those of Elizabeth Roberts whose researches have introduced the historical concept of 'strategy'.

...very many working-class women struggled to find the means to clothe, house and feed their families. Their husbands' wages alone were insufficient for these purposes so they had to find ways of supplementing their incomes as economically as possible. These various methods of balancing families' may be termed 'strategies'...The adoption of these strategies by

working-class women was essential in view of the widespread poverty existing both before and after the First World War.³⁴

Although Elizabeth Roberts was primarily concerned with a later period [1890-1940] and was therefore able to have access to oral testimonies, the concept of strategy can also be usefully applied to the period under consideration in this thesis. Furthermore, she refers to families' budgets, but the concept of strategy is equally applicable to single women. Elizabeth Roberts' research remains the most detailed and systematic work on strategies to date.

Some researchers have made reference to strategies, often as part of a general flowering of interest in women's history in the last twenty years. Diana Gittens alludes to 'strategies for survival', in which she includes work and marriage; Ellen Ross mentions 'subsistence strategies' in her examination of motherhood in London from 1870-1918 and Michael Anderson refers to '...strategies which can be employed to generate and exploit resources.' D.H.J. Morgan refers to '...a variety of strategies...' and Susan Yeandle discusses 'family strategies' and 'personal strategies'. Louise Tilly and Joan Scott suggest '...traditional families employed a variety of strategies to promote the well-being of the family unit' and Jane Lewis comments '...women had to resort to numerous strategies to make ends meet'.³⁵ Such comments do not go far enough in exploring the possibilities open to women in helping them to make ends meet. Too often 'other resources' are tagged on to a study of employment. Employment may not have always been the key resource for women.

While the strategic approach to making ends meet has not received a hostile response from researchers, the lack of substance given to strategies other than employment may be perpetuating a misguided view. Jane Humphries, for example, suggests: 'Few families were entirely dependent on the earnings of husbands and

fathers; but for many families they were the mainstay...by the 1860s dependency on men and male wages was almost universal...'³⁶

The concept of the centrality of the family wage; that men should and indeed did earn enough to support their families, is debatable. Jane Lewis suggests that a large number of working-class families could not achieve a family wage in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Furthermore, she suggests that the family wage was publicised and promoted by contemporaries investigating the social conditions of the period as a means of securing social stability and moral integrity.³⁷ This gives rise to the interesting question that if the family wage was made to appear more important than it was, then resources other than employment may have been of greater significance.

The debate concerning the family wage, indeed the standard of living generally, thus has implications for a strategic approach to the issues which surround making ends meet.³⁸ In exploring other resources, in addition to wages to determine standards of living, the contribution made by women to resource provision would be elevated to mainstream historical theory and debate. Some progress has been made: Sara Horrell and Jane Humphries suggest that economic historians have neglected to look at non-wage sources and Joanna Bourke suggests '...although the struggle to 'make ends meet' is frequently acknowledged, it is portrayed as a rather pointless one producing little of intrinsic value.' Recent research by Penelope Lane on the work of women in the informal economy reinforces the need to consider what she refers to as '...informal non-wage elements...'³⁹

Despite a considerable amount of research into the effects of industrialisation on the lives of women, there is no consensus of opinion. The pioneering work of Ivy Pinchbeck in the 1930s continues to provoke debate despite some criticisms of her 'optimistic' conclusions. Pamela Sharpe suggests the effects '...remain open to

question'.⁴⁰ Much depends on the ideology of the researcher as to how effects are perceived. Within this debate the role of strategic analysis has yet to be fully explored. However, it appears to offer tremendous potential for providing a much fuller account of the lives of women and, in particular, to explore the inter-relationships between the standard categorisations within which women are often studied; consumption, employment and reproduction.

If historians have neglected to use strategic analysis as a research tool, sociologists have taken it up far more readily. Strategic analysis is frequently discussed by sociologists and used as an analytical tool, although it is not without its critics.⁴¹ Rosalind Edwards and Jane Ribbens reject the use of the term and adopt the rather vague 'ways of coping' instead.⁴² They suggest: 'What the debate about strategy reveals is the extent to which the concept carries all sorts of baggage and assumptions derived from its basic masculinist activities in public settings'.⁴³ Additional debate concerns first, restrictions in the choice of strategies; not all strategies are necessarily open to all women. Second, there is debate over the rationality of strategies; whether all should be conscious decisions involving long-term perspective. Finally, it has been suggested that the use of the term 'household strategy' is inappropriate because it cannot be assumed that the household is a consensually operating unit.⁴⁴

How relevant is the sociological debate surrounding strategies for historians? Whilst it is necessary to acknowledge many of the misgivings felt by sociologists regarding the use of the term, such as the need for conscious decision-making and its masculinist and militaristic connotations, is vital to make full use of what sources are available for studying the lives of women. Until oral evidence became available, for example, it is impossible to verify the long-term perspective of women or the degree of consensus within the household unit. There will always be semantic problems regarding key words such as 'strategies', 'employment' and

'leisure' and it may not always aid discussion by setting precise definitions.⁴⁵ Despite certain reservations by sociologists regarding the use of strategies, dialogue between disciplines plays an important part in facilitating research into the lives of women. Both feminist history and gender studies have pioneered interdisciplinary approaches and this thesis makes use of some sociological research.⁴⁶

Given that a lively debate exists around the use of the term 'strategy' amongst sociologists it is surprising that few historians have shown interest in it; an even smaller number have used it in any depth and with any system.⁴⁷ There appears to be considerable scope for its use in studying how women made ends meet. Such an approach should help to unlock a better understanding of the lives of poor, rural women. Studies of urban women, for whom considerably more sources are available, have, not surprisingly, received greater attention from historians.⁴⁸ The main study on rural women is Pamela Horn's Victorian Country-women (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991), which presents much fascinating material but fails to analyse it in a rigorous way or use strategies to explore the poverty experienced by women.⁴⁹

In addition, studies of rural women and women generally, have tended to be fragmentary. They examine employment, motherhood, the household; all valuable themes in themselves, but they need to be balanced by studies which bring together the different strands of womens' lives as well as drawing out the interrelationships between these strands. Such an approach places the woman at the heart of the research, illuminating the lives of women in all their complexities. Carl Chinn is a skilful exponent of this approach, weaving together the different aspects of womens' lives. He suggests the role of the urban poverty-stricken mother is:

...multi-functional in nature. Over a period of years, or often at the same time, she had to act as wife, mother, grandmother, housewife, cook, cleaner,

household manager, nurse, defender of the family and helper to her neighbours in their time of trouble.⁵⁰

This is equally applicable to the rural poverty-stricken mother and neatly summarises her many roles. However, the strategic approach that I shall adopt examines women's lives from a slightly different perspective; placing resources rather than roles at the centre of the study. In this way it is possible to illustrate the multiplicity of resources available to women, rather than the 'wages and other factors' approach. Handicapped by the absence of first-hand accounts, it is difficult to indicate how women made choices about their methods of coping and their needs and priorities.

From the twenty or so resources uncovered mainly during the research on the contemporary studies of poverty, certain patterns emerged; some resources appeared to be clearly related and could be placed under a general heading, such as cookery and sewing within the sphere of household management.⁵¹ Others, such as employment, appeared to have no direct links with other resources. My next task was to establish a framework for analysing these resources. I decided to use a taxonomy of strategies; a framework of resources available to women to assist them in making ends meet.

Fig. 1. The taxonomy of strategies

1. Women's employment strategies
2. Household management strategies
 - 2.1 Spending
 - 2.2 Saving
 - 2.3 Resource strategies
 - 2.3.1 Gardens and allotments
 - 2.3.2 Animal husbandry
 - 2.3.3 Countryside resources

- 2.3.4 Housing
- 2.4 Skill strategies
 - 2.4.1 Food preparation
 - 2.4.2 Sewing
- 3. Community strategies
 - 3.1 Informal networks of support
 - 3.1.1 Kin
 - 3.1.2 Neighbourhood
 - 3.2 Formal networks of support
 - 3.2.1 Charities
 - 3.2.2 Poor relief

The taxonomy was the frame of reference for analysing the research problem and, as such, set the structure for the rest of the thesis, with sections devoted to the study of the individual resources. I constructed the taxonomy in an attempt to facilitate the exploration of what I thought were the many ways women attempted to make ends meet. The taxonomy was intended to guide my research on women's strategies and I was aware that having set an agenda of strategies, others could emerge during the course of the investigation. The next section shows how the taxonomy was used.

1.3 Methodology

The taxonomy was applied to strategies at two levels, locally and nationally. Research at a local level is vital for leading to a better understanding of women's history.⁵² In the first part of this section the case study area is introduced, specific reasons are given for its choice and general reasons are provided for using local case studies. The sub-section addresses the broad economic and social profile of the case study area.

The geographical location chosen was a part of West Oxfordshire centring on the two market towns of Charlbury and Woodstock and their rural hinterlands; around thirty small villages and hamlets.

The area was chosen for the following reasons. First, it represented a fairly 'typical' rural area, where agriculture was at the heart of the economy, a theme that will be explored in depth in the following sub-section profiling the case study area. Second, the proximity of source centres such as Oxfordshire Archives with its considerable wealth of documentation, as well as the Centre For Oxfordshire Studies was important in facilitating research on the area. Third, non-agricultural, as well as agricultural female employment existed in the area in that glove stitching appeared to be a thriving employment for women. Finally, my initial research on wage levels suggested that there was considerable poverty in the area, thus making it an appropriate locality to look at strategies for making ends meet.⁵³

This case study area constitutes a local perspective which needs to be balanced against a wider view, so the next stage was to provide contextualisation for the local angle through a national perspective. Louise Tilly suggests that there are '...two increasingly urgent tasks for women's history: producing analytical problem-solving studies as well as descriptive and interpretative ones, and connecting their findings to general questions already on the historical agenda'.⁵⁴ This approach is emerging but analysis will be limited without sufficient descriptive accounts. Pamela Sharpe suggests we have reached an 'add and stir' stage regarding the economic history of women.

...the ingredients have been collected but the cake has yet to be mixed. Recovery of invisible women has dominated the agenda. The paucity of sources is a problem yet many new sources and fresh approaches to them have appeared over the last two decades. It is when synthesis takes place that

debate is engendered. We are moving to an 'add and stir' stage in the process, with potentially delicious results.⁵⁵

As part of this 'add and stir' approach, complementary local and national perspectives need to be applied, using description and analysis from both perspectives. Too often local history is seen as descriptive and national history as largely analytical. The descriptive nature and lack of context of some local history research tends to lead to its marginalisation. Furthermore, the fact that it is often carried out by enthusiastic amateur historians has sometimes resulted in its neglect by academics. This is a divisive approach and there is a great need for amateur and professional historians to work together. This is possible as the Leicester University Local History School, the Women's History Network and the appointment of Carl Chinn as 'Community Historian' for Birmingham illustrates.⁵⁶ At a local level there is often a mass of detailed sources and the next stage was to use some of them to build up a social and economic profile of the case study area.

1. 3.1 The case study area: an economic and social profile

In this section I aim to provide a broad social and economic context for what follows in the rest of the thesis, but the reader is referred in the footnotes to later chapters where points are taken up in more detail. A few provisos also need to be made.

The organisation of the thesis is thematic which therefore poses problems in the allocation of structural and contextual background to individual chapters. Choices had to be made and this was done on the basis of the fit between the main subject area of the chapter and the relevant economic, social and demographic data that informs it.

A second problem is that a thematic treatment tends to flatten temporal change and give little emphasis to discontinuity. In this initial section the aim has been to highlight key changes as well as provide the contextual information on population and occupational distribution which gives the necessary analytical background for all chapters. Nevertheless, it should be recognised that, as the following section on sources indicates, not all the desirable material (such as that on infant mortality) is available for a rural area. Furthermore, even if the material was available to provide a detailed social and economic profile, it would necessitate a thesis in its own right. Parameters of the possible, in what was available and in relation to the brief length allowed for the doctorate, had to be considered.

The case study area sits within the western part of the county of Oxfordshire. A largely rural county, Arthur Young earlier described it as being made up of ‘...14 hundreds, 1 city, 12 market towns, 207 townships or parishes and about 450.000 acres’.⁵⁷ Oxford, with a population of 49,336 in 1901 was the main settlement, with a renowned university and large retail area. It more than doubled in population during the Victorian period.⁵⁸ However, an editorial comment published in the Victoria County History of Oxford in 1907 suggested: ‘The flood of modern progress has overwhelmed the city of Oxford, but the rural villages have slept on, undisturbed in their peaceful seclusion’.⁵⁹ Whilst this section will show that this comment is not entirely accurate, only the town of Banbury, in the north of the county, experienced significant urban and industrial change. It remained, however, a market town, albeit a flourishing one, unlike most other Oxfordshire market towns during the Victorian period which stagnated or declined.⁶⁰ Agriculture and related trades dominated the economy of most parts of the county and this was particularly true of the case study area.

The case study area centres on two market towns, Charlbury and Woodstock and the thirty or so villages and hamlets around them which make up their rural

hinterlands.⁶¹ At its southernmost point the case study area lies c.3km. north of Oxford and at its westernmost point, touches the Gloucestershire border. It is a largely low lying, gently undulating landscape, dissected by the River Evenlode from west to east with the River Glyme and Oxford Canal running north to south on its easternmost boundary. There were small outcrops of woodland such as Bladon Heath, but by far the largest area of woodland in the mid- nineteenth century was Wychwood Forest which lay to the south-west of Charlbury. This was 'disafforested' in 1857.⁶²

The climate of the district was, according to one contemporary source '...mild and healthy...' whereas Arthur Young had earlier considered it to be '...generally cold... .The stone walls provide little or no shelter.' The case study area lay within what Arthur Young referred to as the stonebrash district. Some 166,000 acres, it extended south to Witney, west to Burford and north to Charlbury and North Aston. John Calvertt, a local farmer, found the stonebrash soil 'hungry'. It was easy to work and productive when extra fertiliser was applied but was 'greedy for water' in hot weather or drought conditions. The land was mainly used for arable farming. C.S. Read declared that it was: '...well adapted for the four field or Norfolk system of farming, it mostly carries sheep well and will produce good crops of barley, wheat, turnips and sainfoin'. The sheep grazed were long-haired which produced a good, profitable fleece. John Calvertt followed the classical mixed farming system of flexible rotations of corn and fodder crops with temporary grasses and large flocks of sheep, Oxford Down and Cotswold, and cattle were fattened in yards and pastures.⁶³

Although the area was predominantly devoted to arable and sheep, there was some dairy farming in the south-east tip of the area, just to the north of Oxford, around Kidlington and Wolvercote. The proximity of Oxford seems likely to have influenced the importance of dairying in this part of the area. In Wolvercote, for

example, there was a shift towards dairy farming towards the end of the nineteenth century. C.S. Read suggested that women were generally not involved in milking in the county, although William Wing, in his essay on changes in farming, reported that the wife of one Kidlington farmer, Mrs Rowland, had a 'high opinion' of the short-horned Yorkshire cows used by her husband because of their high milk yield.⁶⁴

Oxfordshire farms were generally small. C.S Read found '...between 200-300 acres is considered a good sized holding.' At Yarnton: 'The long survival of several small farms... may have owed something to the increasing importance of dairy farming, for which such farms were well suited.' The stonebrash farms were larger than most others in Oxfordshire, although C.S. Read considered: '...for the most part the farms are too small'.⁶⁵ Although farms were small, landownership patterns do not show large numbers of small farmers because much of Oxfordshire had been enclosed by the turn of the nineteenth century.⁶⁶ C.S. Read commented: 'There are certainly more tenants with slender capital than wealthy farmers...'⁶⁷

The economy was firmly based on agriculture and related activities.

There is little or nothing in the actual nature of the county that would necessarily create an industrial district...what industries there are have arisen from purely domestic activities ...or they were made necessary by the presence of a large and ever-growing university, which naturally brought trade to a county which would otherwise have been purely agricultural.⁶⁸

Fig. 2 The case study area



Source: Ordnance Survey 1:63360 (1"-1 mile), sheet 61, Banbury c. 1870.

Although there was no large-scale industry, there were some variations in the economic base. Gloving was an important domestic industry in the case study area, providing work for a small number of men and a much larger number of women. It developed from the availability of hides from the deer grazed in Wychwood Forest and Blenheim Park. The industry was based in the market towns of Woodstock and Charlbury where skilled workers, usually men, sorted and prepared the gloves in yards, workshops and factories. The gloves were then sent out, mainly to village women, who sewed them in their homes.⁶⁹

Apart from gloving, other non-agricultural aspects of the economy usually related to specific settlements. At Thrupp, for example, there was a canal basin and wharf with 22 boats in 1871. As trade in Oxford declined, families had moved north to Thrupp where they carried on a variety of work including rush gathering, boat building, fishing and osier growing.⁷⁰ At Hampton Gay there was a paper mill, although it was destroyed by fire in 1887. At Wolvercote, a papermill was rebuilt in 1856 and, in its first ten years, it made a good profit.⁷¹ Quarrying was carried on in a few settlements. Slate was quarried in, and around, Stonesfield, where, although the Duke of Marlborough had mineral rights, he leased the land to other people who either employed or sub-let it to slate diggers. The open cast mines were exhausted by the end of the eighteenth century, but mine shafts were sunk in the nineteenth century.⁷² At Fawler, ironstone was quarried and the industry grew sufficiently to justify a narrow gauge mineral network and a standard connection to the main line. The quarries were last worked in 1902.⁷³ At Bladon and Hensington, forest marble was used for a number of Oxford University buildings such as the Examination Schools.⁷⁴ Around Leafield, deposits of Oxford clay were used by the Crown Pottery which was run by the Franklin family for three generations. The Oxfordshire and Berkshire Brick Company was based at Wolvercote and provided many of the bricks for the houses of workers in the Summertown part of North Oxford and the east and west suburbs of the city.

There was a small engineering works at Kingham in the 1870s, and although the once flourishing Woodstock 'steel' industry had declined by the mid- nineteenth century, keys were still made there in 1862.⁷⁵

Despite this range of non-agricultural employments, few of them- apart from gloving- provided employment for women. Female work opportunities tended to be based around domestic routines such as child care, washing, cleaning and domestic service, although retailing provided some opportunities, particularly in the market towns.⁷⁶

The social ramifications of the economic profile for the case study area were such that they tended to create rural communities with a small upper and middle-class and a relatively large working-class, some of whom were skilled, but many who were not.⁷⁷ Landownership was concentrated in few hands.

In regard to property, there are a few noblemen and gentlemen who have great estates, which with the addition of possessions belonging to the Church and the different Corporate bodies of the University, form a considerable proportion of the county. ... In almost all West Oxfordshire parishes in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, one or two landowners owned upwards of half the land in the parish and sometimes one landlord owned most of the land in more than one parish.⁷⁸

In Wychwood parish for example, Vernon Watney owned 1,773 acres of 3,681 acres and in Finstock, 350 of 822 acres. The Churchill family owned land in a number of parts of the case study area such as at Begbroke and Bladon. In 1851 Francis G. Spencer, Baron Churchill, lived at Cornbury House, near Charlbury, Alan Spencer Churchill lived at Begbroke House and the Rt. Hon Lady Churchill lived at Ranger's Lodge on the northern edge of Wychwood Forest. In the 1873 list of landowners for Oxfordshire, Lord F.G. Churchill was recorded as having 5,352 acres at a gross annual rental of £6,239 7/-(35p), just slightly less than Viscount Dillon of Ditchley Estate whose rental was £6,989 16/-(80p). The Duke

of Marlborough's seat was Blenheim Palace at Woodstock and he and his family exerted considerable influence on the town and the surrounding area. 'The Marlboroughs dominate the borough [Woodstock] as high stewards, political and ecclesiastical patrons and major employers and purchasers'. Other prominent individuals included Sir John Chandos Reade, a baronet, from Shipton-under-Wychwood and Bill Whippy, a magistrate, deputy lieutenant and landed proprietor who lived at Lee Place, near Charlbury.⁷⁹

Amongst the middle-class there were few industrial and commercial property owners in the villages since they favoured market towns. As early as c.1820 it was reported that in Woodstock the improvements to the town made it into a '...desirable residence, especially for persons retiring from the bustle of business, with moderate fortunes, or for those who wish to live on a limited income, in a comfortable, unostentatious manner'. Similarly in Charlbury, a core middle-class element was the Quaker families such as the Albrights who were involved in retailing and philanthropy in the town.⁸⁰ Most villages had a clergy family from the Church of England, some of whom owned land, but they were not always affluent.⁸¹

The main exception to the lack of middle-class inhabitants in the villages was Kidlington. Situated just north of Oxford, professionals and tradesmen moved out of the city to settle here. In 1851 the inhabitants included the deputy lieutenant of Oxford, teachers, physicians and surveyors and a 'professor' in flower painting.⁸² Geoffrey Crossick suggests that: '... The existence of a 'rural bourgeoisie' may be a matter for historical dispute, but that does not apply to the rural petite bourgeoisie'. Both market towns and villages appear to have had a number of aspiring professionals, skilled craftsmen and, towards the end of the century, white collar workers.⁸³

The backbone of the communities was formed from the labourers and their families. How they fared was largely dependent on the way farming was managed. C.S. Read thought the great estates were well managed and declared: 'The noble Duke [Marlborough] farms in first rate style' ... but that the small farmers '...fail to discriminate between fanciful notions and useful improvements'.⁸⁴ Most were employees since much of the land had already been enclosed by mid-century. C.S. Read concluded that the agricultural labourers were:

...Upon a par with the rural population of the Midland counties in general: they are not remarkable for energy or great activity nor do they display much tact or ability in performing the common work on the farm. The woodmen are distinguished for the dexterity with which they handle the axe, and are as good timber-fellers as can be found in any part of the kingdom.⁸⁵

However, the character of village labour did vary, and at the beginning of the twentieth century John Orr suggested that Leafield '...has a good reputation for its agricultural labourers'.⁸⁶

These different social strata lived within a variety of settlement types. There were isolated settlements and hamlets such as Fifield and Dean; farming communities made up of a few landowners, farmers and a number of agricultural labourers. Then there were villages; larger settlements, such as Milton-under-Wychwood and Spelsbury. Alun Howkins suggests that these were nucleated settlements of twenty or more individual homesteads.⁸⁷ These had a land-owning/ farming class, one or more clergy families, sometimes a small middle-class, a range of skilled craftsmen and unskilled labourers.⁸⁸

Despite the similar stratification patterns of the settlements, not all operated in the same way. Indeed, landholding patterns could exert a significant influence on the way rural communities worked. When landowners exercised a firm, regulatory control it produced a relatively close, insulated community, whereas a dispersed landownership pattern produced a much more open community. In practice, closed

communities had a few, or only one, landowner whereas open parishes tended to have many landowners. Pamela Horn suggested that most settlements in Oxfordshire were open. However, in the case study area there appear to be a mix of settlements, some of which are not easy to define. For example, Milton-under-Wychwood did not have a dispersed landownership pattern, but was an open village in character, with a large surplus of labour available for work. Stonesfield, however, was a classic open village. There were very few gentry or grand houses in the village, it had a mixed economy based on agriculture and a slate industry, which meant that labourers were not totally dependent on the land. In consequence it '... seems to have bred an independent spirit, disliking the calling of any man 'Sir' except the parson...'. Few settlements were as clearly defined as this, however, and it may be sensible to look at settlements from the perspective of what Alun Howkins refers to as an 'openness > closeness' continuum.⁸⁹

The final category of settlement was the market town, of which there were two in the case study area, Woodstock and Charlbury. They exhibited a much greater social mix than the other settlements in the area. 'To these [market towns] came the minor gentry and larger farmers and their families, creating a middle rank of country society, which, much more than the great landowners, really ran the rural area'.⁹⁰ The market towns acted as service centres for their surrounding rural hinterlands. Of Woodstock it was said: 'The town is picturesquely seated on an eminence immediately adjacent Blenheim Park, and consists of several compact, regular streets, chiefly of stone, with a large proportion of handsome houses'. There was a wide range of retail outlets, together with professional services provided by surgeons, a surveyor, bankers, a vet and an auctioneer.⁹¹

To this socio-economic framework of the case study area the dynamics of change and continuity in the second half of the nineteenth century need to be applied.

These could affect the nature and extent of poverty and the ways which people responded to it.

It has already been suggested that despite the dramatic changes that urbanisation and industrialisation brought to many British communities, settlements in the case study area experienced little such direct change. However, these forces did have an indirect impact on rural communities, although many of the changes were not felt until the mid 1870s. For the first two decades there was a period of calm; what Alun Howkins calls 'achieved balance'. This was a period when there were attempts to improve conditions in rural communities, particularly through the Church.⁹² The Bishop of Oxford, Samuel Wilberforce, spearheaded this approach and his letter-books clearly reflect the desire to improve conditions in communities as well as to create social stability.⁹³

One of the first significant changes impacting on local communities was the construction of a railway through the area. 'The opening of a branch of the Great Western Railway from Oxford to Worcester in 1853 with a stop at Charlbury... gave the township excellent communications with both Oxford and London; shortly after Charlbury became a post town'.⁹⁴ The railway had a profound social and economic impact on communities. The diary entries of John Calvertt, a local farmer, illustrate the enhanced marketing possibilities brought about by the line:

Jan. 13th 1877 Sent 7 Bullocks, & 60 Shear-hogs from Charlbury for London on Monday... June 12th 1877 John Chas. and I, to Ascott & away by 8.15 train to Oxford, Didcot and Chippenham, were met by Mr. Chas. Hamblin, & driven to Badminton Kennels...⁹⁵

For rural labourers the building of the railway provided work for the men as well as income from navy lodgers for the women, and for some '... the first close contact with the industrial world'.⁹⁶ However it also brought to the surface fears

and prejudices, traditionally associated with a closed and inward looking rural area. The line was known as 'Oh Wicked Waste'. Caroline Pumphrey wrote that one Finstock woman confessed: '...us don't go to no station, we'm afraid he'd run up into Finstock one night'.⁹⁷

Despite the benefits brought by the railway to the case study area such as easier access to wider markets, local markets in both towns declined as goods could be brought in more cheaply. Furthermore, Woodstock did not get a single track branch line to link it to the main line until 1890. Therefore, although it stagnated economically to some extent, it still had a thriving retail and tourist trade due to the presence of Blenheim Palace.⁹⁸

Another change in the early part of the period was enclosure, although much had already taken place 'quietly' by the middle of the century.⁹⁹ However, the enclosure and disafforestation of Wychwood Forest considerably altered the landscape of the central portion of the locality in the 1850s. The forest was a major landmark; Caroline Pumphrey, who lived in Charlbury, recalled that it stretched seven unbroken miles from east to west. The village of Leafield had grown up in a forest clearing and was renowned for its forest fair. Once the railway opened, excursion trains were laid on and it attracted around 20,000 people. As a result '...more rougher people came and did much damage to the timber etc; so Lord Churchill put a stop to it'. Vernon Watney, who later in the century bought nearby Cornbury Park, suggested that it was '...an extravagance of bucolic pleasures...'¹⁰⁰

As well as for recreational purposes, the forest was used for collecting wood, gathering nuts and by deer-stealers and poachers. The Act for Disafforestation was passed in 1857. The Crown was allocated 2,543 acres under the enclosure award and although 1,970 acres of the Crown holding was unreclaimed forest, within two

years the land was completely cleared of trees and laid out into 7 farms. Initially, therefore, a considerable amount of additional work was available: ‘...no man able and willing to work was rejected. Hundreds and hundreds of men and boys were engaged...’ to clear land and build fences. All the deer had to go so that ‘...the taste of venison was known in cottage as well as hall’.¹⁰¹ Despite initial large amounts of work and hopes for rich arable farming, the land was expensive to clear and some farmers could not meet their costs out of the poor harvests of the 1860s.¹⁰² In addition, the employment structure of Leafield was radically altered. Research carried out by Keith Chandler shows that in a 20 year period male labour changed from predominantly woodland to agricultural tasks.¹⁰³

Although there were some changes to the area between 1850-1870, it maintained a veneer of stability, with the most significant developments felt during the 1870s-1890s. At the core of these changes was the depression in agriculture when the flooding of markets by cheap American wheat and the application of mechanisation were associated with poor weather leading to bad harvests. The diary of James Calvertt, who farmed at Leafield, graphically recorded the problems faced.

Sept 16th 1879 The worst Harvest I ever gathered- neither quantity, or yield,...worthless.

Sept 27th 1879 A parson nr. Bampton, has resigned his ‘Living’, because unable to Farm, or let, his Glebe.

June 16th 1879 The Country is in the worst state I ever knew it in my life, seasons are ruining English Farmers, & Farming.¹⁰⁴

For agricultural labourers and their families this meant unemployment, under employment and low wages leading to considerable hardship. Mid-century a wage of 10/- or 11/- (50p-60p) was common. By 1868, on three of the largest farms in the Woodstock area labourers were earning 12/6-15/- (62p-75p), although in

winter months they earned 10/--11/- (50p-60p). With the depression in agriculture, John Calvertt was forced to reduce wages by 1/- (5p) a day to 2/- (10p).¹⁰⁵

It was not that hardship was new, but that labourers had a new response to it, fuelled, suggests Alun Howkins, by their religious nonconformity and personal bitterness. Some of this feeling was expressed through the trade union movement and in particular, The National Agricultural Trades Union. Set up in nearby south Warwickshire, it met with strong support in West Oxfordshire. The first branch was formed at Milton-under-Wychwood in April 1872 and by May there were 13 branches and over 500 members in the county. There was particularly strong support from the largely nonconformist, open settlement of Stonesfield. It had 73 union members by 1872. Feelings ran high, and this is typified by what Joseph Arch, the founder of the N.A.L.U, called 'The shameful Chipping Norton affair'. An Ascott-under-Wychwood farmer, who employed two labourers from a neighbouring parish when his own were on strike, found the wives of the striking labourers trying to drive the men away with 'tongue blows'. The magistrates at Chipping Norton dealt extremely harshly with the women, some of whom were nursing mothers, and they were sent to prison. This decision created a furore, the press intervened and the matter was raised in the House of Commons, leading to their release. The women became known as the Ascott martyrs.¹⁰⁶

Although union membership fell after an initial surge of interest, the movement helped to accelerate the decline in the traditional deferential relationship between master and servant. It also encouraged a diminution in the regulation of the labour supply through migration and emigration arising from labourers' attempts to escape the effects of the agricultural depression. George Dew, the relieving officer for the Bletchington District of the Bicester Poor Law Union in the east of the county commented: 'What farm labourer if he were wise would stay here and work for 10/- or 11/- per week when the New World is open to him'. The Duke of

Marlborough's agent complained in the mid 1860s that harvest wages in the Woodstock district were too low to keep young men at home.¹⁰⁷

Some stayed and struggled on; others, particularly the young, moved away. H. Rider Haggard, who toured Oxfordshire as part of his rural researches between 1901-1902, found considerable rural depopulation. At Great Rollright, a village just to the north of the case study area, he spoke to Frank Dormer, the schoolteacher: 'He told me that three quarters of the young men and all the young women left the village at 19 or 20 years of age, only the dullest ones staying at home'. He said that they wanted to come back but needed wages higher than 15/- (75p) a week. It was believed an extra 3/- would stem the flow. It is interesting that he comments on the loss of all the young women because in the whole of the county by 1901 there were still 1,111 women to every 1,000 males.¹⁰⁸

There was a general trend of rural depopulation in the nineteenth century. John Saville has shown nationally that some villages had a population peak between 1821-1851 then entered into a period of almost constant decline, whereas for others the peak and decline did not take place until the second half of the nineteenth century.¹⁰⁹ Oxfordshire falls into this second category.

In an earlier part of this section it was shown that, although the population of the county as a whole increased in the Victorian period from 170,434 in 1851 to 185,274 in 1891, there was a slight fall-off by 1901 to 181,149. The County Report of 1901 states that all Registration Districts showed a loss during this decade except Headington, which contained part of the City of Oxford. The greatest proportional losses occurred in the districts of Chipping Norton, Bicester, Thame, Woodstock and Witney. When the figures for the individual settlements in the case study area are examined, most experienced a decline in population at some point during the second half of the nineteenth century. In Stonesfield the

population fell by 12% between 1861-71, attributed largely to migration to manufacturing districts and it fell again in the 1890s as a result of emigration to Canada. Only a few parishes showed an overall increase between 1851 to 1901; Kingham from 617 to 816, Shipton-under-Wychwood 616 to 672 and Wolvercote from 637 to 966. The Wolvercote increase is largely attributable to the building that took place in the North Oxford suburbs which encroached on the parish. Similarly, the proximity of Oxford affected the growth of Kidlington. Although the parish as a whole experienced a small fall in population from 1,494 in 1851 to 1,380 in 1901, the southern parts of the parish nearest to Oxford saw an increase. Gosford hamlet increased from 30 to 56 and Water Eaton from 119 to 148. In addition, some parts of parishes experienced population increases; the population of Bruern (extra parochial) went from 46 to 70, Hensington (part of Bladon parish) from 236 to 291 and Blenheim Park (along with Woodstock, the Liberty of Oxford) from 93 to 164.¹¹⁰

Moving to a manufacturing district or another country was not always the solution sought. John Saville suggests that over two thirds of people who moved, did so within 25 km of their base. In the case study area, Oxford acted as a magnet for some, with a range of employment opportunities, including domestic service for women and girls. Malcolm Graham suggests: 'During term time, the University offered an almost unlimited range of casual jobs... even vagrants were drawn to Oxford at the beginning of each term by the prospect of rich pickings from the undergraduates'.¹¹¹

Socially and ideologically communities began to change. A growth of village clubs and societies, friendly society involvement, the provision of better education, and the emergence of wider horizons through better communications and newspapers encouraged independence amongst the working-classes.. Alun Howkins suggests that these kinds of changes 'rocked the balance' of rural society, rather than

resulting in a new distribution of social and economic power. Although the land-owning class maintained a degree of paternalism, it did not have such a strong hold on the working-classes as at the beginning of the period because these changes had begun to alter the traditional structure of rural communities.¹¹²

The study area was therefore subtly transformed, economically as well as socially, but change was piecemeal and continuities remained strong. At the turn of the century, H. Rider Haggard considered: 'Of Oxfordshire I may say that, agriculturally, except on the poor Uplands it seems, on the whole, to be holding its own as well as in most counties'.¹¹³ Continuity was marked in the gloving industry. Many women still gloved in their own homes, although it was reported that organisation was 'chaotic'. Women worked for a number of firms, all with different rates of pay and deductions.¹¹⁴ In Charlbury there was change where it was found that the market was becoming more important.¹¹⁵

This was the social and economic landscape within which the poor lived and worked. For many labourers the struggle to manage a livelihood continued to be problematic. Wages rarely reached the level of those recommended by B.S. Rowntree. There was no margin for unexpected events and many families were solely dependent on agriculture. The main exception to this was the village of Stonesfield, as the slate industry provided work during the agriculturally slack winter months. This meant that some workers were able to save regularly and the village had a thriving friendly society. However, by the end of the century the industry had declined and the low wages failed to attract workers. For most labourers and their families it was: '... bare subsistence, and [they] are unable to save anything for their old age, or for times when they were out of work'.¹¹⁶ Wages alone were insufficient for many to make ends meet and the rest of the thesis seeks to address how women managed to stretch the household budget in

order to ensure survival for their families. This involved my detailed search for, and examination of, local sources.

1.4 The sources and the analytical and interpretative problems posed by their nature and limitations

Problems face researchers trying to uncover the history of poor women and, if these women live in rural areas, the problem is exacerbated.¹¹⁷ Contemporary commentators were mainly interested in the newly formed urban communities and the problems they created. Poverty was therefore on the historical agenda but the main concern during the period covered by this thesis was the nature and extent of urban poverty. It was not until the early twentieth century when B.S. Rowntree and May Kendall published a study on rural poverty that it became the focus for more general attention.¹¹⁸ The theme that women were 'hidden from history' has been widely reported and this was particularly so for the vast majority of 'ordinary' women during the Victorian period.¹¹⁹ Given this situation, it is not surprising that the problems created by the sources needed for this thesis have been considerable. These problems have occurred at three stages. First, in the seeking out of relevant sources, second in the nature of the primary sources themselves, and third in the ways they have been interpreted or ignored by researchers.

In the seeking out of sources, the main problems were the paucity of sources relating to the subject areas covered by this thesis and the difficulty in finding the ones that were available. However, there now exists a number of source books to assist researchers carrying out work on women's history and these, combined with more general source books, particularly those relating to local records, were an essential starting point for the research.¹²⁰

The task was far from easy. There was no central core of sources that could be consulted because the subjects covered by this thesis encompass wide areas; employment, household management, relations with neighbours and kin, charities and poor relief. Seeking out sources was a painstaking process. Subject indexes in record offices are not always comprehensive. In some cases it was not clear whether sources would be of value and sometimes a long trawl through documents supplied very little information.

The bibliography does not reflect the amount of primary sources consulted. In particular I cite very few of the sources I examined for both the Ditchley Estate records and those of the Bicester Poor Law Union. In both cases there was so much useful information it was impossible to include it all. Furthermore, I consulted all the log books available for schools in the case study area but only cite a few of them as they tended to provide similar information. While I have looked at some sources beyond Oxfordshire, particularly in the case of gloving, if at all possible I have tried to keep my comments to Oxfordshire. Furthermore, I had to become familiar with a range of subject areas covered by the strategies, so some references for further reading have been included in the footnotes. This has resulted in an extensive list of secondary sources.

In tackling my first problem of locating sources I asked myself the following questions. What would poor women be involved in relative to the taxonomy of strategies, who would be interested in reporting about them and what sort of sources would feature them? I compiled three lists; one of subjects such as allotments and animal husbandry, one for the places in the case study area and one for the types of sources that I might usefully consult. The main source categories consulted are outlined in figure 3.

The amassing of relevant sources was a slow and tedious process and, I would argue, a major research problem itself. Certain themes emerged during source collection. First, for some subjects, there were clearly more sources available than others. A key determinant of the quantity of sources available was formality; the more 'formal' the strategy, the more likely sources were available. Organisations tended to have rules and regulations and so the most heavily sourced sections were those of formal support (the poor law and charities) and aspects of household management such as allotment keeping organisations and friendly societies. In these cases an ample supply of material was available. However, the poor law records for the case study area were not so extensive as for the neighbouring Bicester Poor Law Union, which in addition had the diaries of a relieving officer. Therefore, I examined this latter area which complemented the general poor law records, instead of the case study area.¹²¹

Employment provided a modicum of sources. Estate records provided details of agriculture and domestic service but few sources could be found for the more home-based employments such as sewing and laundry work. School log books proved to be surprisingly useful in providing snippets of information about female employment and seasonal family employment cycles. Even gloving, an employment for which the case study area was well known, was poorly sourced. Despite extensive searching, the private records appear to have been lost or destroyed, although how far stitching in the home was ever recorded is not clear. It was only through government reports that a detailed picture of gloving could be obtained.

It was not surprising that household management along with support provided by kin and neighbours, both relatively informal strategies, were the most difficult areas for which to find sources. So much of what took place within these strategies was hidden from commentators' eyes. Much of it related to ordinary, everyday activities that were taken for granted. It was only when there was a break with

tradition that something became newsworthy. A good example of this was the case of the Ascot martyrs.¹²² It was precisely the minutiae of everyday female activities that interested me the most. Household management activities could, to some extent, be explored through government reports and household manuals aimed at the poor, but the activities and relationships between neighbours and kin were almost impossible to explore at a local level. Without oral sources, a detailed study of the nature and extent of support that the poor gave to each other may never be possible.

At the beginning of this section I referred to the availability of urban sources for the study of poor women. This theme was also reflected in the case study area in that it was easier to find sources for the two market towns of Woodstock and Charlbury than most of the surrounding villages. In part this relates to the formal organisations that tended to be set up in the towns with their record books, lists of rules and places to keep records such as a town hall. Village organisations appear to have been far more fluid in nature, sometimes evolving over a period of time, without the more formal record keeping of their urban counterparts. For example, references to female friendly societies were found in parish magazines but no other records could be found for them.¹²³

Finally, a factor which cuts across all the strategies covered in this thesis and relates to the formal nature of many of the sources, was the difficulty of finding the voices of the women themselves. 'The consequence of this silence is that here, as in so much written history, women can rarely be seen except through the eyes of fathers, husbands, lovers and sons'.¹²⁴ The comments of women were included in government reports but the accuracy, context and bias of the commissioners reporting on them is not known. A few letters were found among the poor law correspondence but no diaries or informal letters.¹²⁵ It has been frustrating not to be able to explore in any depth the priorities, feelings and attitudes of the women

both to themselves, their kin and neighbours and the formal organisations set up to provide them with support. It was therefore impossible factually to explore what I perceived to be a likely psychological dimension to the strategies; the emotional support needed, given and received. Oral sources are needed for this.

Even with the amassing of a body of relevant sources, I found the nature and application of them was not without problems. I was left with many pieces of fragmentary evidence; what seemed like a giant jig-saw puzzle that needed careful piecing together but would remain incomplete because of the hidden nature of many of the subject areas.

Turning to the primary sources themselves, I found both general and specific problems associated with the source types. The general problem related to the filtering of material by contemporary writers. '...it is hard to find first person accounts of poor women's domestic and [employment] lives. Most records come to us filtered through the sensibilities and prejudices of middle-class reporters and bureaucrats'.¹²⁶ It was a filter based on the middle-class formed domestic ideology of the time which called for women to avoid employment and stay at home to involve themselves in domestic concerns. In the thesis this filter was most evident in household manuals and government reports. Poor women were criticised for working outside the home which was considered to make them poor household managers and mothers.¹²⁷ Obviously household manuals were largely prescriptive and there were also hidden agendas for the writers of government reports so the information they provide must be used with caution. The knowledge poor women had of this domestic ideology and their responses to it was rarely recorded.¹²⁸

As well as this general problem with primary sources there were some difficulties with specific source types and these, along with certain comments on the source

types are given below. The main source types used for this thesis are outlined in figure 3.

Fig.3 Main source categories consulted for the thesis

1. Parish records such as church accounts and magazines, and charity accounts.
2. Personal records such as estate documents, business and personal correspondence.
3. School records such as log books and attendance registers.
4. Ecclesiastical records such as diocesan reports.
5. Government records in the form of Parliamentary Papers, especially the census for 1851 and 1891.
6. Poor Law Union records.
7. Local newspapers and directories.
8. Contemporary household magazines and manuals.

Parish records were well worth searching. It was a time-consuming job since it involved the checking of all sources for the settlements in the case study area both in the Centre For Oxfordshire Studies and Oxfordshire Archives. Parish magazines in particular provided useful information. A number of parishes had records of local charities and allotment and friendly society records.

Personal records such as estate documents, business and personal correspondence were of some use, particularly for the sections on the poor law and on employment. The George Dew diaries were invaluable for comments on the operation of the poor law and the Ditchley records were used for details of agriculture and domestic service employments.¹²⁹ However, even the use of employment record books was not without its lacunae; women's names were not

always recorded in the farm books whereas domestic servants names were recorded but it was not clear what their positions were.

School records, particularly log books provided information on employment, especially its seasonal dimension, family employments and a glimpse of how mothers related to organisations outside the home. In contrast, ecclesiastical records such as diocesan reports were not found to be of great use; women's activities were rarely recorded.

The main obstacle associated with a fruitful use of government documents, that of the filtering of information, has already been discussed earlier on in this section. In addition there were specific problematic issues in using the census. Researchers, and in particular Edward Higgs, have already written about the difficulties of using the census returns for providing information about women and especially in relation to the underestimation of their employment. Indeed, researchers may well be put off using it because of the problems associated with it.¹³⁰ This is understandable but the census can be used, as I have done, with caution, to provide information about the groups within which women lived as well as their employment. Viewed as raw data and accompanied by a detailed knowledge of the socio-economic conditions of the area in question, the census can be of some value. The cross-checking of census data against other sources will corroborate or contradict some evidence but to let census data stand alone would be unwise: '...if carefully used the census enumerators' books are a mine of largely reliable economic, demographic and social information'.¹³¹ To this end a concern with numbers of women employed was avoided as it was considered that the census could not provide reliable material for this aspect of employment.

Poor law records have provided a mine of information, from formal records to correspondence. The only area where they were lacking was in the views of the

people who used their services, although the diaries of the relieving officer, George Dew, provide some idea of what the poor themselves thought of the poor law provision. Local newspapers and directories were less useful than had been anticipated. The directories rarely mentioned poor women and local newspapers were extremely time-consuming to use without the aid of subject indexes. This was particularly the case at the beginning of the period when local newspapers contained much national news. Toward the end of the century more local news was recorded but it was in the form of 'newsworthy' items reflecting the unusual, rather than the commonplace, events of rural life.

Finally, contemporary household manuals and magazines were of some use, although their filtering of information has already been discussed earlier on in this section. They were largely prescriptive and so had to be used with caution. Some were specifically aimed at the poor and these were the only ones used in the thesis.

The third theme relates to the use of secondary sources. It has already been stated that because of the range of subjects consulted for this thesis, a large number of primary sources were used to direct both preliminary reading and to suggest further reading. The problems with the primary sources are reflected in the approach to the subject area by secondary sources; namely the urban bias of the research and the tendency to concentrate on middle-class women and the domestic ideology associated with them. Work on poor women has hitherto mainly related to the more visible aspects of their lives such as employment rather than what went on in the household. To a certain extent this is the result of the availability of the primary sources, but I have also detected some form of modern filtering, if not of sources then of subjects. In particular there is a dearth of academic studies on household management. This appears to be the result of researchers bringing their own ideological standpoint to bear on the sources. Broadly, these researchers appear to have feminist leanings, although it is difficult to be precise about what

encompasses feminism. Dorothy Thompson suggests: 'The student of the history of women faces problems of definition and vocabulary which are probably greater than those involved in most other circles of history...some words which are commonly used still do not bear agreed definitions'.¹³² This seems to be true of feminism. Carol Dyhouse suggests that this is because it has had different meanings at various times and for different groups. However, she concludes that feminists are '...those who have identified a problem in the social relations existing between men and women, deriving from an imbalance of power operating in favour of the former'.¹³³

Women have suffered some power imbalances which have been uncovered by feminist research particularly in the 1960s and 1970s. This helped to redress the balance of what had been up till then a very male-based history. It highlighted not only the lives of 'great' women but also drew out the oppression suffered by many women in a variety of historical periods. However, I have to take issue with the constant feminist insistence of oppression which seems to set a restrictive agenda based around the ideas of patriarchy, inequality and subordination even before the sources have been fully examined. For Judith Bennett the reasons why this subordination has endured so long is the central question for the study of women's history.¹³⁴ I see it as an important question, but not the core of women's history. It cannot be assumed that women were always oppressed in every aspect of their lives. For example, much that took place within the homes of women is still not fully understood although liberal feminists tend to see the home as a place of retreat and restriction.

My own stance is, as far as possible, an open-minded one although I am aware that it could also be perceived as an ideological approach. I hope that my framework will enable me to reach whatever conclusions are necessary. An

open-minded approach does, I believe, put the women under consideration at the core of the research rather than the ideas about women held by the researcher.

There is a need for the history of women to progress in new ways. Some feminists in the 1980s who were aware that their movement had lost its way and pushed itself into an historical corner, were concerned to develop new ideas. Jane Rendall discusses this point and proposes that the agenda for the 1990s should be the history of gender.¹³⁵ Central to this discussion has been the interest in patriarchy. A term once used to mean rule by the father, it has now come to mean a society where men are the more dominant and powerful sex.¹³⁶

In many ways this 'new' approach is still filtered, confrontational and isolationist.¹³⁷ I doubt whether it will result in the history of women taking its rightful place within the mainstream historical agenda. There is much still to be uncovered about the lives of women within the home. A meshing of historical interests is required, integrating men's and women's experiences as a matter of course when dealing with any subject of historical interest. Awareness of bias is a central skill of the historian and filters of either a male or female bias need to be avoided so that there can be a concentration on a sensitive examination of documents.

If I appear to have painted a depressing picture of the problems created by the sources, it is only to underline the difficulties I had in seeking out material and attempting to use it carefully. It must be acknowledged that prior to the availability of oral sources it will only be possible to create an imperfect picture, with gaps in information and therefore difficulties in quantifying strategies. However, it is vital to try to find out something about how these women lived, not least because rural women constituted such a substantial, if declining, part of the population and so I have attempted to turn from a preoccupation with what cannot be done to what

can be done. Mary Prior suggests looking at sources in a new way to try to assess what they meant for women, using domestic documents and neglected sources.¹³⁸

I attempted to think laterally and imaginatively in gathering my sources so that, although the investigation was far from easy, it was feasible.

Having discussed the nature of the research problem, the framework for tackling it, the methodology and sources, the final section of this chapter is devoted to the aims of the thesis.

1.5 The aims of the thesis

The primary aim is to place women, and in particular poor women living in rural areas, in the mainstream of historical research. Although women's history has received considerable attention from social historians, it has received far less from economic historians. However, it is vital to see women as agents themselves and sometimes as independent economic agents. It has been suggested: 'We must now rewrite economic history texts to reflect a different set of priorities'.¹³⁹ As well as putting women back into the historical picture Olwen Hufton suggests we should go further. 'It is a question of re-evaluating a whole world of experience, women's experience, and using it, with empathy to describe more accurately the world that men and women shared in the past'.¹⁴⁰ It is hoped that this thesis can contribute to this approach, bringing together women's experiences of production, reproduction and consumption both within the family and the wider community. One source suggests that the wife was at the 'intersection' of these three functions and I hope that this thesis allows this intersection to be explored more fully.¹⁴¹

I hope to achieve this general aim through an in-depth study of the nature of the individual strategies within the taxonomy already discussed, the extent of their use by the women in the case study area, the factors which affected their use where

possible and the quantification of their value. Furthermore, I would like to explore the inter-relationships between the strategies in an attempt to determine whether some form of hierarchy of strategies existed.

As well as examining the strategies within my taxonomy, I am interested in exploring to what extent it is comprehensive by seeing whether other strategies emerge during the course of the research. Exploring the application of the taxonomy is a further consideration and in particular whether such a taxonomy could be applied to other groups of women. My findings for these sections will be placed in the concluding chapter.

My final aim is an overall assessment of the value of using strategies for the study of women's history. I am interested in focusing on a number of themes: first, to see the role of gender within the strategic network; second, the presence of power relationships within the study; particularly those within the home. Third, I had hoped to uncover aspects of women's lives that are difficult to quantify: their priorities and decision-making processes. Within this theme I was keen to see whether there was a role for psychological/emotional strategies, but was unable to do so because of the limited nature of the sources and in particular the absence of first-hand accounts.

These and other issues will be addressed in the next four sections, working through the strategies enumerated in the taxonomy. The first of these sections relates to perhaps the most obvious of strategies, that of employment.

Footnotes to Chapter 1

1. The best overview, although not specifically related to rural women and ending in 1850, is Ivy Pinchbeck, *Women workers and the Industrial Revolution 1750-1850*. Virago, 1981 reprint of 1930 edition. Also useful is Pamela Horn's *Victorian Countrywomen*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991. In addition there are a number of studies on individual employments, for example Celia Miller, 'The hidden workforce: female fieldworkers in Gloucestershire, 1870-1901'. *Southern History*, vol.6, 1984, pp.139-161. An international conference on rural women was to be held at the University of Luton in July 1997 but was cancelled due to financial constraints. *Women's History Network Newsletter*, issue 20, 1996, p6.
2. See wages mentioned in works in footnote 1. See also section A on employment strategies, particularly chapter 4, section 4.2.1.1 on wages.
3. See E.H. Hunt, *Regional wage variations in Britain 1850-1914*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973. For case study examples see the records of the Ditchley Estate kept in Oxfordshire Archives. See bibliography for full details of this source.
4. Charles Booth, *Life and labour of the people in London*. Vols. 1-5. Facs. reprint of rev. ed., originally published 1902. New York: Augustus Kelley, 1969; B.S. Rowntree, *Poverty: a study of town life*. Longmans, 1922, 2nd ed., (originally pub. 1901); B.S. Rowntree and May Kendall, *How the labourer lives*. Thomas Nelson, 1913.
5. Charles Booth, *Life...* see especially vol. 1, part 1, chapter 5, pp.131-155; B.S. Rowntree, *Poverty...* see especially chapter iv, pp.117-151.
6. Judith Fay and Richard Martin (eds), *The jubilee boy. The life and recollections of George Swerford of Filkins*. Filkins: The Filkins Press, 1987, p53.
7. Pat Thane, *Foundations of the welfare state*. Longman, 1982. (Social Policy in Modern Britain), p4.
8. Michael E. Rose, 'Poverty and self-help', *REFRESH*, 11, Autumn, 1990, p4.
9. Pamela Sharpe, 'Continuity and change: women's history and economic history in Britain', *Economic History Review*, vol. xlvi, 2, 1995, p356.
10. Michael E. Rose, *The relief of poverty 1834-1914*. Macmillan, 2nd ed., 1986. (The Economic History Society), p9.
11. Samuel Mencher, 'The problem of measuring poverty', *British Journal of Sociology*. vol. 18, 1967, p2.
12. Gertrude Himmelfarb, *The idea of poverty. England in the early industrial age*. Faber and Faber, 1984; Charles Booth, *Life...*; B.S. Rowntree, *Poverty...*; Peter Townsend, *Poverty in the United Kingdom: a survey of household resources and standards of living*. Penguin, 1979. For social policy see Anne Digby, *British welfare policy: workhouse to welfare*. Faber and Faber, 1989 and for a 1990s perspective on poverty see Paul Goodman, 'Are the poor really worse off?', *The Sunday Telegraph*, 12th February 1995, p21.
13. *Report from His Majesty's Commissioners for inquiring into the administration and operation of the Poor Laws*. London, 1834, p156. Cited in Gertrude Himmelfarb, *The idea...*, p523.

14. Gertrude Himmelfarb, *The idea...*, p525.
15. *ibid*, p526.
16. Henry Mayhew, *The Morning Chronicle survey of labour and the poor*. pp.220, 501, 508. Cited in Gertrude Himmelfarb, *The idea...*p528.
17. Gertrude Himmelfarb, *The idea...*,p529.
18. See chapter 1, footnote 4.
19. See Ditchley Estate farm record books. Full details are in the bibliography. See also chapter 1, footnote 4.
20. E.H. Hunt, *British labour history 1815-1914*. Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1981, p123.
21. See especially section C on household management.
22. B.S. Rowntree, *Poverty...*pp.117-151 and pp.169-174.
23. B.S. Rowntree and May Kendall, *How...*See the case studies of individual families, eg. study 1 on an Oxfordshire family, pp.42-42 and his conclusions on different aspects of support, such as neighbours and kin, p310.
24. Maud Davies, *Life in an English village. An economic and historic survey of the parish of Corsley in Wiltshire*. T. Fisher Unwin, 1907; Michael E. Rose, *The relief...*pp.64-65.
25. H. Mayhew, *London Labour and the London poor*. 4 vols., (1851-1862); Alex Somerville, *The whistler at the plough*. Manchester, 1852; Richard Jefferies, *Hodge and his masters*. Quartet, 1979 reprint of 1880 ed. and *The toilers of the field*. Macdonald, 1981 reprint of 1892 ed.; Richard Heath, *The Victorian peasant*. Ed . Keith Dockray Gloucester: Alan Sutton, 1989. An abridged ed of *The English peasant*, 1893; H. Rider Haggard, *Rural England. Being an account of the agricultural and social researches carried out in the years 1901 and 1902*. Longmans, Green and Co., new ed., 1906; Edwin Grey, *Cottage life in a Hertfordshire village*. Harpenden: Harpenden and District Local History Society, 1977 reprint of 1934 ed.
26. Michael Pickering, *Village song and culture. A study based on the Blunt collection of song from Adderbury, North Oxfordshire*. Croom Helm, 1982, p135. See also section C on household management.
27. Samuel Mencher, *The problem...*p10.
28. Michael E. Rose, *The relief...*p7.
29. Gertrude Himmelfarb. *The idea...*p531. See also Anne Digby, *British...*
30. Peter Townsend, *Poverty...*p31.
31. *ibid*, p33, p38 and p59; David Donnison, *The politics of poverty*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell,1982, p226.
32. See chapter 1, section 1.4 on sources.
33. Of most value is B. Seebohm Rowntree and May Kendall, *How...* and Maud Frances Davies, *Life...* A useful modern source is Carl Chinn, *They worked all their lives. Women of the urban poor in England, 1880-1939*. Manchester University Press, 1988. A rural companion volume is desperately needed.

34. Elizabeth A.M. Roberts, 'Women's strategies, 1890-1940', in Jane Lewis (ed.), *Labour and love. Women's experience of home and family, 1850-1940*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986. p232. See also Elizabeth Roberts, *A Woman's place. An oral history of working-class women, 1890-1940*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984 and 'Working-class standards of living in Barrow and Lancaster, 1890-1914', *Economic History Review*, second ser; vol. xxx, 2, 1977, pp.306-319. Elizabeth M. Corrigan is currently engaged in doctoral research on survival strategies during the Lancashire Cotton Famine. See note in *Women's History Notebooks*, vol.4, no.1, Winter 1997, p23.
35. See Diana Gittens, 'Marital status, work and kinship, 1850-1930', in Jane Lewis (ed.), *Labour...*pp.264-265; Ellen Ross, *Love and toil-motherhood in outcast London, 1870-1913*. Oxford University Press, 1993 p9; Michael Anderson, *Approaches to the history of the Western family, 1500-1914*. Macmillan, 1980, (Studies in Economic and Social History), p65, pp.81-82 and 'New insights into the history of the family in Britain', *REFRESH*, Autumn, 9, 1989, p3 where he mentions 'coping strategies' and the importance of women and children in the self-provisioning of food and clothing; D.H.J. Morgan, *The family, politics and social theory*. Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985, p175; Susan Yeandle, *Women's working lives. Patterns and strategies*. Tavistock Publications, 1984, p151; L.A. Tilly and J.W. Scott, 'Women's work and the family in nineteenth century Europe', in Michael Anderson (ed.), *Sociology of the family*. Penguin, 1971, (Penguin Modern Sociological Readings), p139; Jane Lewis, 'Sexual divisions: women's work in late nineteenth century England', in *The sexual division of labour, 19th and 20th centuries. Six essays presented at the Ninth International Economic History Congress, Berne, 1986*. (Uppsala Papers in Economic History 1989, working paper no.7), p84.
36. Jane Humphries, 'From work to dependence. Women's experience of industrialisation in Britain', *REFRESH*, Autumn, 21,1995, pp.5-8.
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47. See footnotes 34 and 35.
48. See for example Carl Chinn, *They worked...and Ellen Ross, Love and toil....*
49. Pamela Horn has written prolifically about the Victorian countryside. See for example, *The changing countryside in Victorian and Edwardian England and Wales*. Althone, 1984.
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55. Pamela Sharpe, *Continuity...p353*.
56. Carl Chinn suggests that his job is '...to help to bridge the gap between academia and the locality.' He considers that university scholars sometimes make little attempt to make connections with local history; not appreciating its importance and regarding local historians as amateurs. 'The sooner such invalid reasoning is dispelled the better.' From a talk included in *Local Studies Librarian*, vol. 14, no.2, Winter 1995, pp.8-10.
57. Arthur Young, *General view of the agriculture of the county of Oxfordshire. Drawn up for the consideration of the Board of Agriculture and Internal Improvement*. Newton Abbott: David and Charles, 1969 reprint of 1809 ed., p1.
58. See also Malcolm Graham, *Images of Victorian Oxford*. Stroud: Allan Sutton (Oxfordshire County Council), 1992.
59. William Page (ed), *A history of the county of Oxford*. Vol. 2, Oxford: Archibald Constable and Co., 1907, editorial.
60. Barry Trinder, *Victorian Banbury*. Chichester: Phillimore, 1982. For Oxfordshire market towns see C.J. Bond. 'The small towns of Oxfordshire in the nineteenth century' in Trevor

Rowley (ed.), *The Oxford region*. Oxford University Department for External Studies, 1980, pp. 55-79.

61. As well as the market towns of Woodstock which included Blenheim Palace and Park, Old Woodstock and Hensington, and Charlbury which included Cornbury Park, Ranger's Lodge and Ditchley House, the settlements were Ascott-under -Wychwood, Begbroke, Bladon, Bould, Bruern, Cassington and Worton, Chadlington, Chilson, Churchill, Combe, Dean, Fawler, Fifield, Finstock, Foscoate, Fulwell, Gosford, Hampton Gay and Hampton Poyle, Idbury, Kidlington, Kingham, Langley, Leafield, Lyneham, Milton- under -Wychwood, Pudlicott, Sarsden, Shipton on Cherwell, Shipton-under -Wychwood, Shorthampton, Spelsbury, Taston, Thrupp, Water Eaton, Wolvercote, Wootton and Yarnton.
62. Wychwood Forest is discussed in more detail at a later point in this section in connection with enclosure.
63. C. Belcher, 'On the reclaiming of the waste lands as instanced by Wichwood (sic) Forest', *Journal of the Royal Agricultural Society of England*, vol. xxiv, part ii, 1863, p277; Arthur Young, *General...*p2 and pp.5-6; Celia Miller (ed.), *Rain and ruin. The Diary of an Oxfordshire farmer John Simpson Calvertt 1875-1900*. Gloucester: Allan Sutton, 1983, p8; Clare Sewell Read, *On the farming of Oxfordshire*. Prize report, 1854, p12. See also *Post Office Directory of Oxfordshire*, 1869, p850- Wheat, barley and roots were grown around Charlbury; James Caird, *English agriculture in 1850-1851*. New intro. by G. Mingay, 2nd ed., Frank Cass, 1968. Letter IV, West Oxfordshire, pp.26-27; Celia Miller, *Rain...*p10.
64. Alan Crossley (ed.), *A history of the county of Oxford*. Oxford University Press, Vol.xii Wootton Hundred (South), 1990, p318; Kelly's Directories of Oxfordshire, 1883 onwards; C.S. Read, *On the...*p 224; William Wing, *Change in farming and the rural economy during the 55 years, 1826-1880*. (Reprint from *Oxford Chronicle*), p8, p7.
65. C.S. Read, *On the...*p256; Alan Crossley (ed.), *A history...*vol. xii, p481 and C.S. Read, *On the...*p256.
66. John Higgs, 'Farming in the Oxford region from the Napoleonic Wars to the World Wars', *Journal of the Royal Agricultural Society of England*, vol.119, 1958, p7.
67. C.S. Read, *On the...*p256.
68. William Page (ed.), *A history of...* Vol. 2, p225. The arrangement of the county census reports does not facilitate the drawing out of information for detailed occupational structure unless it is the county town, that is, Oxford, or individual hundreds. As the case study area is made up of parts of four hundreds as well as Woodstock (Liberty of Oxford) it is difficult to give precise statistical data.
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70. Mary Prior, *Fisher Row. Fishermen, bargemen and canal boatmen in Oxford, 1500-1900*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982, p317, pp.334-335.
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72. M.A. Aston, *Stonesfield slate*. Woodstock: Oxfordshire County Council, 1974. (Department of Museum Services, publication no.5), p27. p30.
73. Charlbury Tithe Award map: O.S. map 25'', xxvi, 5; Kelly's Directories 1883-: cited in R.B. Pugh (ed.), *A history of the county of Oxford*. Oxford University Press, vol.x, p144.

74. W.J. Arkell, *Oxford Stone*. Faber, 1947, p87.
75. Nancy Stebbing, John Rhodes and Maureen Mellor, *Oxfordshire potters. The clay industries of Oxfordshire*. Woodstock: Oxfordshire County Council, Department of Museum Services, 1980. (Oxon Museum Services Publication no. 13), p23; Oxford Journal 2nd May 1870 and 18th November 1871; Our...*Our Kingham as it used to be*. [Pr. pub. 1986], p25; Anne James, 'Woodstock steel', *Country Fair*, March 1965, p47.
76. See chapter 2 on female employment opportunities in the case study area.
77. I have looked at the social groupings used by R.S. Neale, 'Class and class consciousness in early nineteenth century England', *Victorian Studies*, vol. xii, no.1, Sept. 1968, pp.5-32 and Alun Howkins, *Reshaping rural England. A social history 1850-1925*. Harper Collins, 1991.
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80. R.S. Neale, *Class...*; W.F. Mavor, *A new description of Blenheim*. Oxford: H. Slatter, c.1820, 11th ed., p115; C.W. Pumphrey, *The Charlbury of our childhood, 1845-1860*. Unpublished typescript, [c.1900], p25.
81. Pamela Horn, *Victorian countrywomen*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991, p72; *Return of owners...* See for example Rev. T.C. Baker of Spelsbury who owned 322 acres at a gross annual rental of £286 4/- (20p); Peter Ditchfield, *Country folk. A pleasant company*. Wakefield: E.P. Publishing, 1974, reprint of 1923 ed., p213; Richard Jefferies, *Hodge and his masters*. Quartet Books, 1979, reprint of 1880 Smith, Elder & Co. ed., p157-159.
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139. Pamela Sharpe, *Continuity...*p364.

140. Olwen Hufton; James Macmillan; Natalie Zemon Davies et al, 'What is women's history?', *History Today*, vol.35, June 1985, p47.

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SECTION B. WOMEN'S EMPLOYMENT STRATEGIES

Section B will consider the nature and, where possible, the extent of employment as a strategy used by women against poverty. It comprises three chapters. The first chapter examines the interpretations of female employment in rural areas and the employment opportunities within the case study area. This chapter is essentially descriptive in nature as it provides the framework for the other two, largely analytical chapters.

The second chapter in the section examines the effective demand for employment using the cross-analysis of employment data to draw out the key factors which brought about womens' employment patterns.

The final chapter in this section considers the overall value to women of employment as a strategy against poverty, suggesting the rewards and limitations employment brought .

‘ The work of working-class married women has been ignored by many social and economic historians: but...whether full or part-time, paid or unpaid, at home or in the community, this work was in itself of great social and economic importance and in turn affected many areas of economic activity’.

(Elizabeth Roberts, *Women's work, 1840-1940*. Macmillan, 1988. *Studies in Economic and Social History*, pp.53-54.)

Chapter 2. Rural female employment: its interpretations and employment opportunities within the case study area.

2.1 Introduction

When considering the various aspects of women's lives, employment appears to be the area most documented as well as most controversial. Some of this research and controversy was highlighted in the introductory chapter.¹

There are five key areas of controversy relating to female employment that are relevant to this section. First, there appears to be no consensus regarding the effects of industrialisation on women's employment.² Second, there is debate regarding the impact of domestic ideology on the nature and extent of female employment.³ Third, it is not clear what effect the concept of the family wage had on female employment.⁴ Fourth, very little is known about what poor women themselves thought of their employment until oral sources were available at the end of the century.⁵ Finally, there is controversy regarding the validity of some analysis as a result of the unreliability and scarcity of sources.⁶

These general problems associated with female employment are equally applicable to rural employment. In addition, a controversial theme relating specifically to rural employment is the impact of agrarian change on the nature and extent of the female farm work force.⁷ It is clear, therefore, that there is no accepted framework of research to build upon regarding female rural employment.

I suggest that there are three approaches that need to be put into practice when examining female employment in rural areas and these will be used to underpin the whole of section B. First, a wide variety of sources must be examined, not always obviously directly related to employment. Second, it is important to use local

studies to draw out local and regional patterns and so build up case studies of female rural employment. Finally, there is a need to begin to ask a different set of questions regarding female employment; in particular, to explore what the women themselves thought of their employment and to draw out patterns of employment rather than concentrate on numbers of women employed. Indeed, trying to establish numbers employed may be misleading; patterns of employment, as will be shown in section B, were complex; full-time, part-time, casual, seasonal and multi-employments. Such patterns may have masked numbers of women employed; many women operated within a hidden economy.

2.2 The need to work.

If research has generated controversy concerning the nature and extent of female employment, there appears to be a more general consensus that, as a result of poverty, women needed to work and a number of studies support this.⁸ Poverty affected many women living in rural areas, if not constantly, then from time to time.⁹

Despite a rise in real wages, the family wage appears to have rarely been a reality. 'Male wages alone were rarely sufficient to support a family, let alone allow standards of living to rise. Few wives, even of skilled men, could hope to give up waged work entirely on marriage...'¹⁰

As well as research showing the widespread existence of poverty and the need for women to work, it is clear that women in particular suffered greatly as a result of poverty. E.H. Hunt contends: 'Women in fact were the chief sufferers from most of the causes of poverty and there were always more women than men below the poverty line'.¹¹

Women suffered because they were affected by key lifecycle changes to either themselves or their families. These changes could tip the balance from a coping to a non-coping strategy and necessitated the use of additional strategies to attempt to restore a balance. Particular points of tension included illness, injury, unemployment, large families, widowhood and old age.¹²

2.3 Employment opportunities for women in rural areas

Studies that have been carried out on female rural employment have tended to concentrate on two major areas of employment; agriculture and domestic service. Both are important since they employed large numbers of women, although as already suggested, there continues to be debate about the numbers of women involved in agriculture in the second half of the nineteenth century.¹³ In addition, domestic service has largely been studied in a general way rather than as a rural employment.¹⁴ However, there have been some studies relating to small scale rural employments, usually based on a particular locality, but in general the employment of women in rural areas is a subject neglected by mainstream research.¹⁵ The failure of researchers to explore female rural employment more fully has resulted in a partial perspective on the nature and extent of rural employment patterns, although some progress has been made in uncovering urban employment.¹⁶

Although studies on individual employments are important, a clearer understanding of the general nature of female employment is also required, which, as I have already suggested could be casual, difficult to uncover and varied in time span.

Two studies have been very valuable in highlighting these patterns. First, Shelley Pennington's research on women's homework describes such employment as 'extended domestic operations'. She includes jobs such as charring, washing and taking in lodgers. She suggests that they were jobs '...poor women have turned to

in order to keep starvation and the workhouse from their door. In one form or another they are nearly all mere extensions of the role women had expected to play in the family'.¹⁷

It is interesting that Shelley Pennington refers to these occupations as 'mere extensions' of a woman's household role as it appears to be an implicit belittling of the work women did. Women had to be realistic in what employment they could get; only limited types of work were open to them but they also needed to be opportunists, taking employment chances when they saw them.

Second, research by John Benson on what he calls 'penny capitalism' is also helpful. He defines the term as '...a working man or woman who went into business on a small scale in the hope of profit (but with the possibility of loss) and made himself or herself responsible for every facet of the enterprise'.¹⁸

Both petty capitalism and extended domestic operations were often small scale and casual in nature. John Benson suggests that this is why women in particular turned to it.¹⁹ However, such patterns of employment make the uncovering of information difficult so the most constructive approach appears to be the analysis of a small case study area. For the purpose of this thesis part of West Oxfordshire was chosen, the social and economic profile of which was outlined in chapter 1. Immersion in a small area allows the drawing out of employment nuances not easily perceived in single employment studies or large scale national and regional research. The next section provides a profile of the employment options open to the women who lived in the case study area.

2.4. Employment opportunities for women in the case study area

2.4.1 Introduction

This section will focus on the types of employment available to women in the case study area using, as a starting point, the census enumerators' returns in addition to a number of local sources such as directories and newspapers: '...there were all kinds of women's work which do not fit in the census at all, but which might play a greater part in keeping a family together than a man's wage'.²⁰ One such example is provided by the Kingham churchwarden's accounts where Jane Pigeon is recorded as being '...paid for keeping the church doors shut on Sundays'.²¹ From a list of specific employments compiled, I was able to reduce this to one of general employments as shown in fig.4.

Fig.4 List of general employment types that women had access to in the case study area

| | | |
|------------------|-------------------------|-------------------|
| Gloving | Agriculture | Domestic service |
| Laundry/cleaning | Sewing | Retailing |
| Trades | Providing accommodation | Nursing/midwifery |
| Teaching | Miscellaneous | |

Source: 1851 Census returns PRO HO 107/ 1730, 1732 and 1891 Census RG 12/1173 and RG 12/1178, local directories and newspapers.

The following sub-sections introduce these general employment opportunities, focusing on the nature of the work available rather than the numbers involved; the hidden nature of much women's work makes quantification difficult.

2.4.2 Gloving

Oxfordshire, along with Worcestershire, Somerset and Hertfordshire was an important gloving area. The main concentration of the industry was in the west of the county which includes the case study area.

The origins of the industry in Oxfordshire have been well documented.²² In the early part of the nineteenth century gloving provided a valuable employment for women. William Albright, a resident of Charlbury, revived gloving in the town in part to relieve the distress caused by the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars. Caroline Pumphrey, his granddaughter, commented: 'At first there was no factory, Mr. Pritchett [later to employ a large number of people in and around the town] had a room behind his shop in Sheep Street, where they cut out and they always made up in the cottages'.²³ Despite a deep depression in the glove trade which followed the removal of the prohibition on French gloves in 1826, many firms survived, often small family businesses and by specialising in certain types of glove.²⁴ By the middle of the century, it would appear that there was ample opportunity for women to obtain glove stitching employment. 'It is likely that one labourer's household in two derived some income from gloving by the middle of the century and continued to do so'.²⁵ Charlbury appears to have been a particularly important centre.

Owing to its being surrounded by about twenty villages within a circuit of a few miles, a considerable trade is carried on in Charlbury. Here is the largest glove manufactory in the county; it is carried on by Mr. Samuel Pritchett and about 1000 hands are generally employed.²⁶

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In contrast, there is some debate concerning the health of the Woodstock gloving industry at the middle of the century and comments range from ‘...extremely thriving...’ to ‘...trade remained very variable in the 1850s...’ and ‘...even at its height, gloving remained small scale and employed relatively few townspeople’.²⁷ Certainly, gloving did not appear to employ many people in Woodstock; 47 (9.3%) of the female population of 12 years and over were listed in the 1851 census. However, one of the key opportunities provided by gloving was employment for village and hamlet women. Unfinished gloves were sent out to these women who stitched them in their own homes.²⁸ In some settlements this was clearly of immense economic importance. In Finstock, Stonesfield, Langley and Combe for example, 61%, 52%, 35% and 31% respectively of women of 12 years and over were listed in the 1851 census as employed in gloving. These are clearly high proportions given the general opinion that the census underestimated the numbers of women employed.²⁹

Gloving remained a significant employment throughout the second half of the nineteenth century. Employment patterns in 1891 were little changed. The villages of Finstock and Fawler, for example, still recorded a large percentage of women involved in gloving.³⁰ Even in the early twentieth century a report on the rural industries of Oxfordshire mentions that glove stitching was still carried out by women working at home, but does not give numbers or distribution patterns.³¹

2.4.3 Agriculture

Examining the parts played by women in agriculture is not an easy task. Agricultural sources, both primary and secondary, are plentiful but much of their focus has been on production and male employment, with no, or only passing reference to women. Eve Hostettler suggests that labouring women and farmers’

wives have been consigned to '...the shadowy background, which has resulted in scanty knowledge of the everyday life of the poor country woman at the end of the nineteenth century'.³²

Although Hostettler's comments refer to the end of the nineteenth century, it seems likely that the problem of the invisibility of women was even more acute mid-century when sources from the women themselves were rare. By the end of the century some oral evidence was available.³³

Recent studies have begun to examine the role of women in agriculture; some using an innovative approach, although there is still a tendency to assume that the absence of women in primary sources is indication of their non-involvement. Celia Miller's ground-breaking study used farm records to show the gendered patterns of labour and her results challenge some of the commonly held views on the numbers and roles of women in agriculture.³⁴

Of these local sources, farm records are extremely useful. Local enumerators' returns have limited value. Edward Higgs suggests their use is '...fraught with dangers'.³⁵ However, with cross-checking of sources, they can be of some help. At a national level the census returns have been used to support the argument that women withdrew from agriculture during the second half of the nineteenth century.³⁶ The census returns for the case study appear to support this along with other local sources. 'There are not many women employed in the field except at hay and corn harvest...'³⁷ However, much depended on the time of year at which the observation was made. It was common in arable agriculture for women and men not to be employed all year; during the winter months some of the work force was usually laid off. Employment patterns may be more complex than commonly thought. A key difference between male and female employment was that during the main employment seasons men tended to be in constant employment whereas

women continued to be casually employed.³⁸ This casual basis of employment makes it extremely difficult to assess the opportunities open to women. This is why farm records, which supply an all year round picture, are so valuable.

While researching the role of women in agriculture in the case study area, a few anomalies to the 'shrinkage thesis' were found, surprisingly in the census returns. In the returns for 1851, one village, Milton-under-Wychwood, listed 98 women, 40% of the female workforce of 12 years and over, as employed in agriculture. Two other villages, Shipton-on-Cherwell and Sarsden, had 19% and 13% respectively, listed as well. The 1891 census returns for the same settlements show a different picture; only 2 elderly women from Milton-under-Wychwood were listed as agricultural labourers, although the accuracy of this information is not known.³⁹

Scant evidence could be found to explain the figures for 1851; they do not fit the general pattern of numbers employed but it is uncertain which are the more realistic figures. The problem with the debate over numbers is that it tends to become the core question when investigating the place of women in agriculture; what might be more advisable is to attempt to uncover the work performed by women in all its complexity, including that of women farmers, the wives of farmers, farm servants and day labourers. Obviously the debate over numbers has implications for this thesis; if employment opportunities were shrinking, women needed to find alternative employment, or other strategies to make ends meet. However, realism is required; so much agricultural work was casual, part-time and seasonal and so relatively undetectable that the role and numbers of women involved in agriculture in the second half of the nineteenth century may never be fully understood.

2.4.4 Domestic service

Research into the employment of women as domestic servants mirrors that of women in agriculture in two ways. First, research in both areas has been plentiful and second, considerable attention has been given to numbers of women employed.⁴⁰ It is not surprising that domestic service has attracted considerable interest, because it employed a vast number of women. Jane Rendall suggests around one third of all young women between the ages of 15 and 25 were employed as domestic servants by the 1880s.⁴¹ Documentation on the cautionary use of the census is considerable and most areas of research have concentrated on the better sourced urban areas.⁴²

To attempt to understand something of the opportunities for women as domestic servants in the case study area two approaches were taken. First, using household records and census returns, a list of the various types of servant was made. Second, using the same sources, an attempt was made to ascertain the types of people in the area who required servants.⁴³

Fig. 6 Categories of servants cited in local sources relating to the case study area

| <u>General</u> | <u>Specific</u> |
|---------------------------|----------------------|
| Servant | Housekeeper |
| Domestic/Domestic servant | Chambermaid |
| House servant/Housemaid | Nurse girl/Nursemaid |
| General servant | Companion/Attendant |
| Maidservant | Kitchen maid |
| Under servant/Under maid | Lady's maid |
| Servant of all work | Stillroom maid |

Day servant

Cook

House/Fieldwork

Errand girl

Laundry maid

Source: 1851 Census returns, PRO, HO 107/ 1730, 1731 and 1891 Census RG 12/1173 and RG 12/1178

Two types of service were found. First, general service, where women were engaged in a number of domestic duties and second, specific service, where women were employed to do certain jobs such as cookery or laundry work. Employment in specific service did not preclude a woman from performing general duties as well. Usually, however, women progressed from general to specific service as they gained experience and skills. In terms of availability, the most common jobs were for general servants, with fewer opportunities for the more specialist forms of service. This is clearly shown from an examination of the 1851 and 1891 census returns for Charlbury.

Table 1. General and specific domestic service jobs in Charlbury using the 1851 and 1891 census enumerators' returns.

| Year | Type of Servant | | | |
|-------|---------------------|-----|--------------|-----|
| | General | no. | Specific | no. |
| 1851 | Houseservant | 18 | Cook | 8 |
| | Housemaid | 12 | Housekeeper | 8 |
| | Servant of all work | 8 | Nursemaid | 2 |
| | Servant | 5 | Lady's maid | 1 |
| | General servant | 2 | Kitchen maid | 1 |
| | Under servant | 1 | | |
| Total | | 46 | | 20 |

| | | | | |
|------|----------------------|----|---------------|----|
| 1891 | General domestic | 32 | Cook | 4 |
| | Domestic | 4 | Governess | 1 |
| | Housemaid | 9 | Dressmaker / | 1 |
| | | | Mother's help | |
| | Assistant (domestic) | 1 | Housekeeper | 7 |
| | | | Nursemaid | 1 |
| | | | Companion | 1 |
| | | | Mother's help | 1 |
| | | | Kitchen maid | 1 |
| | Total no. servants | 46 | | 17 |

Source: 1851 Census returns, PRO HO 107/1732 and 1891 Census RG 12/ 1178

I then attempted to ascertain the degree of demand for domestic servants in order to assess how readily available it was as an employment for poor women. I examined families employing servants in the census returns for the case study area and found six distinct groups of servant employing households which have been summarised in the figure below.

Fig.7 Types of households employing servants in the case study area

1. Aristocracy - always employed servants, usually a large number, many with specific duties. For example, the family of Francis G. Spencer, Baron Churchill, of Cornbury Park near Charlbury employed a butler, coachman, under butler, three grooms, stable boy, housekeeper, lady's maid, cook, two laundry maids, two housemaids, kitchen maid and under maid.

2. Clergy - nearly always employed domestic servants but generally not in large numbers, some specific and some general servants were usually employed.. Work was available in most villages through Church of England clergy and nonconformist ministers. For example, the family of Charles Cary of Spelsbury which included his wife and children of 2, 1 and 1 month employed a cook, housemaid, 2 nurses and a monthly nurse.

3. Farmers - sometimes employed servants, but it was not always clear whether they were domestic, farm or both. The number of servants depended on size of farm and family as well as aspirations of the family. For example, William Rowland, a farmer of 380 acres at Water Eaton Manor House resided there with his 2 daughters, 2 female house servants and 1 male servant as well as 23 labourers.

4. Professionals - usually employed servants, both general and specific. For example, William John Birch, a Briefless barrister of Puddlicot with a wife and 3 children aged 13, 7 and 1 employed 5 house servants including 1 male.

5. Retailers - sometimes employed servants but not always clear whether they were employed in the shop, house or both. For example, Joseph Prior of Woodstock, a tailor, with a wife, 5 children between 2 and 10 years and 2 nieces employed 4 house servants aged between 17 and 35.

6. Miscellaneous - a number of people were found who did not fit into categories 1-5. For example, Herbert Griffiths, a fund holder from Shipton-under- Wychwood lived with his wife, 2 sons, 3 house servants and 4 general servants.

Source: PRO 1851 Census HO 107/ 1730,1732.

Women had a range of opportunities in terms of job and employer type. General service was widely available in town, village and hamlet. Specialist service was more likely to have been available in towns and the country houses of wealthy families. In addition, the proximity of Oxford meant that there was work in colleges, shops, hotels and inns as well as in private homes.⁴⁴ For many women domestic service must have been a readily available employment.

2.4.5 Laundry and cleaning work

Although some women engaged as domestic servants were involved in cleaning and laundry work, another group of women was specifically employed for these tasks. It was largely part-time employment and numbers are therefore difficult to assess, but it seems likely that the work provided a number of employment opportunities. Cleaners were needed for public buildings, shops and workshops, as well as domestic settings. Work could be regular or casual and the latter may have been ideal for a woman who suddenly found herself in need of extra income. One suggestion is that: 'Between 1850 - 1939 the majority of unskilled women did some char work at some time during their lives'.⁴⁵ Whilst this seems likely, it is difficult to prove; employment details were rarely recorded, largely, as Patricia Malcolmson suggests, because it was a commonplace, rough, undramatic activity.⁴⁶

The cleaning of clothes was sometimes carried out in conjunction with char work. Laundry work ranged from taking in a little washing from time to time to the operation of a full scale laundry business.⁴⁷ The 1851 census for the case study area cites the following categories of cleaner: laundress, laundry mistress, laundry servant, laundry assistant, washer woman, clothes cleaner, mangler and ironer and charwoman. Some of these categories are more specific than others, but it is not

easy to be precise about the differences between some designations, for example, a washer woman and a clothes cleaner.⁴⁸

The census for 1851 also shows a marked distribution focus on the two market towns and their surrounding villages. The market towns provided work through shops, hotels and public houses as well as the homes of upper and middle class families. In the 1851 census for the area almost 40% of women listed with laundry and cleaning jobs were located in Woodstock and Charlbury. Villages near the towns listed a number of cleaning women, such as Bladon with five and Finstock with three. Some of the more populous villages listed a large number as well; for example Kidlington had five and Churchill ten.⁴⁹

Further evidence of a relationship between a town and village with regard to the supply of cleaning women comes from the work of Raphael Samuel on Headington Quarry near Oxford. He found women took in college, church and hotel laundry from Oxford, working in their own homes, often on a large scale. 'Laundry work was far from being a mere supplement to the man's earnings; in winter time it often had to serve in their stead'.⁵⁰

The women listed in the census returns may have worked full-time or at least regularly in this employment but, in addition, there was a network of casual cleaning women whose work was largely unrecorded, working as and when they needed employment or when they could find work

2.4.6 Sewing

Sewing was an integral part of a woman's domestic duties. Household manuals refer to it as 'woman's indispensably useful instrument', declaring that 'every clever housewife will do well to have at least one day in the week for a mending

day'.⁵¹ Sewing for the family was a vital part of making ends meet. Women made, mended and altered clothes.⁵² In addition to domestic sewing some women turned their skills to earning money as well.

Most studies on sewing as an employment have concentrated on the workshop, the factory and the evils of sweated labour.⁵³ Far less is known about women who did a little sewing for money at home, often on a casual basis. Opportunities for work came from two sources. First, from women who went out to work and so had little time for needlework themselves. The second opportunity was inter-class in character, the poor carrying out fine sewing for middle and upper class women such as making clothes or detailed alterations rather than repairs. This appears to have been a widespread occupation. John Benson suggests that even at the end of the nineteenth century 7-12% of all married women took in sewing.⁵⁴ The 1851 and 1891 census enumerators' returns for the case study area cite both general and specific categories of sewing women.

Fig. 8 List of sewing women categories using the 1851 and 1891 census returns for the case study area

| <u>General</u> | <u>Specific</u> |
|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| Dressmaker | Staymaker |
| Dressmaker's apprentice | Staymaker's apprentice |
| Dressmaker's assistant | Milliner and dressmaker |
| Seamstress | Jacket maker |
| Needlewoman | Embroidery worker |
| Family Tailoress | |
| Sewer | |
| Journeywoman dressmaker | |
| Plain needlewoman | |

Source: 1851 Census PRO, HO 107/1730, 1732 and 1891 Census RG 12/ 1173 and 1178.

The distribution pattern of sewing women appears to be similar to that of laundry and cleaning women, with large numbers in the market towns, their surrounding villages and other large villages. In the 1851 census 52 sewing women were listed in Woodstock and 31 in Charlbury. There were 4 in Finstock, near Charlbury, 8 in the large village of Kingham and 13 in Kidlington.⁵⁵ ‘...In most villages a seamstress or two may be found, and has plenty of work to do for the farmers’ families’.⁵⁶

Specialist sewers were usually employed in the market towns, such as two jacket makers listed in the Charlbury 1891 census. It was unlikely that poor women were employed in this way because of the capital needed for such a business. These sewers had particular skills, sometimes operating from a shop or a room in their house.⁵⁷ Poor women were usually employed casually; sewing from home as and when the need arose. How this needle employment related to one of the main employments in the case study area, that of gloving, is uncertain, particularly whether women moved between these employments or they remained mutually exclusive. Whatever the relationship, sewing was an accessible strategy for poor women although the nature and extent of it may never be fully known.

2.4.7 Retailing

The nature of retailing changed considerably in the second half of the nineteenth century and this has received attention from a variety of sources. Usually the focus has been on the development of shops, particularly in urban areas. This is not surprising since the increasing separation of production and distribution, facilitated by the development of an extensive railway service, saw the concentration of the

retail business in urban areas. Attention given to retailing in rural areas has largely been based on the way urban retailing has detracted from rural trade. Although there has been some work on retailing in market towns, village retailing has been neglected, in part because it has been assumed that villages rarely contained more than a few shops. Even if a village only had a few shops this does not necessarily mean that there were only a few retailers. There were a number of forms of retail outlet, not all shop-related.⁵⁸

The following section will examine the retail opportunities open to women in the case study area. Four types of retail outlet were found; selling from home, street selling, markets and fairs and shops. The first category, selling from home, is difficult to quantify. Usually it was casual work, undertaken by women when they had something to sell or needed to raise extra money because of financial hardship. All sorts of items could be sold, from food to fuel. Women could not make a great deal of money this way but it was a readily available strategy with low overheads and needed only limited stock. In Stonesfield, fossils found by slate workers were sold from their homes to visitors to the village although the degree of involvement of the slatemakers' wives in the transactions is not known. 'The village, which stands in a very bleak situation, consists mainly of a succession of fossil shops containing specimens obtained in the neighbourhood by the quarrymen'.⁵⁹

The second retail outlet, street selling, is closely related to that of selling from home, in villages at least, where women might offer items for sale on the village green or in the main street. On market days women took their produce to the local market town. Research on street selling suggests that it was often undertaken by women, country produce such as flowers and gleanings were often sold and that women did not always obtain the licence they needed to sell.⁶⁰ John Benson suggests that street selling was a last resort employment for the unemployed, sick, old and seasonally unemployed.⁶¹ However, for many women, particularly the

wives of labourers, street trading was an easy way of earning a livelihood, especially for those who had neither trade nor capital.⁶²

Street sellers often used the third category of retail outlet to sell their wares; markets and fairs.⁶³ The general market appears to have been the best outlet for the casual seller. 'Farmers' wives were the largest part of this body as they would bring in butter, poultry, eggs and fruit as they happened to have produce available'.⁶⁴

Despite a decline in the number and importance of markets and fairs in the second half of the nineteenth century, small rural markets continued to act as exchange centres for local produce and on this level women had significant opportunities for regular selling.⁶⁵ Although the market functions of Woodstock and Charlbury declined in importance during the second half of the nineteenth century, both towns continued to act as service centres for their immediate hinterlands.⁶⁶ Day to day retailing continued in the villages.

The shop was the fourth retail outlet and little research has been carried out on the rural shop, most work concentrating on the development of chain stores. Yet between the 1820s and the 1850s there was an enormous growth in the number of shops, particularly the small general shop.⁶⁷ This form of retailing was of limited significance to poor women who could not afford premises, staff and only limited stock. Women such as Martha Bateman who advertised in Kidlington parish magazine as being '...grocery and provision merchants, drapers, ironmongers and bacon curers, vendors of patent medicines, petroleum of all kinds and garden seeds' operated a completely different level of retailing to poor women.⁶⁸ Their involvement was as assistants within these shops such as John Albright's drugs, grocery and drapery shop in Charlbury where he employed female assistants in his grocery department.⁶⁹

Casual retailing opportunities were considerable for poor women, particularly at certain times of the year when they could sell off surplus garden or allotment produce or even resources acquired free from the countryside.⁷⁰ 'Retailing long remained a most popular form of penny capitalist activity. At one time or another almost every working man or woman in the country must have tried to sell something at a profit'.⁷¹

2.4.8 Trades

Women were usually involved in trade employment on two levels. First, through helping their husbands and second, taking over on the death of a husband or close relation such as father or brother. As such, any involvement could be hidden within the family trade and consequently is difficult to uncover.⁷² Sources for the case study area reveal very little about the involvement of women in trades. The 1851 census returns list women as involved in a few trades such as wood cutting, basket making and shoe binding.⁷³

2.4.9 Accommodation provision

This employment strategy operated on two levels. First, by landladies, who viewed it as their major, or at least a very significant part of their income and was carried on as a business. Accommodation was provided in commercial premises or within a domestic setting. Commercial premises were usually public houses, inns, hotels or lodging houses; providing a number of rooms for people generally staying for short periods. Within a domestic setting a landlady would provide a few single rooms or a suite of rooms for a family which were usually let on a long-term basis.⁷⁴

Operating an accommodation service at the first level may have been beyond most poor women. They were far more likely to have been involved at the second level, providing accommodation on an irregular basis when a need or opportunity arose. Lack of space and limited facilities made it unavoidable that lodgers would become involved in family routine. 'The necessities of working-class life, as well as its cultural traditions, resulted in a great deal of mobility and flexibility in living arrangements of a kind incomparable, if not downright immoral in middle-class eyes'.⁷⁵

The census enumerators' returns reveal a number of visitors and lodgers staying in a variety of family settings, including the homes of agricultural labourers with large families.⁷⁶ Specific events or major construction work could result in a large influx of temporary residents although landlords of cottages in close villages (estate villages) could prohibit the taking in of lodgers. The construction of the Oxford to Worcester railway line in 1851 resulted in a large influx of labourers in some settlements and this is clearly shown in the census returns. It was an easy way of making a little extra money, regardless of family size or quality of housing. Indeed, examination of the census returns appears to substantiate the idea that accommodation provision was a popular strategy amongst the working-classes involving both local and more distant provision for friends, neighbours and relations.⁷⁷

2.4.10 Nursing and midwifery

Different levels of nursing care were provided and it is essential to distinguish between them because although women began to train and obtain qualifications in the second half of the nineteenth century, the majority of women remained unqualified.⁷⁸ Poor women were usually involved at a basic level of nursing care; providing help for friends and relations in times of illness. For such services they

may have been given a few pence, paid in kind or sometimes not at all as part of being a 'good neighbour'.⁷⁹ On another level, some poor women received informal training by a local doctor or unqualified nurse. They might be called on to attend more serious complaints and received payment, sometimes by Poor Law authorities.⁸⁰

A more systematic approach was the setting up of Benefit Nursing Organisations towards the end of the nineteenth century to provide trained nurses for rural areas. The North Oxfordshire Benefit Organisation was set up for the inhabitants of '...cottage homes on which the burden of illness always presses with extra and sometimes crushing forces.' Their primary duties were to attend to the needs of patients but they were also expected to perform all household tasks except the family washing.⁸¹

For women who sought casual and regular nursing employment, opportunities must have been plentiful. First, because there was considerable ill health, pregnancy, birth and post-natal care as well as duties associated with care of the dying and laying out the dead. Doctors were expensive, so it is not surprising that the poor looked to local women whom they knew they could trust both in terms of treatment given and charges made. Mary Chamberlain calls such women '...the custodians of communal and community medical knowledge'.⁸² They were usually well respected members of the community and could earn a regular income from such work.

The opportunities to gain employment from nursing care varied from the more traditional nursing duties to good neighbours carrying out general care duties as part of a neighbourhood culture. Of the latter there are few records.

2.4.11 Teaching

Although opportunities for women to become involved in teaching increased during the second half of the nineteenth century, poor women could only participate to a limited extent. They were involved in teaching in dame schools which offered rudimentary tuition to some village children. Others became monitresses in village schools and sometimes went on to train as teachers.⁸³

Teaching provided a regular, basic income which attracted both poor working-class girls and poor middle-class women.⁸⁴ The latter could offer private tuition at home, often of a specialist nature such as languages or music. A Miss Greenwood of Chipping Norton advertised in a local paper that she would be '...happy to receive out of town pupils for instruction on the piano-forte. Terms on application'.⁸⁵

Some girls attended training schools such as the one at Kidlington where pupil teachers boarded and received instruction under Julia Hobart, mistress of the school.⁸⁶ Finally, poor middle-class women might obtain governess positions. Only 5 governesses were listed in the census returns for the case study area in 1851 so it seems likely that opportunities in rural areas were low. Oxford was a more likely source of employment.⁸⁷

Teaching appears to have been a useful strategy for a very limited number of poor women. Most villages in the case study area had a school and the census returns show at least one female teacher living or working in most settlements. Charlbury, for example, had 6 and Churchill had 2.⁸⁸ However, it would be wrong to place too great an emphasis on teaching within the range of employment opportunities

for poor women because numbers employed were always low when compared with other jobs such as sewing or cleaning.

2.4.12 Conclusion on employment opportunities within the case study area

This section has shown that a wide range of employment opportunities were open to women in the case study area. There were more, usually unrecorded, such as childminding, preparing meals and running errands although the distinction between an employment and a good neighbour service is not always clear cut.

Domestic service and gloving were major sources of employment, but there were a number of relatively hidden employments and jobs such as sewing and cleaning may have been more widespread and of greater value to the family economy than previously realised.

2.5 Conclusion

This relatively long and largely descriptive chapter provides an essential frame of reference for the two more analytical chapters which follow. This chapter has introduced the opportunities for female employment within the case study area and something of the complexity surrounding the study of female employment in rural areas. In particular, women appear to have needed to use complex employment patterns in order to make ends meet.

In the next chapter an attempt is made to explore these patterns of employment by looking at the ways women responded to their work options. In this way women can be placed firmly within the centre of the analysis. It will not, indeed I would argue that it cannot, provide detailed numbers of women employed in different occupations. The inadequacy of the sources would make this approach difficult and

would only serve to mask, rather than uncover the complex nature of employment patterns.

Footnotes to Chapter 2

1. See chapter 1, section 1.2.
2. See Ivy Pinchbeck, *Women...*; Maxine Berg, 'Women's...'; Elizabeth Roberts, *Women's work 1840-1940*. Macmillan, 1988, (Studies in Economic and Social History); Louise A. Tilly and Joan W. Scott, *Women...*; Pamela Sharpe, *Continuity...*
3. See for example Sandra Burman (ed.), *Fit work for women*. Croom Helm/Oxford University Women's Studies Committee, 1979, especially the Catherine Hall article, pp.15-32; Patricia Branca, *Silent sisterhood: middle-class women in the Victorian home*. Croom Helm, 1975; J.A. Banks, *Prosperity and parenthood. A study of family planning among the Victorian middle classes*. Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1954; Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family...*
4. Michele Barrett and Mary McIntosh, 'The family wage', in Elizabeth Whitelegg et al (eds.), *The changing experience of women*. Oxford: Martin Robertson, 1982, pp.71-87; Sara Horrell and Jane Humphries, *Old...*
5. See especially Elizabeth Roberts, *A woman's*
6. See chapter 1, section 1.4.
7. See chapter 2, section 2.4.3
8. For one of the earliest studies on rural poverty see B. Seebohm Rowntree and May Kendall, *How....* For more recent works see Raphael Samuel, *Village life and labour*. Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975, (History Workshop Series); Anne Digby, 'The rural poor', in G.E. Mingay (ed.), *The Victorian countryside*. Vol. 2, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981, pp.591-602.
9. See B. Seebohm Rowntree, *Poverty...*
10. Sally Alexander, Anna Davin and Eve Hostettler, 'Labouring women: a reply to Eric Hobsbawm', *History Workshop Journal*, 8, Autumn 1979, p178. See also Jane Lewis, *Women...* p55 and Shelley Pennington, *Women as homeworkers- an analysis of the home work labour force in England from 1850 to the present day*. Ph.D., Essex University, 1980, pp.53-54.
11. E.H. Hunt, *British labour history 1815-1914*. Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1981, pp.122-123. See also E.H.Hunt, *Regional...*
12. For causes of poverty see Leonore Davidoff, 'The family in Britain', in F.M.L. Thompson (ed.), *The Cambridge Social History of Britain 1750-1950*. Cambridge University Press, 1990, vol.2, pp.71-129 and Michael E. Rose, *The relief...* especially chapter 3.
13. See section 3.2.2 in the next chapter.
14. Pamela Horn, *The rise and fall of the Victorian servant*. Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1975, probably provides the best rural perspective. See also chapter 3, section 3.2.3.
15. Many of these studies are local history based and are not published in the well known historical journals. For example, Pamela Horn, 'Pillow lacemaking in Victorian England: The experience of Oxfordshire', *Textile History*, vol. 3, 1972, pp.100-115; Celia Miller, *The hidden....*
16. See for example Carl Chinn, *They...*

17. Shelley L. Pennington, *Women...* p176, but the whole of chapter 4 is useful. See also S. Pennington and B. Westover, *A hidden workforce: home workers in England 1850-1985*. Macmillan, 1989.
18. John Benson, *The penny capitalists. A study of nineteenth-century working-class entrepreneurs*. Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1983, p6.
19. *ibid.* pp. 129-130.
20. Raphael Samuel, *Village labour...* p xvii.
21. O.A., Ms. d.d. Par. Kingham b.7. *Churchwarden's accounts, 1759-1884*. Easter 1833-1834.
22. N.L. Leyland and J.E. Troughton, *Glovmaking ...* p11. A number of studies have been published on the gloving industry in the case study area and these should be referred to for background information. See for example, T.E. Schultz, 'The Woodstock glove industry', in *Oxoniansia*, vol.3, 1938, pp.139-152 and Flora Grierson, *The story of Woodstock gloves*. Woodstock: Sampson Press, 1962.
23. Caroline Pumphrey, *The Charlbury...* p66.
24. Ivy Pinchbeck, *Women...* pp.224-225. See also William Hill, *A history of the glove trade*. 1834; N.L. Leyland and J.E. Troughton, *Glovmaking...* p14 suggest that some towns in West Oxfordshire grew between 1841-1851 because of the gloving industry; for example, Charlbury 3,400 in 1841 to 3,631 in 1851.
25. D.N. Bates, *The agricultural ...*
26. *Gardner's Historical Gazetteer and Directory of the County of Oxfordshire*, 1852, p638. See also 1851 census returns for Charlbury, PRO 107, 1730. Within the enumerator's schedule Samuel Pritchett is cited as employing '...28 grounders, 8 bleachers and colourers, 16 cutters, 8 layers out and ironers, 8 boys and 820 sewing women.'
27. William Page (ed.), *A history...* vol.2...p258 and Alan Crossley (ed.), *A history...* vol.xii...p367. See also census returns for Woodstock in 1851. PRO, HO, 107, 1730. J. Hutt is listed as employing 150 hands, Samuel Godden as employing 6 men and 70 women and William Ryman 45 men and boys and 600 women.
28. PRO, HO, 107/1730.
29. *ibid.*, see also chapter 1, section 1.4.
30. PRO, RG 12/1178.
31. K.S. Woods, *The rural ...*, section 3 on gloving.
32. Eve Hostettler, 'Making do: domestic life among East Anglian labourers', in Leonore Davidoff and Belinda Westover (eds.), *Our work, our lives, our words. Women's history and women's work*. Macmillan, 1986, (Women in Society), p36. Exceptions to this 'shadowy background' approach include: Alan Armstrong, *Farmworkers. A social and economic history, 1770-1980*. Batsford, 1988. It has excellent coverage of women within the main body of the text rather than relegating them to a separate chapter. See also Ivy Pinchbeck, *Women...* which is old but still useful and K.D.M. Snell, *Annals of the labouring poor. Social change and agrarian England, 1660-1900*. Cambridge University Press, 1985. (Cambridge Studies in Population, Economy and Society in Past Times). Pamela Sharpe, *Continuity...* p356 questions some of his conclusions.

33. Eve Hostettler, *Making...* examined the daily life of East Anglian labourers, 1890-1910 using, amongst others, oral sources.
34. See especially Celia Miller, *The hidden...*
35. Edward Higgs, *Making...* p89.
36. For more detail on this debate see Ivy Pinchbeck, *Women...* p111; Eric Richards, 'Women in the British economy since 1700: an interpretation', *History*, vol.59, 1974, especially pp.345-349 and Celia Miller, *The hidden...* p139 and p143. Edward Higgs suggests that wage books, diaries and other local material be used to supplement the census. '...much of the evidence for historically low levels of women's employment recorded in nineteenth century England and Wales may be merely statistical illusion.' Edward Higgs, 'Occupational censuses and the agricultural workforces in Victorian England and Wales', *Economic History Review*, vol. xliviii, no.4, 1995, p712.
37. Clare Sewell Read, *On the farming...* p263.
38. See Ditchley employment records in the Dillon Collection (DIL) in Oxfordshire Archives. For example, DIL 1/e/2a-e. *Account books 1856-1873*. 2a covers Model Farm, Ditchley; b-e: '4 account books for farms in lands on Ditchley Estate'. Type of farming affected involvement. For the dairy industry see Deborah Valenze, 'The art of women to the business of men: women's work and the dairy industry c. 1740-1840', *Past and Present*, 130, 1991, pp.142-169.
39. PRO HO 107/1730,1732 and RG 12/ 1173,1178.
40. See for example Pamela Horn, *The rise...*; Theresa McBride, *The domestic revolution: the modernisation of household service in England and France, 1820-1920*. Croom Helm, 1976; Edward Higgs, *Domestic servants and households in Rochdale 1851 to 1871*. New York: Garland, 1986; Liz Stanley (ed.), *The diaries of Hannah Cullwick, Victorian maidservant*. Virago, 1984.
41. Jane Rendell, *Women...* p98.
42. Edward Higgs has written widely on the use of the census to study domestic service. See for example, 'Domestic servants and households in Victorian England', *Social History*, vol.8, no.2, 1983, pp.201-210 and 'Domestic servants and household production', in Angela V. John (ed.), *Unequal opportunities: women's employment in England 1800-1918*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986, pp.127-150. For rural sources on domestic servants see Pamela Horn, *Victorian...* especially chapter 6 and the note accompanying the chapter, pp.258-263.
43. See PRO HO 107/1730,1732. See also O.A., DIL xx/b74. *Account book and receipts of the Honourable Miss Dillon, 1888-1892* and DIL 1/o/14-18: 5 *Account books for wages of house servants in Ditchley House, 1886-1922*.
44. See Malcolm Graham, *Images...* Local directories list retail and hotel establishments and the census enumerators' returns show servant employing households; see especially North Oxford.
45. Shelley Pennington, *Homework...* p143.
46. Patricia E. Malcolmson, *English laundresses. A social history, 1850-1930*. Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1986, pp.6-7.
47. *ibid.* p7. Malcolmson suggests that there were plenty of opportunities for taking in washing, citing the reason that the constant need for clean clothes was part of the paraphernalia of gentility.

48. For examples of attempts to define categories see Patricia E. Malcolmsen, *English...* p26 on washerwomen; Pamela Horn, *Victorian...* p188 and Shelley Pennington, *Homework...* p143 on charring.
49. PRO HO 107/1730,1732. Patricia E. Malcolmsen, *English...*p7 suggests the under reporting of workers in the laundry trade.
50. Raphael Samuel, 'Quarry roughs: life and labour in Headington Quarry,1860-1920. An essay in oral history, in Raphael Samuel (ed.), *Village...* p183.
51. C.L. Balfour, *Homely hints on household management*. Partridge, c.1850, p44.
52. See chapter 6, section 6.3.2.
53. See for example Wanda F. Neff, *Victorian working women. An historical and literary study of women in British industries and professions 1832-1850*. Frank Cass and Co., 1966. Reprint of 1929 ed, see especially chapter 4 and Helen Rogers, 'The good are not always powerful, nor the powerful always good'; the politics of women's work in the London needle trades, 1841-1864', *Women's History Notebooks*, no.1, June 1994, pp.3-25. See also Christina Walkley, *The ghost in the looking glass: the Victorian seamstress*. Peter Owen, 1981.
54. John Benson, *The penny...* p44.
55. PRO HO 107/1730,1732.
56. Richard Jefferies, *Hodge ...* p247.
57. See directories for the case study area. Women listed in these are likely to have had an established business.
58. See for example David Alexander, *Retailing in England during the industrial revolution*. The Athlone Press, University of London, 1970 and for market towns Jonathan Brown, *The English...* For a local perspective see the census returns for the case study area, local directories and newspapers.
59. John A. Murray, *A handbook for travellers in Berks, Bucks and Oxon*. Murray, 1882, 3rd ed., p288. See also M.A. Aston, *Stonesfield...* p35 'At one time every slater had his own private stock...'. They were put in cottage windows and porches and the rare ones could be sold for between 2/6 and half a sovereign.
60. John Benson, *The penny...* p99.
61. *ibid.* p101.
62. Ivy Pinchbeck, *Women...* p300.
63. David Alexander, *Retailing...* p232. He suggests street trading was affected by the general decline in markets during the Victorian period.
64. Jonathan Brown, *The English...* p44.
65. See David Alexander, *Retailing...* p232.
66. See local directories in The Centre for Oxfordshire Studies.
67. Catherine Hall, 'The butcher, the baker, the candlestick maker: the shop and the family in the industrial revolution', in Elizabeth Whitelegg et al (eds.), *The changing...*

68. O.A., *Kidlington Parish Magazine*, January 1889. Compare with Richard Jefferies, *The toilers ...* pp.105-106.
69. Caroline Pumphrey, *The Charlbury...* pp.25 and 30.
70. See chapter 6, particularly sections 6.2.1., 6.2.2. and 6.2.3.
71. John Benson, *The penny...* p98.
72. See chapter 3, section 3.3.3.
73. PRO HO 107/1730,1732.
74. This is clearly illustrated in the census returns and local directories for the case study area.
75. Leonore Davidoff, 'The separation of home and work? Landladies and lodgers in nineteenth and twentieth century England', in Sandra Burman (ed.), *Fit work...* p71.
76. PRO HO 107/1730,1732.
77. See chapter 7, sections 7.2.1 and 7.3.2
78. See for example Pamela Horn, *Victorian...* Many studies on the history of nursing and midwifery devote few pages to the Victorian period.
79. See chapter 7, sections 7.2.1. and 7.3.2
80. See Bicester Poor Law Union records. Details of medical treatment were found in correspondence to the Guardians and Application and Report Books. For poor relief as a strategy against poverty see chapter 8.
81. C.O.S., *Chipping Norton Deanery Magazine*, March 1892.
82. Mary Chamberlain, *Old wives' tales. Their history, remedies and spells*. Virago, 1981, p3.
Ann Summers, 'The mysterious demise of Sarah Gamp. The domiciliary nurse and her detractors, c.1830-1860', *Victorian Studies*, vol.3, no.3, Spring 1989, p367. She suggests that '... for most serious as well as minor illnesses all classes of society sought the assistance of some kind of domiciliary nurse.'
83. Pamela Horn, *Victorian...*chapter 8.
84. See chapter 9 which offers a comparative element relating to middle-class women.
85. *Oxfordshire Weekly News*, Wednesday 31st July 1869.
86. PRO HO 107/1732.
87. See census enumerators' returns for Oxford; North Oxford in particular. Local papers provide details of governess positions. See also Jeanne M. Peterson, 'The Victorian governess. Status incongruence in family and society', in Martha Vicinus (ed.), *Suffer and be still. Women in the Victorian age*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1972.
88. PRO HO 107/1732. Compare 1891 census; Charlbury 12, Churchill 3. PRO RG 12/1178.

Chapter 3 Factors affecting employment patterns

3.1 Introduction

Chapter 3 examines the patterns of female employment in the case study area by means of cross-occupational analysis in an attempt to draw out the key factors which affected these patterns. Chapter 2 provided background information on employment opportunities but providing employment profiles tends to reinforce the idea of a non-changing employment pattern. For many women, employment was a dynamic concept; they worked when they needed to at whatever was available. Women might therefore work in a variety of employments, dependent on factors such as seasonality and lifecycle changes. The rest of this chapter is devoted to a study of the patterns that emerged when individual employment profiles were compared and contrasted and attempts to suggest factors which brought these patterns about.

3.2 The frame of reference for determining employment patterns

In order to compare and contrast a wide range of employments I constructed a frame of reference to draw out the key factors affecting employment patterns. I set up a model based on endogenous factors, that is factors relating to the woman herself and to her immediate circumstances, and exogenous factors based on the social and economic fabric of society. This model is outlined in fig. 9. All the factors hypothesised in this figure affected, to a greater or lesser extent, employment patterns. However, certain factors emerged as key determinants and these will be discussed in the next section.

Fig. 9 Model used to help determine the key factors affecting employment patterns

Endogenous factors

1. Age band of woman - young, middle-aged, elderly
2. Marital status - single, married, widowed, deserted, separated
3. Family circumstances - numbers and ages of children, additional family members
4. Skills - the match between skills and employment, family background and the passing on of skills, traditions of employment
5. Financial circumstances of employment - setting up costs and wear and tear
6. The nature of the need for employment - to support or be supported and the duration of need
7. Implications of class

Exogenous factors

1. The nature of the employment - location and basis of employment such as full or part-time
2. The employment culture of a settlement or region
3. Gender - the impact of domestic ideology on employment choices and work practices
4. The impact of market forces such as boom, depression, mechanisation and taste
5. The impact of educational reform

3.3 Key factors affecting women's employment patterns

3.3.1 Location of employment: the importance of the home

Women had three options regarding the location of their employment; they could work from home, outside the home, or a combination of the two. It is clear that in

the case study area many women worked from home. It appears to have offered a number of advantages over the other options. First, women did not have to undertake journeys to and from work and so did not waste time travelling, there was no wear and tear on footwear and clothing, nor did they get so hungry that they needed to consume additional food because of the physical exertion involved in walking long distances. Second, women could, to some extent, fit their employment around their domestic and childcare responsibilities. Childminders were not needed and women could break off from their work to prepare a meal or do some washing. Ada Heather-Bigg suggested in 1894 the value of homework in a rather poetic form. 'Homework allows a married woman to contribute her share to the family maintenance in a way congenial to herself, and on the lines which are consonant with the beauty and stability of family life'.¹

Many of the employments profiled in chapter 2 could be carried on from home; gloving, sewing, providing accommodation, laundry work and some retailing. Gloving was perhaps the most prominent of the home-based employments and allowed domestic flexibility. 'Homeworkers seldom gave more than four days a week to gloving and even on these days household duties have to be done in most cases. The other days are reserved for washing and house cleaning'.²

The presence of young children does not seem to have detracted from production.

Although some persons devote themselves entirely to this occupation [gloving] and make a great many pairs in the course of a week, in the majority of cases the gloves are sewn at leisir (sic) hours and at odd times by the wives and children of the labouring men and tradesmen...³

The census returns show children as young as five involved in gloving. In Leaffield, for example, the 1851 census returns list one gloveress of five years, three of seven years, one of eight years, five each of nine and ten years and four of eleven years. In other areas too, children sewed. In Leicestershire, for example, children helped

their mothers sew socks and stockings at home.⁴ Even if children were not involved in stitching, many gloveresses had young children as Table 2 illustrates.

Table 2 Ages of children of gloveress mothers in Fawler in 1851

| Ages of children | Numbers | % |
|------------------|---------|-----|
| under 1 | 3 | 11 |
| 3-5 | 7 | 25 |
| 6-10 | 6 | 21 |
| 11-15 | 7 | 25 |
| 16-19 | 4 | 14 |
| 20+ | 1 | 4 |
| Total | 28 | 100 |

Source: PRO HO 107/1732

Home work, and gloving in particular, was not only used by women with young children, it was an extremely valuable strategy for elderly women too. Even women with poor mobility or little physical strength could do some sewing. Gloving was a sedentary occupation and even the distribution and collection system did not involve most women in much exertion as elected packwomen distributed and collected bundles of gloves. Sarah Sturmer of Stonesfield was one such 'glove carrier'. She travelled with the weekly waggoner or carter to Woodstock taking bundles of gloves and bringing back unstitched ones. Sometimes a shop was used as a collection point. 'Many women 'did the gloving' by hand in those days. Several brought their bundles of gloves, tied up in red and white handkerchiefs (known locally as bundling handkerchers) to my father's shop to be called for by the carrier's cart', recalled an Ascot-under-Wychwood man.⁵

The main problem with home work was that it was low paid and wages were reduced even further by the fact that women tended to do it on a part-time basis.⁶ However, for women who, for various reasons, did not find it easy to go out to work, it at least provided some additional income. Furthermore, home work continued to be available throughout the second half of the nineteenth century and continues to be valuable for some women in the 1990s.⁷

3.3.2 Duration of employment- flexibility

Flexibility of employment was an important factor in two ways. If need for employment was constant, women moved from one employment to another with as few breaks as possible. For women without a constant need to work, family life cycle changes were often key determinants of ability to manage such as the birth of a child or illness of a husband. Seasonal cycles were also important such as the onset of winter and the time of relative plenty at harvest. Some factors caused temporary short-term need, others caused chronic long-term need for work. A pattern emerged of women, and some men, slipping in and out of employment as needs changed.

Elizabeth Roberts suggests that women who worked after marriage did so because of financial necessity although their ambition was to stop work and stay at home.⁸ How far such ambitions were fulfilled is not clear. Women stopped and started work for a variety of reasons and this is reflected in their attitudes towards their employment. Categorisations of full-time, part-time, permanent and temporary employment, so relevant to the late twentieth century woman, were not primary considerations for poor, rural women in the mid to late nineteenth century. Louise Tilly and Joan Scott's suggestion of women '...putting together a series of jobs to increase their earnings or to earn enough in order to help their families survive' is a reflection of employment priorities.⁹

Women used the flexibility of their employment in two ways; they moved between different types of employment and within an individual employment. The flexibility between different types of employment allowed them to become involved in seasonal work such as specific agricultural tasks. This appears to be particularly evident between gloving and agricultural work. K.S. Woods found that: 'Women and girls employed in glove making are let off for turnip-hoeing, haymaking, fruit picking or potato lifting as the case may be in districts where there are smallholdings'.¹⁰ Also in Oxfordshire, although just outside the case study area, Sid Knight from Filkins recalled that his mother worked in the fields some of the time and at gloving at others.¹¹ This employment pattern appears to have been approved by gloving firms. One Worcester firm reported that the best workers were those who took time off for agricultural work 'They find that the output of these workers is superior in quality and quantity of those who glove all year round...'. The reasons given for this opinion were that eye strain was relieved and that workers felt more refreshed having done a different job.¹²

There is, however, some conflicting evidence which suggests that gloveresses did not always want seasonal agricultural work. Marjorie Filbee suggests: 'The farmworkers' wives do not wish to work in the fields at the seasonal work expected of them because, apart from the financial aspect, they do not wish to roughen their hands which makes gloving more difficult'.¹³

Equally, some women fieldworkers were not keen to be involved in gloving. Women fieldworkers interviewed by Assistant Commissioner Culley at Shipton on Cherwell reported that they could get 9d (4p) a day for 8 hours work but could never make 1d an hour at gloving. They told him that they preferred fieldwork.¹⁴

Despite personal preferences, women had to be flexible, particularly when involved in fieldwork. It may have provided more money than gloving but its seasonal nature meant that women often had to resort to other strategies, some of which were other employments. This seasonal nature of agricultural work is clearly brought out in Ditchley Estate farm records. Extracts from an estate labour book show three women; Ruth Trinder, Mary Beck and Mary Fowler, recorded in the fortnight ending 10th July 1874 as performing haywork at 1/2 (c.6p) per day. Incidentally, the men received 2/4 (c.12p). This carried on for a further two weeks. In the week ending 31st July 1874 the three women were involved in weeding but not constantly. Next, they are recorded doing harvest work for around four weeks and they continued to be employed weeding and picking potatoes until the week ending 23rd October. After that they were not mentioned again until the week ending 13th November when they were employed to weed and rake leaves. After this, they disappear from the record books until the following year; the fortnight ending 12th March 1875, when Ruth Trinder and Mary Beck were recorded as 'thrashing and beating manure'.¹⁵ Winter was a lean time for agricultural work for women, and to a lesser extent, for men. How agricultural seasonality relates other employments is not clear.

Some employments, such as retailing, provided inbuilt flexibility. Women could start off by selling a few home-made items from home; 'Granny Cox' of Yarnton, for example, sold faggots, sweets and wine and her husband made branches into bundles for sale at 1/2d each.¹⁶ A glut of produce might be sold at a market or fair or to a shop. George Dew, the Poor Law Relieving Officer for Bletchington District, which was just outside the case study area, recalled: 'An old Irish woman, Ann Murray, between 70 and 80 years old, found herself, from fatigue & the darkness of the night unable to travel on to Bicester and applied to me for lodging'.¹⁷ It appears that she was travelling from Bristol to Cambridge and she made her living making and selling nightcaps to shops.

Other employments such as sewing, laundry and cleaning had an inbuilt flexibility; women could do a little work or take on a larger workload when in considerable need or when conditions favoured work. Budgets compiled at the end of the nineteenth century show how the wife of a Surrey farm labourer and gardener took in laundry work in the summer months when it was easy to get washing to dry.¹⁸

Gloving was a very flexible employment. It could be carried on to a greater or lesser extent, depending on individual need or family circumstance. It could be a life-time employment, begun in childhood and carried on into old age and it appealed to a wide range of women. The census returns of 1851 show no one type of woman involved in gloving in the case study area; women at all stages in their lifecycles appear to have participated in it.¹⁹ Furthermore, as long as the market remained buoyant, gloving provided employment in the lean winter months when other family members might be unemployed or under-employed. K.S. Woods suggests: 'Gloving has survived where agricultural wages have been low and there has been no other industry for women'.²⁰

In conclusion, flexibility of employment appears to have been an accepted pattern for some women. This flexibility took many forms; women moved in and out of the same or different employments, undertaking greater or lesser amounts of work. Thus the employment profile is much more fluid than appears from the census returns.

3.3.3 Family connections

Family connections involved the passing on of skills from one member of a family to another, from one generation to the next. It was particularly valuable because the skills would be maintained and family ties could be strengthened. In the case

study area most employments available to women were affected by family connections to some extent. Sewing, laundry work, gloving, teaching and trades appear to have been most strongly influenced. Agriculture is another employment where there is thought to be a strong link, but the evidence from the case study area is less clear and mainly comes from the study of one settlement, Milton-under Wychwood.²¹

The influence of family connections operated on two levels. First, through a gender link; women passing on skills from one generation to the next. This is clearly illustrated in gloving where children often learnt to glove from their mothers or grandmothers. In Woodstock it was reported:

Glove stitching, at least at Woodstock, is a home industry which finds occupation for many of the wives of agricultural and other labourers as well as their daughters, of the district. It is no unusual sight in this part of the country in the summer months to see old ladies, over whose heads the snow of at least 60 summers may have passed, sitting outside their neatly arranged cottages, instructing young people, whom one could readily believe to be their granddaughters in the craft which they themselves followed for many a long year.²²

Such traditions could produce 'gloving families' where more than one female member of the household was involved in gloving. In Fawler, the 1851 census shows 18 of the 29 families in the village listed as having at least one gloveress in the family. Of these 18 households, 2 had three gloveresses and 3 households had two.²³

Often, a mother and daughter would work together. The following example comes from the recollections of a woman from Fulbrook, near Burford, at the end of the nineteenth century. It provides a clear timetable of family glove stitching. The woman recalled that, as a girl, she used to start work with her mother at 4am on Monday and Tuesday and work until 9pm with short breaks for meals and

household duties. On Wednesdays the work was taken to Witney on the horse-bus. On Thursday and Friday about half the amount of work was done as at the beginning of the week because of family washing and other duties. Saturday was the grand housework day and Sunday was for Chapel. Together they earned 14/- (70p) a week making three dozen pairs of gloves.²⁴ When mothers gave up work, daughters often continued the tradition. Ann Joles of Finstock, a widow of 76 was classified in the 1851 census as a 'former gloveress'. She was listed as having four unmarried gloveress daughters, between 39 to 49 years.²⁵

Within this gender link it was not only immediate family members who worked together. Charlotte Harris was listed in the 1851 census returns for Combe as a spinster of 51, a gloveress and head of household. With her lived her sister 'Amey' aged 38, and two nieces, aged 17, all gloveresses. In addition a niece aged 9 was listed as an apprentice.²⁶ This pattern of employment could be termed a gendered family strategy and evidence from the 1851 census shows it operating very clearly within gloving, sewing and laundry work. Unfortunately, the social implications of gendered family strategies are not clear from the available sources

Family connections at the second level can be termed a non-gendered family strategy. Here, whole families were involved in the same or allied employments. This was particularly evident in three employments; gloving, farming and trades. In the case of gloving, family members were involved in different processes, mainly divided by gender. Thus in Charlbury, for example, the 1851 census records William Witham as a glove cutter, his wife and his four daughters, aged between 15 and 21, as gloveresses, and his son as a glover's apprentice.²⁷

In farming, the family connection can be seen in two ways; between farmer husband and wife and between farm labourer husband, wife and family. There have been some suggestions that family connections between the farmer husband and his

wife altered in the second half of the nineteenth century; the impact of domestic ideology may have led to farmers' wives withdrawing from farm work. Richard Jefferies lamented:

But the tenant farmer's wife who made the butter and cheese and even helped to salt the bacon, where is she now? Where are the healthy daughters that used to assist her? The wife is a fine lady...the daughter is pale and interesting... while a skilled person, hired at a price rules the dairy.²⁸

The diaries of John Simpson Calvertt, the tenant of a number of farms around Leafield, also show that his wife and daughters had little to do with the running of the farms. Many of the entries relate to the places visited by the members of his family.

June 14th 1878 'Drove Alice [his eldest daughter] to Blenheim Palace and attended a Bazaar...'

August 5th 1878 'Drove Elizabeth [his second daughter] and Miss Slack to a Garden Party in the Grammar School Avenue, Witney...'²⁹

Conversely, other sources suggest a greater involvement of the farmer's wife in the running of the farm. In the middle of the nineteenth century James Caird referred to the Cheshire farmer's wife as '...the most important person in the establishment' because of her dairy skills.³⁰ However, the degree of involvement of farmers' wives depended on a number of other factors such as farm size and type, local traditions of employment and profitability.

The second type of farming family connection occurred within labouring families, where most or all family members were involved in agricultural labour. A nineteenth century government report suggests: '...even when the gain of individuals is very small in a family, yet by their all working together and assisting with contributions they make out a living'.³¹

Family involvement is clearly shown in Milton-under-Wychwood where the 1851 census returns suggest unusually high numbers of female farmworkers. Some 98 women, 40% of the female population of 12 years and over were listed as agricultural labourers. Of these, 75 (80%) were married and over half were under 40 years (53%). Of all the married male farm labourers in the village only seven had wives who were not farm labourers. Children were often involved in agricultural labour too. For example, two of Adam Smith's four children, aged ten and nine, along with his wife, were engaged in farm work. A further example from this village is the family of Elizabeth Williams. She was 52 and listed as an agricultural labourer, her son aged 18 was a shepherd, another son aged 16 and a daughter of 14 were agricultural labourers. In addition, her 12 year old son was a plough boy, her 10 year old son was a shepherd and she had one other child aged 7.³²

Sometimes there were financial advantages in appointing a family member as this teaching example illustrates. At a meeting of the Charlbury School Board on 10th February 1888 it was decided to appoint a male principal teacher, two female assistant teachers and a monitress. However, at a later meeting on 24th February it was decided that instead of appointing two female assistant teachers, the principal teacher should be a married man and his wife would be the assistant teacher, thus saving the cost of one assistant teacher.³³

The degree of female involvement through family links in trades and retail employments is not clear because of the lack of sources. It is known that women sometimes became involved in family work on the death of a husband as the following example of an advert placed in a local directory illustrates. Mrs Garnett of Woodstock '...begs to return thanks for the past favours conferred upon her late husband, and to state that she continues the business as usual and trusts to meet with the same support'.³⁴

Family tradition appears to have been an important factor in determining male and female employment patterns, both within individual families and at a community level. Family connections within settlements are considered in the next sub-section.

3.3.3.1 Settlement patterns

As families passed on skills down the generations so a community tradition of those skills was built up, sometimes influencing women to follow certain employments. Gloving, for example, showed a strong settlement pattern both regionally and within individual settlements. Regionally, it would seem that Woodstock, Charlbury and their surrounding villages exhibited a strong gloving tradition.³⁵ On an individual settlement basis certain villages appear to have had a notable gloving tradition. Table 3 illustrates 12 settlements in the case study area where gloving had a considerable numerical significance, despite the under enumeration associated with the census.

Table 3 Settlements in the case study area where more than 25% of females aged 12 years and over were listed as gloveresses in the 1851 census

| Settlement | No. gloveresses | % female population 12 years and over |
|------------|-----------------|--|
| Wootton | 91 | 39 |
| Leafield | 138 | 54 |
| Finstock | 91 | 61 |
| Fawler | 25 | 57 |
| Chilson | 25 | 41 |
| Langley | 8 | 35 |
| Taston | 14 | 25 |

| | | |
|---------------|-----|----|
| Stonesfield | 114 | 52 |
| Combe | 64 | 31 |
| Bladon | 55 | 37 |
| Old Woodstock | 53 | 31 |
| Dean | 17 | 30 |

Source: PRO HO 107/1730,1732

It is not surprising that with some settlements having such a large number of gloveresses that, over time, they became well known for gloving. The manager of Morley's, one of the glove houses, commented: 'There are whole villages of born glovemakers: it is quite a hereditary talent, and families generation after generation are celebrated for their peculiar skill'.³⁶ Leaffield, with over 50% of females aged 12 years and over involved in gloving appears to have exhibited a camaraderie among gloveresses; not only did they work together, they played together too.

The Leaffield girls made gloves, and very seldom 'went into service'. They met in each other's houses so that they could talk as they worked, and in cold weather sat around a large ash-pan which they replenished with red-hot coals to warm their feet... When it was too dark to 'glove' the girls danced on the green... The gloves were collected and taken to Woodstock.³⁷

In conclusion, family tradition at its most basic level was something entirely natural, indeed so commonplace that it was rarely recorded in any detail. It had advantages for individual families; the free passage of skills and sometimes equipment. For women who did not have family employment connections domestic service was an option. Not only did this work provide accommodation and food, but sometimes clothing too. There were plenty of opportunities for this work because of the proximity of Oxford with its colleges, hotels and wealthy families. Country girls were sometimes specifically requested as the following advert illustrates: 'Wanted. A young girl about 16; must be fond of children. From the

country preferred. Apply Mrs. Stevens, Ancient Britton, Blackfriars Road, Oxford'.³⁸

3.3.4 Gender

The sexual division of labour should be seen as part of the larger gender order. Women's work is doubly gendered; first by being confined to 'feminine' tasks, whether paid or unpaid, and second, being subordinate to men's work both at home and in the work force.³⁹

This section will attempt to assess whether women's work in the case study area was, as Jane Lewis suggests, 'doubly gendered'. In the first part of the quotation reference is made to 'feminine tasks' and certainly most of the jobs that were available to women fit within this category in that they were based on domestic activities. Domestic-related employment did however provide women with work in a sphere they knew well and where they could to some degree fit employment around domestic routines. John Benson suggests: 'Indeed, it is ironic that it should have been such traditional domestic tasks which offered working-class women one of their few opportunities for greater emancipation'.⁴⁰

A second point in the gender quotation states that women's work was regarded as subordinate to men's work both at home and in the work force.⁴¹ Many contemporary sources show an explicit or implicit condemnation of working women. Even in jobs where women were employed with men they were very much confined to the routine, less specialised tasks such as shoe binding within shoe making and weeding within agriculture. The manager of Morley's, one of the largest London gloving houses, made this clear when providing evidence for a government report.

On his [the agent's] premises a few men are employed to cut out, and then the various parts of the glove are given out to be sewn together. The people

who do that are the wives and daughters of agricultural labourers scattered throughout the neighbouring community. This is purely domestic work; there is no such thing known as a woman getting ten or a dozen people to do the work which she has received from the agent there.⁴²

Outright condemnation of women going out to work was found in a parish magazine editorial for the village of Spelsbury.

...We wish to state that it was decided at the last meeting of the Board School that a child's absence from school is insufficiently excused by the statement 'Mother has gone to work'. Apparently, the Board thinks that 'Mother' would be better off at home. Indeed mothers may find something to do at home, if they try, and especially where there are children.⁴³

Such a quotation is only useful up to a point because it offers a prescriptive viewpoint, encompassing the domestic ideology of the time that a woman's place was in the home. Eve Hostettler argued however, that it was reasons of economy that determined the views of farmers. 'The sexual division of labour concerned them [the farmers] purely because of the relative cheapness of the women fieldworkers and the ease with which her labour could be hired or dispensed with...'⁴⁴

The commonplace domestic nature of much of the work carried out by poor rural women meant that it did not attract the public gaze and thus come under close scrutiny. Laundry work was one such activity.

As long as laundry work remained a small scale, technologically unsophisticated trade, often performed by isolated women in their own or their employer's homes, contemporaries were little concerned to investigate, document or regulate it. The trade was seen as a strictly private arrangement between household and 'outdoor servant' or small laundry owner.⁴⁵

By contrast, teaching was a much more public employment and attracted greater attention from contemporary observers including hefty criticism for some female

teachers. Inspectors at Begbroke school found the teacher, Ann Fowler, to be lacking.

The teacher is untrained and not suited in the Art of Teaching. In very bad weather she does not even come to school! The distance from her house at Kidlington being too great. At the same time it's fair to add that this present 'Governess' acts to the best of her knowledge and ability.⁴⁶

The report was patronising in tone, suggesting feminine physical weakness. By contrast, a report on the Stonesfield school, apparently remodelled since the last inspection, clearly met with the (male) inspector's approval. His verdict was imbued with gendered assumptions on the vigour and intellect of the male and the domestic skills of the female. 'The effect of the change from a mistress only to a master only school has been exactly what might have been anticipated viz: boys: more of a higher order-more vigorous and energy dispelled. Girls fewer-needlework not prominent'.⁴⁷

Many sources show predictable views of women's work being subordinate to that of men's although they do not reveal how women themselves perceived their work. There appears to be some evidence that women exercised some choice of employment. In the Thame Poor Law Union of south Oxfordshire a report published in the 1890's stated:

As to women, for agricultural purposes, they are extremely scarce, and except in Cambridgeshire and Berkshire, very rarely employed...The only work which women *care* to do in the field now is haymaking and harvest, and even that they are not always willing to undertake.⁴⁸

Unfortunately, the reasons for this reluctance are not made clear although the quotation hints at the downward social extension of domestic ideology. Gender shaped employment opportunities open to women and there was a good fit between the opportunities for work and the skills of the women.

This analysis has suggested a number of factors which affected womens' employment in rural areas, but it leaves many areas unclear or untouched. The numbers of women who worked may never be fully known, largely because of the nature of much of their employment; part-time, casual and seasonal. Jane Lewis refers to the number of women in casual work as 'literally incalculable'.⁴⁹

3.4 Conclusion

This chapter has focused on the main factors which have determined female employment patterns in the case study area and the following conclusions were reached.

First, a wide variety of employments were exhibited in the case study area. The standard view that agriculture and domestic service were the main employments was not the case and gloving appears to have been equally, if not more important. In addition, there were a number of largely invisible employments such as cleaning and sewing work . There were two important sub-points regarding the variety of employment. First, women appear to have made employment choices such as the preference of gloving over agriculture. Second, the role of family relationships was significant; in determining the type of employment, the passing on of skills and sometimes in providing a job.

Second, employment was an important, often first stop strategy for poor women in an attempt to make ends meet. It provided ready money, if in relatively small irregular amounts.⁵⁰ The nature of much of the employment available appears to have been particularly suited to short-term needs. This could cover a crisis, but for women with long-term employment needs they sometimes had to put together a range of jobs to keep the employment flow going. In the case study area gloving and agriculture were matched by some women, with laundry work in the summer.

This suggests that women shifted in and out of employment and that to focus on linear occupational boundaries may not always be accurate.

The lateral method of viewing employment resulted in fluid employment profiles. Factors affecting employment such as age and marital status had a far less determining influence on patterns than might be thought. Gloving, for example, attracted women at a variety of stages in their lifecycles. Other employments such as teaching and retailing were prevalent among unsupported women. Settlement patterns had a strong determining influence in the case of gloving.

Certain employments provided more opportunities than others; nursing and teaching provided relatively few for poor women, domestic related work such as sewing, cleaning and washing provided far more. Many domestic based employments matched the skills of poor women. Furthermore, they were generally ignored by middle-class contemporaries who criticised the more visible female employments such as fieldwork. As many of these employments were small-scale, casual and relatively hidden they may have remained largely unchanged during the period. The 1891 census returns show similar female employment types to those of 1851 but the change or continuity of numbers employed may never be fully known. Overall, the evidence is inconclusive.⁵¹

Employment needs to be kept in perspective as a strategy. It was often a first-stop strategy but was rarely the only strategy used by women. The final part of the employment equation is to examine what women obtained from employment; obviously there were rewards, but there were also limitations and these were the hidden costs of employment. This will be explored fully in the next chapter.

Footnotes to Chapter 3

1. Ada Heather-Bigg, 'The wife's contribution to the family income', *Economic Journal*, vol.4, 1894, p58.
2. K.S. Woods, *The rural...*p138. The whole of section 3 relates to gloving.
3. *Children's Employment Commission*. PP 1843, vol.xiii, p451.
4. PRO HO 107/1732; The Economic Society, *Family budgets: being the income and expenditure of twenty eight British households, 1891-1894 compiled by the Economic Club*. P.S. King and Son, 1896. See budgets 25-28.
5. T.E. Schultz, *The Woodstock...*p149; PRO HO 107/1730; N.L. Leyland and J.E Troughton, *Glovemaking...*p10; D.M. Warner, *My personal memories*. [n.p.], {c.1970}, [p3]. There is no precise date for these memories but the one in the text appears to relate to the late nineteenth century.
6. See chapter 4, section 4.2.2.1 on wages.
7. S. Pennington and B. Westover, *A hidden...*examine homework up to 1985.
8. Elizabeth Roberts, *Women's...*p73.
9. Louise A. Tilly and Joan W. Scott, *Women, work and the family*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1978, p46.
10. K.S. Woods, *The rural...*pp.51-52.
11. Sid Knight, *A Cotswold lad*. Phoenix House, 1969, p142.
12. K.S. Woods, *The rural...*pp.140-141.
13. Marjorie Filbee, *Cottage industries*. Newton Abbott: David and Charles, 1982, p73.
14. PP 1868-69... Part II, p344.
15. O.A., *Account Books for Day Labour*, Ditchley Estate. DIL 1/q/8a-c, July 1874-June 1877.
16. Joan Roe, *A peep into the past through Yarnton parish books 1610-1852*. [Pr. pub. 1986].
17. B.L. G.J. Dew Papers Temporary box no. D, MSS. D.D. Dew , 18th November 1873.
18. The Economic Society, *Family...*Budget 21, p50. Also note budget 20, p50; a Surrey woodman earned extra money repairing clocks and watches in the evening.
19. PRO HO 107/1730, 1732.
20. K.S. Woods, *The rural...*p23.
21. Further details of this settlement are provided later in the chapter.
22. H.A. Jones, 'Where Tommy Atkins gloves are made', *Black and White*, 3rd December 1898. [no page no.].

23. PRO HO 107/1732.
24. D.N. Bates, *The agricultural...* p68.
25. PRO HO 107/1732.
26. *ibid.*
27. *ibid.*
28. Richard Jefferies, *Hodge...* p118.
29. Celia Miller (ed.), *Rain...* pp.50-51.
30. James Caird, *English...* pp.252-253. (Letter xxxi).
31. PP 1843 vol.xiii, p451.
32. All data on Milton-under-Wychwood is from PRO HO 107/1731.
33. O.A., *Charlbury School Board Minute Book T/SM4*, 1896-1901.
34. *Post Office Directory* 1887, Woodstock, p338. Mrs Garrett sold toys, fancy goods, baskets, views of Blenheim, stationery, glass, china, tobacco, cabinet goods, confectionery and cigars. See also Thea Vigne and Alun Howkins, 'The small shopkeeper in industrial and market towns', in Geoffrey Crossick (ed.), *The lower middle-class in Britain 1870-1914*. Croom Helm, 1977, pp.184-209. See the example of Charlie Clifton, a grocer from Bicester in the early twentieth century. 'Wives helped in the shop in those days, little businesses, you couldn't exist without your wife.' pp.197-198.
35. See section on gloving in chapter 2, section 2.4.2.
36. PP 1864 vol.xxii, p255. Cited in Duncan Bythell, *The sweated trades. Outwork in nineteenth century Britain*. Batsford, 1978, p118.
37. Muriel Groves, *A history of Shipton under Wychwood*. G. & C. Brook & Co.. 1934, pp.57-58. Memories of George Pratt Hambidge, born 1840, Field Assarts, Leafield.
38. *Oxford Weekly News*, Wednesday 25th December 1889.
39. Jane Lewis, *Sexual divisions...* p89.
40. John Benson, *The penny...* p131.
41. Gender within the home is considered in Chapter 5, section 5.1.1.
42. PP 1864 vol.xxii. Cited in Duncan Bythell, *The sweated...* p118.
43. *Chipping Norton Deanery Magazine*. Spelsbury 1884, editorial.
44. Eve Hostettler, 'Gourlay Steell and the sexual division of labour', *History Workshop Journal*, no.4, Autumn 1977, p99.
45. Patricia E. Malcolmson, *English...* p5.

46. O.A., Ms. Oxford dioc. papers c.51/1. *Report of the schools in the Deanery of Woodstock, Oxon.* Inspected 1854. Begbroke School.

47. *ibid.* Stonesfield School.

48. *Royal Commission on Labour 1893-94*, vol.xxxv. The agricultural labourer, vol. 1. part 2. reports by Mr Cecil Chapman, 1893, p16.

49. Jane Lewis, *Women in England 1870-1950: sexual divisions and social change*. Brighton: Wheatsheaf Books. 1984, p55.

50. See Chapter 4 for the rewards of employment.

51. 1851 census HO 107/1730 and HO 107/1732 and 1891 census RG 12/1173 and RG 12/1178

Chapter 4. The Value of employment: rewards and limitations

4.1 Introduction

In the concluding section of Chapter 3 it was suggested that employment was often a first stop strategy for women needing to make ends meet; indeed, employment is an obvious course of action when in financial need because of the immediate monetary gain. Chapter 4 sets out to explore the value of employment in its widest sense; its gains and costs, in an attempt to assess its overall value as a strategy against poverty.

To this end, Chapter 4 is divided into two sections. Section 4.2 will examine the gains women could make by employment. These include payment both in money and in kind, the fostering of self-esteem, promotion and the provision of social contact. Section 4.3 will examine the limitations employment brought or was perceived to bring. These include the perceived effects of employment on morality, education and the home and family, the hidden costs of employment, physical problems created by employment and the casual nature of many employment opportunities. The concluding part of this chapter will offer an assessment of the overall value of employment for poor rural women and address the issue as to whether employment as a strategy against poverty was worth the effort women had to give it.

4.2 The rewards of employment

This section examines four areas where women appear to have gained from employment. First, payment, which could have been in the form of wages, payment in kind or both. Second, some women seem to have obtained a degree of

self-esteem from their work. Third, for a few it brought promotion and finally, for some it provided social contact.

4.2.1 Payment

Women appear to have received payment in three ways; wages, payment in kind or both, however, the casual, hidden nature of much women's work makes it problematic to evaluate the amounts of money brought in overall.¹ In most employments monetary gain depended on a number of factors such as the availability of work, the skill of the worker, the hours worked, methods of payment and deductions. This was particularly true of gloving. Although the employment records of the Oxfordshire gloving industry have been lost; it is debatable whether detailed records of outworkers were ever kept. Government reports contain details of wage levels but they do not reflect the variables which affected employment.

In the Report of the Commission on the Employment of Children, Young Persons and Women in Agriculture, published 1868-69, a Woodstock glove manufacturer suggested:

A good sewer makes up to one dozen gloves per week and gets paid 5s. to 7s. An average woman will earn 4s. to 5s. a week when one can get constant work which is rarely the case now. Women for 7 or 8 miles around sew gloves.²

It is difficult to know what constitutes 'a good sewer' or 'an average woman'; level of skill, hours worked or both. In Oxfordshire George Culley, an Assistant Commissioner for the above Report found that a girl in the glove factory in Woodstock could earn between 3/- to 5/- per week (15p to 25p) and if at home 2/6 (12.5p). A woman working at home could earn 3/-. 'I was informed that when trade was brisk a good sewer could earn from 4s. to 6s. a week, working from 10 to 12 hours per day', commented George Culley.³

Ten to twelve hours a day is a considerable amount of time and it is clear from the evidence of the glove stitchers themselves that they did not generally put in such hours. Consequently their earnings were lower than the 4/- to 6/- suggested.

Many a mother has had to toil in this way during the years in which she could least spare the time and energy from her home duties. People in one village 'were regular cowed down' one of the older women in one of the principal gloving villages said.⁴

Even putting in long hours did not always bring in much money. Mrs. Walter Huckens of Combe commented: 'I have been at work hard all day at gloving, I haven't earned 5d (2p)'.⁵

At the end of the century women earned about the same as in the middle. Maud Davies, in her research on the village of Corsley in Wiltshire found, in the early twentieth century, women with a home to look after seldom earned more than 2/- or 2/6 a week whereas girls living at home, because they could spend more time working, earned 4/-.⁶

Women earned relatively little at gloving, even if working constantly, and it is clear that many women did not.⁷ Furthermore, money received for work was, in some cases, not without obligations. Evidence provided by Mrs Gardiner, a gloveress from Stonesfield, clearly illustrates the unfairness of the truck system. How widespread this system was is not clear.

A girl of 16 could earn 2s. to 2/6 per week, working all day. Girls begin to earn a little at glovemaking at 10 or 11 years of age. I get gloves from Mr Money of Woodstock; he pays in money and has no shop. Mr Doggett and Mr Pritchett make us take money in tea, or candles or sugar etc. within a few pence of what we get. If I want 1/6 they make me spend 1/3 in the shop, or they would 'sack' me i.e. give me no more work. They sell sugar at 5 1/2d a

pound when we could get it at 4 1/2d if we had ready money. Candles they charge 6 1/2d instead of 6d.⁸

Although gloving wages were low, the employment at least offered a steady income. In agriculture, wages appear to have been higher but the work could be casual and was certainly seasonal in nature, with wage levels dependant on a number of variables such as time of year, hours worked, type of work, the skills of the worker, and, it has been suggested, assessed in part as a proportion of the male wage rate.⁹

One of the best sources for discovering what women fieldworkers earned are farm wage books such as those used by Celia Miller in her pioneering study of Gloucestershire female farm workers.¹⁰ In the case study area the records of the Ditchley Estate are particularly useful. An examination of the Ditchley Estate Farm Account Books, 1856-1873, reveals female payment to have been between 6-10d (2.5-4p) a day, with considerably more at harvest time and haymaking.¹¹

Fig. 10 Summaries of female labour participation taken from the Ditchley Account Books

10th-17th October 1856. Two girls pulling up potatoes, 6 days at 6d. a day.
17th-24th April 1857. Four girls, 6 days at 8d.(3p) a day.
19th-25th June 1857. Six women at 8d. a day. 24th-31st July 1859. Eliza and Sarah Launchbury 10d.(4.5p) a day, Mrs Trinder and Mrs Millen 10d. a day, Mary Quarterman 10d. a day, Fanny Quarterman 10d. a day, Sara Howes 9d. a day.
3rd August 1861. Haymaking. Women 6/-(30p) a day, men 10/-(50p).
Harvest fortnight ending 30th August 1861, women 12/10(64p) per day in some cases.
Fortnight ending 25th April 1862. Elizabeth Castle for steam ploughing 1/8(8p) per day.

Source: O.A., DIL I/e/2a-e. Account Books, 1856-1873, Ditchley Estate; 2a Model Farm and 2b August 1861-July 1862.

Wage rates on an estate farm may well have been generous: certainly the day labour daily rate is considerably more than that of the glove stitchers, particularly those working part-time although the problems with field work have to be taken into account when comparing wage rates with those of gloving. When field work was available it was generally full-time, women had to leave their children alone or in the care of someone else, it was physically exhausting work and involved wear and tear of footwear and clothing. Female fieldwork rates were not uniform. The Ditchley Model Farm Account Books showed two types of female worker. Some listed were anonymous; 'six women at 6d. a day'; others are mentioned by name. The Fulwell Farm Account Books, also from the Ditchley Estate, show a number of women employed regularly. The accounts cover the late 1870s and show a rise in wages, to around 1/- a day from around 8d a day in the late 1850s as shown in figure 10. The Fulwell Farm records also show the involvement of the women in a range of farm work including dairying.¹²

Fig.11 Summaries of female labour participation taken from the Fulwell Farm Account Books on the Ditchley Estate

26th October 1877. Three women/girls digging potatoes, removing twitch for 1/- a day. Mrs Hedges for service to under carter and dairy 5/-(25p) (£1 for 4 weeks).

November 1877. No women employed in the fields. Mrs Hedges as above entry. Mrs Hitchen 5 days for churning and mending sacks 1/-. One woman employed for 3.5 days but no reason given.

29th March 1878. Mrs Titchenor and Mrs Bowden gathering stones and Mrs Titchenor for churning (butter day).

2nd May 1878. Mrs Titchenor, Mrs Bowden and two extra women thrashing
1/4(12p)

Source: O.A., Fulwell Farm Account Books, Ditchley Estate. DIL 1/q/9c.

The Ditchley Estate records show the minutiae of daily employment and it is vital to have access to such information to allow detailed comment on the participation of women in fieldwork. Even so, its financial value is difficult to determine and women may have worked in other employments as well. Furthermore, the impact of gender on task allocation by farmers is not always clear although Celia Miller suggests that female labour was more attractive [financially] to farmers for at least six months of the year, particularly after the depression in agriculture.¹³

Although some farmers may have favoured female employees, contemporary observers, critical of women working, were vociferous in putting forward their views that the disadvantages of fieldwork offset any of its financial advantages. All the more unusual therefore to find a Government report which reached a different conclusion.

The labour of women in the fields (whatever may be its disadvantages, and however desirous it may be that it should not be necessary) is under the present circumstances of great advantage to the family, since it adds that amount of income to a family which relieves the pressure of want, and provides shoes and clothing, and pays the rent, and thus enables the whole family to be better fed...¹⁴

Gloving and agriculture are the best documented employments in terms of financial gain. Of the many casual jobs undertaken by women, few have been recorded, so the net gain cannot be assessed precisely. Amounts of work varied and with some jobs there were costs to offset against earnings, such as soap and fuel in laundry work. Maud Davies, researching at the turn of the century suggested that the Corsley women made just 1/- to 2/- (5p-10p) a week this way, whereas The

Economic Society budgets from the end of the nineteenth century suggest a figure of 5/- (25p) a week.¹⁵ Cleaning was another relatively hidden employment; so commonplace and mundane that it was not deemed worthy of recording by contemporaries. Pamela Horn suggests women could earn 1/- a day plus a meal by char work.¹⁶ Other sources show considerable variation on this figure. The entries in the Ditchley Account Books reveal from 2/6 a week to 2/- a day depending on the nature of the work.¹⁷

Plain sewing brought in very little. Mrs Bowerman of Kidlington commented: 'Last week I got 3d.(1p) for a bit of sewing; so we had 12/3(61p)'; her husband being a milkman earning 12/-(60p) week.¹⁸ Garment sewing could command higher rates. Maud Davies suggested that the Corsley seamstresses could earn considerably more by making garments; 3/6 (17p) for a shirt or blouse and up to £1 a week overall.¹⁹

For a poor girl who could obtain a teaching position and a qualification wages were still low and there was a clear gender differential, as the following example from Charlbury illustrates. A male principal teacher was paid £80 plus 20% Government grant, two female teachers were paid £50 plus 10% and £15 plus 5% respectively. The monitress was paid £7 14/-(70p). In the Infant school the female principal received £60 and the Assistant £15, raised on 3rd August 1888 to £20.²⁰

Domestic service provided variable financial rewards. The records of the Ditchley Estate house servants between 1893-1899 only state a servant's name and wages. Attempts to cross check the names against those in the 1891 census returns for Ditchley provided no matching names. However, as both the census and the Ditchley record book appear to record servants in decreasing order of seniority, some suggestions regarding wages can be made. George Russell appears to have been the butler and in 1893 he was paid £55 plus beer (£5) while Mrs Edwards was

the housekeeper and earned £35 plus beer (£4) in 1893. The housemaids appear to have earned £12 rising to £14 by 1898.²¹ Although general servants were low paid, once experienced they could expect their wages to rise and, if they gained a particular skill, such as the ability to cook, they not only earned extra money but gained a degree of responsibility too.

From the information available on wages the following conclusions can be reached. First, wages were not only low to live on but also when compared with those of men. Nancy Osterud suggests one of the consequences of this was that it '...reinforced their [women's] status as supplementary rather than primary breadwinners, for their incomes were insufficient to ensure their own security, let alone enable them to support dependants'.²²

Similarly, Maud Davies, in her research on Corsley, found that female gloveresses in the village were unable to support themselves by this work.

No case has been found where a single woman or widow is able to support herself by this work, though several women in receipt of poor relief add a little to their incomes by gloving. It must, therefore, be considered entirely a parasitic industry.²³

Wages alone appear to have been generally insufficient for a woman to support herself, although it is vital to stress that wages were not the only way women managed. Payment in kind was another way in which a woman could be reimbursed.

Assessing payment in kind is even more problematic than measuring the overall rewards of wages paid in money. Payment in kind could be total or combined with wages. Although it was largely unrecorded, agriculture and domestic service appear to be the most useful types of employment for finding sources referring to such payments. Women working in the fields sometimes received beer money and

meals. George Swerford of Filkins, near Burford, recalled the celebrations after haymaking at the farm where his mother worked. ‘...and the farmer weighed all the women on the scales he weighed the sacks on. They turned hay for him, and when it was ricked they had tea. They then had singing, and at 8 o’clock they had beer’.²⁴ Domestic servants received accommodation, food, sometimes a uniform and cast-off clothing from their employers. Flora Thompson suggested that girls entering service, their ‘petty place’, often received far more than a wage.

The wages were small, often only a shilling a week; but the remuneration did not end with the money payment. Material...was given to them to make their underwear, and the Christmas gift of a best frock or a winter coat was common. Caps and aprons and morning print dresses, if worn, were provided by the employer.²⁵

Washerwomen too sometimes received meals and cast-off clothing if they had young families.²⁶ However, little evidence has been kept on this form of payment and the extent of it may never be fully known.

Despite the focus on monetary payment, it is hard to quantify the gains made from the receipt of wages. Sara Horrell and Jane Humphries have attempted this using a data set of household budgets between 1789 and 1865 taken from 59 sources. They suggest that women and children contributed between 18-22% of family income but overall they stress the value of male earnings, concluding: ‘...only in the case of outworkers did women and children play a persistent and substantial role in the sourcing of income’.²⁷

This was true of the glove stitchers in the case study area at least in terms of persistence, if not substance. The importance of regular, if low paid work, should not be underestimated. Thus fieldwork for example might provide higher wages than certain other employments but it was often temporary in nature. Sara Horrell and Jane Humphries commented: ‘In agricultural families the relatively high

participation rates of wives and children generated at most 5% of family incomes in high-waged and 12% in low-waged counties; which clearly reflects the seasonal and discontinuous nature of the work undertaken'.²⁸

Ultimately trying to quantify the value of wages earned can only provide a partial picture as it fails to address payment in kind and makes no reference to other strategies used by women to bring in both money and resources. Financial reward is the most obvious of the advantages of employment, but there were a number of other benefits and these will be addressed in sections 4.2.2 to 4.2.4.

4.2.2 Self-esteem

There is a tendency to think of employment opportunities for poor rural women in a negative way; limited in range, with an emphasis on domestic type jobs, poor working conditions which could create feelings of powerlessness. Yet Elizabeth Roberts suggests: 'Earning money on your own account, careful budgeting and skilful cooking were all strategies of which women were justly proud'.²⁹

No sources could be found to support this point in the case study area although there was evidence of public recognition of some types of employment. Some settlements were highly regarded for women's skills. One source suggests that skilled labour was sought in West Oxfordshire by gloving firms from Worcester and Somerset and certain families were celebrated for their skills.³⁰ Similarly, in agriculture, women could gain public recognition. Mrs Mary Millington from Ardley, near Bicester, was, at the Royal Show at Oxford in 1870, the winner of the best managed farm; 890 acres, of which 820 were arable.³¹

It was not possible to explore how far feelings of self-worth created perceptions of power although Judy Lown, in her study of Courtauld silk mill workers, found the

effects of segregation and philanthropy had the opposite effect on workers than the one intended. She suggests that women ‘...developed a power base of their own from which to distance themselves from middle-class ideals and initiate actions for improvements in their conditions’.³²

As well as a public power base, Joan Perkin suggests employment could create a private power base in the home, particularly when husbands were unlikely to earn enough or regularly enough to keep their family. She suggests: ‘This made for a rough kind of equality between husbands and wives’.³³ No firm conclusions could be reached. One woman thought of gloving as ‘slavery’, whereas the son of a gloveress emphasised a much more positive side to it.

She was by her own fire-side and not in a stuffy belt-driven factory. She could lay down her work and do something else for a change when tired, and above all she was contributing a few badly needed shillings to the household economy.³⁴

4.2.3 Promotion

For a small number of poor women, employment lead to additional responsibilities; promotion in some way. A glove sewer, for example, could be promoted to a pack woman; a carrier of unsewn and sewn gloves. Such a position involved public recognition of a woman’s responsibility as she was usually elected by other glove stitchers.³⁵

Sometimes work could grow so that women needed to employ others to help them. Maud Davies found that some women took in so much washing that they needed to employ help.³⁶ In domestic service girls usually started as a general servant and worked their way up to more specific jobs such as cook or housekeeper.³⁷ Teaching was another employment were women could gain promotion. ‘...Schoolteaching offered intelligent girls from relatively humble backgrounds the

chance to obtain a professional training and qualification which enabled them to enjoy modest independence'.³⁸

4.2.4 Social contact

For some women work brought social contact, particularly meeting with other women. As well as the fellowship aspect, social contact could lead to the sharing of resources such as heating and lighting. There is evidence that this took place to a certain extent in gloving.³⁹

4.2.5 Conclusion: the rewards of employment

Section 4.2 has examined the rewards of employment; financial, social and emotional. It is vital to think laterally when considering the value of employment; monetary gain is only part of the equation. Elizabeth Roberts suggests this is because of the part-time nature of much women's work which '...cannot be evaluated in monetary terms, but because so many women were involved, it must have been of considerable significance to the economy at large'.⁴⁰

The predominantly part-time nature of women's employment should not automatically lead to the idea that women's work was of secondary importance to male employment. Women were not a reserve army of labour although from an employer's perspective this may have been their function. They were intimately involved and in some cases made vital contributions to the household economy through the bringing in of wages and other ways as well. However, employment was not only gain; it did not automatically lead to making ends meet and the limitations of employment will be explored in the next section.

4.3 The limitations of employment

There is a significant problem when attempting to assess the limitations of female employment because, although the documentation on this subject appears to be extensive, it is not easy to balance the perceived problems against what was reality. Contemporary observers frequently stressed the unsuitability of employment for women, considering their place to be firmly within the home.⁴¹ This section begins with a discussion of these perceived problems and then moves to a general discussion of the actual problems found when examining the case study area.

4.3.1 Contemporary middle-class observations on the problems of female employment

There appear to be three problems associated with female employment that particularly concerned contemporary middle-class commentators. These were the effects of employment on morality, education and the home and the family. How far these were problems to the women themselves is debatable but they cannot be dismissed outright and need to be explored.

4.3.1.1. The effects of employment on morality

Many contemporary middle-class commentators believed employment had a detrimental effect on morality in two ways. First, it supposedly made women more masculine as this quotation about female fieldworkers illustrates.

...Not only does it almost unsex a woman in dress, gait, manners and character, making her rough, coarse, clumsy and masculine; but it generates a further very pregnant social mischief by unfitting her or indisposing her for a woman's proper duties at home.⁴²

Second, employment was thought to lead to improper liaisons. George Dew noted in his diary that a ploughwoman had become pregnant by the head carter whilst employed as an undercarter.⁴³ In such situations men might be able to take advantage of female employees but it would be wrong to suggest that employment caused the immorality. Gloving was also criticised in this way. The vicar of Combe strongly attacked the occupation.

Gloving is an employment well nigh universal amongst girls and begins in their eighth year. From the fluctuations in the gloving trade it is not a very reliable means of subsistence and seems to give occasion to immorality from the fact that the girls, when it is dark and they can no longer work, walk out to meet youths who are returning from their work.⁴⁴

These comments reveal a lack of understanding both of village life and the work practices associated with gloving. Good light was needed for stitching and it was difficult and expensive to work after dark.

A further criticism related to the way women spent their money; any spending on luxury items such as fine clothes and bits of ribbon were thought of as fripperies and encouraged contemporary observers to believe that this dress style was intended to incite immorality. An example of this attitude occurs in a novel by Mrs. Henry Wood. Caution must be exercised in using fictitious examples but it is known that the author lived in Worcester, a major gloving centre, and her description of gloving in the novel suggests a detailed knowledge of the industry. One of her characters, Mrs. Buffle, complains about the gloveresses.

They be the improvidentist things in the world, mum, these gloveress girls. Sundays they be dressed up as grand as queens, flowers inside their bonnets and ribbons (sic) out, a-setting the churches and chapels alight with their finery; often off for walks with their sweethearts in the afternoon and evening. Monday is mostly spent in waste, gathering themselves at each other's houses, talking or laughing or maybe off to the fields again. Tuesday is often the same, and then the rest of the week they had to scout over their work, to get it in on the Saturday.⁴⁵

Not all contemporaries made a moral judgement about dress, however. George Dew, writing about Bicester Fair, commented:

There were a goodly number of servant girls who were walking about to be hired, but they really of late years have so altered their style of dress that it is in some cases most difficult to judge as to which is the mistress and which is the servant.⁴⁶

Most of the criticisms appear to stem from a lack of understanding of rural culture. Employment did not cause immorality, although it could have provided women with opportunities to engage in it by getting them out of the home and mixing with men at work. The cultural codes of the women are as yet imperfectly understood. Richard Jefferies suggested:

As a rule, it may be safely laid down that the agricultural women are moral, far more so than those of the town. Rough and rude jokes and language are indeed, too common; but that is all. No evil comes of it.⁴⁷

4.3.1.2. The effects of employment on education

Employment was criticised for keeping girls away from school and therefore uneducated. The Reverend Salmon of Martock, Somerset, commented on the illiteracy of the gloveresses. 'They grow up in a state of deplorable ignorance, very few of them being able to write their own names'.⁴⁸ Yet children were viewed as a resource by their parents; their labour to be used at home or in paid employment. In the Combe School log book it was reported that: 'Six children left and gone to Stonesfield School- the parents insisting upon sending them to school at any hour and fetching them away to suit their convenience'.⁴⁹ A defaulters list was kept which shows that most of the children did not attend because they were at work.

Table 4 Combe School defaulters list, April 1895

| Parent | Child | Age | Defaults | Total | Excuse |
|--------|---------------|-----|-----------|-------|-----------|
| Thomas | Albert Walter | 13 | 4-9-9 | 22 | At work |
| Alfred | Jas. Margetts | 13 | 5-10-9 | 24 | " |
| Mary | Geo. Huckins | 13 | 8-10-5 | 26 | " |
| Nab | Chas. Slatter | 12 | 10-3-6 | 19 | " |
| Edward | Louie Slatter | 11 | 8-10-9 | 28 | Mother |
| Geo | John Painting | 11 | Not given | - | At work |
| Ger. | Geo. Partlett | 10 | " | - | Not given |

Source: O.A., Combe School Log Book, 1872-1900. SO/71/1/A1/1

Despite legislation and the appointment of School Attendance Officers, it was often difficult to ensure children attended school. Mothers expected their daughters to stay at home and help with domestic chores and childcare when necessary, although as domestic jobs could be fitted around school hours attendance was generally higher amongst girls than boys. In Oxfordshire Assistant Commissioner Culley reported that attendance of girls between 10 and 13 years exceeded that of boys by 40% in summer and 20% in winter.⁵⁰

Despite legislation to restrict employment and enforce education, work opportunities did not diminish and many children continued to work around the school day and during the holidays. In 1891 the teacher recorded in the Finstock and Fawler log book that: 'I have also written to or seen almost every employer of labour in the village warning them against employing children of school age.'⁵¹ However, attendance was poor. On 8th March 1891 it was recorded that of 417 possible attendances for first division infants only 4 attended over 300 times, 15 attended between 250-299 times and 8 less than 250 times.⁵²

Concern for non-attendance varied. Magistrates were sometimes employers of child labour or had friends who were, and took the view that it was not always in their best interests to enforce attendance. This point is clearly illustrated in a Finstock and Fawler log book entry.

The attendance officer called today and we went through the Register. It appears to us that he can do nothing to help the school in the matter of attendance at present as the irregularities worked appear to him to be justifiable and such as our Bench of magistrates would consider quite excusable.⁵³

Although there was considerable school non-attendance, this needs to be weighed against the changing employment conditions for children from the mid- to late-nineteenth century. Yet despite restrictions, employment continued to be available on a casual, part-time, largely unrecorded basis in just the same way as female employment. This makes it difficult to gauge the relationship between children's employment and that of other household members, and in particular whether it was a supplement or a replacement for a mother's employment.

The abolition of school fees in 1891 removed the double penalty of attending school; paying for school fees and losing money for employment. However, what contemporary observers hoped for; the reduction in the numbers of children working, only took place to a certain extent as many children continued to work and go to school. To what extent employment was responsible for keeping girls uneducated is not clear. The development of skills for work and household management took place in the home, and, given the limited employment opportunities, there was generally a good fit between the abilities of girls and the range of jobs available. This leads on to the third contemporary middle-class criticism of the effects of female employment; that the combined effects of loose

morals and poor education resulted in the neglect of, and inability to care for home and family.

4.3.1.3 The effects of employment on home and family

The belief that employment led to the neglect of the home and the family took a number of forms. First, it was suggested that it did not prepare girls for motherhood and household management. Domestic service was deemed acceptable because it initiated girls into the running of a household and assisted the middle and upper classes, who relied on servants to perform domestic tasks, and provided them with status as servant employing households. Gloving, however, was harshly criticised as: ‘...the ruin of families; girls will not go into domestic service and become demoralised’. Furthermore, it was thought that: ‘...the employment of girls in the glove factories totally unfits them for domestic service and household management’.⁵⁴

A second criticism was that, once married, the continuation of employment exacerbated a woman’s inability to manage a household properly.

One of the worst features attending the system is the cheerlessness with which it invests a poor man’s house. On returning home from work, instead of finding his house in order, a meal comfortably prepared for him, his wife accompanies him home, or perhaps arrives after him, when all has to be done in his presence which should have been done for his reception.⁵⁵

The Reverend Read of Cassington commented on female fieldwork: ‘I think that the effects of such coarse labour is to destroy the gentler qualities of a woman’s nature’.⁵⁶ The Reverend Joseph Dodd was equally condemnatory: ‘Upon the whole, I do not think it desirable that women should be employed too much in the fields. The advantage to them is but small, as their domestic concerns must suffer’.⁵⁷ Again, these comments show a lack of understanding of the needs of the

women. Fieldwork was hard, but no corroborating evidence could be found to suggest that it had an adverse effect on household management abilities.

A third criticism concerned the effects of employment on the care of children. Women employed in fieldwork usually left their children at home to be looked after by a young girl or relative.⁵⁸ Homework tended to escape criticism because the work was largely hidden and often served the needs of the middle and upper classes. Women who worked from home were still able to look after their own children.⁵⁹ They remained in the private sphere, the home, which was deemed acceptable. It was the more public employments such as fieldwork that were most harshly criticised. The key error in all these criticisms is the view that employment caused immorality, poor management and neglect of children. For some women these patterns of behaviour would have occurred whether employed or not.

When attempts are made to find out what the women themselves thought about the fit between employment and domestic and childcare responsibilities, a different perspective is obtained. Evidence supplied to the Royal Commission on the Employment of Children, Young Persons and Women in Agriculture by a Monmouth woman reveals the real dilemma faced by many mothers; the need to work balanced against a real concern for the welfare of the children.

...One is only a few months old, and none of them are old enough to take any real care of the others. I lock them into the kitchen and they play about. Must leave a bit of fire because of the supper, but it is dangerous, and I am always afraid they may come to some harm.⁶⁰

Another part of this report concluded that there was little to choose between the comfort and cleanliness of homes of women not engaged in work with those who were. Indeed, the opinion of many labourers, as well as their wives was that the most appropriate wife for a farm labourer was one willing and able to undertake

fieldwork.⁶¹ Clementina Black's research at the beginning of the twentieth century found that in N.W. Worcestershire: 'Public opinion approves of wage earning by married women; and the woman who abstains from working in the fields is tainted-even if she has young children- with being lazy'.⁶²

Women then, as today, had to balance needs using, where possible, additional strategies for support such as friends or relations to care for their children.⁶³ Despite these criticisms, largely the result of a lack of perspicacity on the part of contemporary observers, a number of employment limitations were uncovered when researching the case study area.

4.3.2. The hidden costs of employment

The financial gains of employment must be balanced against their costs. Hidden costs included the time taken to get to work and return from it, the purchase and repair of warm clothing and stout footwear and the need for additional food if involved in physically demanding work. In addition, employment resulted in women having less time for domestic tasks such as food purchase and preparation, washing and mending clothes.⁶⁴ Fieldwork was perhaps the employment with the greatest number of hidden costs. Reverend Edward Girdlestone, commenting on the condition of the agricultural labourer in North Devon, and in particular the fact that women earned 7d or 8d (3p) a day, considered: 'This scarcely pays for the wear and tear of clothes, and not at all for the consequent neglect of household duties, and in reality adds nothing to the welfare of the family'.⁶⁵

Although women working from home did not have as many hidden costs as those who went out to work, there were some. Gloveresses had to purchase needles, and fuel and lighting if working during the evening, and washerwomen needed soap

and fuel. Wages received were not pure profit; hidden costs varied but could be considerable when wages were low.

4.3.3 The physical costs of employment

Two dimensions exist to the physical demands employment put upon women. First, some employments such as farm labour required women to be physically strong and second, some employments were physically exacting and weakened womens' constitutions.⁶⁶ The implications of these physical costs of employment are debatable. Fieldwork was criticised by contemporary observers in part because of its hard physical nature. One female labourer who had a heart complaint sometimes worked 14 hours at a stretch. She commented: '...This fieldwork ruins many a woman's constitution'.⁶⁷ Gloving was also criticised for the specific problems it created, including '...contraction of the chest, displacement of the lungs backward, deficient respiration and impaired eyesight...'⁶⁸ Problems with eyesight were exacerbated when women used candles near bottles of water to diffuse the light for night time sewing.⁶⁹

In the case of fieldwork it was found that there was no physical fitness distinction between farm labourers and people in general in the Woodstock Poor Law Union. It was suggested that people were generally strong, healthy and that a few could live to between 80-90 years.⁷⁰ Of female fieldworkers Assistant Commissioner George Culley concluded:

The evidence shows strongly that such work, if not distinctly favourable to health, at least contrasts favourably with other employments, such as factory work, gloving, shop and lacemaking, in which women of the labouring class in these counties are engaged...⁷¹

Little evidence was found of physical problems caused by other forms of employment. In conclusion, a matrix of problems affected the health of women, such as inadequate diet in terms of lack of food and insufficient appropriate nutrients, little medical support, poor housing and a general lack of knowledge and resources to be able to create a healthy lifestyle.

4.3.4 The problems created by the nature of varied employment opportunities

In the previous chapter the casual nature of many employment opportunities was discussed.⁷² The piecemeal nature of much employment made it difficult to earn a regular income. This was true of fieldwork but also applied to gloving too. Glovers who depended on London firms could find themselves without orders for up to six months, as in 1866.⁷³

4.4 Conclusion to Chapter 4 and Section B

The gains from employment helped poor rural women to make ends meet but they were not always enough to ensure a woman could manage entirely on wages alone. Much depended on whether the need of the individual woman could be matched against the availability and type of employment and the rewards it brought.

Women's needs varied and were dependent on a number of factors such as whether a woman was supported or not. Although this point was not fully explored in the thesis, certain employments may not have provided enough support. Clementina Black suggested that unsupported women could not manage by gloving.

No woman labourer has been met with who attempts to support herself by it; those who work are married women, or elderly, who depend on private

income or outdoor relief, and girls, who for some reason are living at home instead of following the usual pattern of going away to service.⁷⁴

As for married women, it was suggested that gloving could be of considerable assistance.

The immediate effect of the glove trade on the homes of the individual labourer whose womenfolk were engaged in it was undoubtedly beneficial, even when the arduous nature of it and its disadvantages had been taken into consideration. A labourer's wife who was a prolific gloveress could, with her children's help, almost double the family income in the 1860s and more than double it later on in favourable circumstances.⁷⁵

Female wages were of considerable value when they were but one contribution to the household and especially if they were gained by homework, as there were fewer associated costs. Shelly Pennington suggests: 'An analysis of homework shows vividly the important contribution made by women's wages to the family income'.⁷⁶

The quantification of male wages to the family income poses problems. Sara Horrell and Jane Humphries have attempted this using a data set of 1,781 household budgets. They concluded that there had been a decline in the contributions of married women by the mid-century which was caused by '...changes in demand associated with structural and / or institutional changes'.⁷⁷ As much female employment was hidden and payment largely unrecorded, the accuracy of some of the data they use is debatable. However, they do draw out the value of women working from home: '...fitting around their domestic schedule or not at all'.⁷⁸ Working from home enabled women to earn a little, as well as looking after household and children.

A Mrs Bowerman of Kidlington, interviewed for the Royal Commission on the Employment of Children, Young Persons and Women in Agriculture, when asked about gloving in the village commented:

We don't do much gloving here; women either work out or mind their children. We do a bit of fagging [menial work] but by the time we get better victuals and a drop of beer there ain't much left; enough to buy a pair of shoes maybe.⁷⁹

Mrs Bowerman appears to imply that sometimes employment was barely worthwhile. Some evidence suggests that women found their payment unfair for two reasons; first, that the payment received was low for the amount of effort exerted and second, that it was low when compared to a man's rate. A Kent waggoner's wife complained: 'I go and do more than a man would, and yet they give me a shilling instead of half a crown'.⁸⁰

Women did not always choose to work and an element of coercion could exist either inside or outside the family. Reverend Edward Girdlestone found that women were sometimes forced into fieldwork through an agreement between their husbands and their employers, the farmers, who, in many cases, would not give employment on any other condition.⁸¹

Employment, although frequently a first-stop strategy, was rarely sufficient to make ends meet, even with the combined wages of husband and wife. Clementina Black suggested: 'The earnings of man and wife together, are in thousands of households inadequate, however industrious, however sober, however thrifty the pair, to the proper support of themselves and their children'.⁸² It could be a precarious strategy as its availability and value varied. The remaining part of this thesis therefore examines other strategies women used to make ends meet.

Footnotes to Chapter 4

1. See Chapter 3, section 3.3.2 on the flexibility of employment patterns.
2. R.C., 1868-69, vol.xiii. *Agriculture*.... There is a valuable section on Oxfordshire in this report. For comparison see *Victoria County History of Somerset*, vol. 2, 1969 where there is a section on gloving by Ethel M. Hewitt. In 1832 women averaged 4/- (20p) for several dozen pairs, p427.
3. *ibid.* Part 1, p80.
4. K.S. Woods, *The rural*...p139.
5. R.C., 1868-69,vol. xiii, Part 2, Appendix B, parochial evidence.
6. Maud Davies, *A history*...p126.
7. See Chapter 2, section 2.4.2 on gloving and Chapter 3, section 3.3.1 on homework.
8. R.C., 1868-69, vol.xiii, Part 2, p80. Mrs Gardiner was probably referring to H.K. Money who, in 1871, employed 30 women at Hope House, Woodstock. Mr Doggett was probably Charles Doggett who, in 1871, was Woodstock's largest glove manufacturer with 42 employees (plus outworkers?). From: 1871 Census, RG 10/1499. Mr Pritchett was probably Samuel Pritchett of Charlbury. From: 1851 Census, HO 107/1730.
9. E.H. Hunt suggested: 'Women's wages were determined, in a large part by consideration of what most people believed they ought to earn and this was usually measured as a customary proportion of the male rate.' *Regional*...p118. Maxine Berg, *Women's work*...suggests on p2 that women were increasingly confined to low-paid activities such as weeding and stone gathering.
10. Celia Miller, *The hidden*...
11. O.A., DIL 1/e/2a-e. *Account Books, 1856-61, Ditchley Estate*.
12. O.A., DIL 1/q/9c. *Fulwell Farm records, Ditchley Estate*.
13. Celia Müller, *The hidden*...pp.47-48.
14. *Sixth Report of the Medical Officer of the Privy Council, with appendix*. 1863 (Pub. 1864), vol. xxviii. Report no. 6; Dr Edward Smith on the food of the labouring classes in England, p268.
15. Maud Davies, *A history*...pp.124-125; Clementina Black, *Married women's work*. Being a report of an enquiry undertaken by the Women's Industrial Council. G. Bell and Sons, 1915 who suggests '...if her (a washerwoman) need be great enough, she will accept a wage of a few pence.' pp.101-109. See also The Economic Society, *Family budgets*...pp.45-50, Budgets 20 and 21. The wife of a Sussex woodman earned 5/- (25p) a week washing for her husband's master and the wife of a garden labourer 'some pounds' in summer by washing. Patricia E. Malcolmson, *English*...p13 suggests 2/- to 2/6 or 3/- to 3/6 (10-12p or 15-17p) plus beer. These figures remained constant in the period covered by the thesis.
16. Pamela Horn, *Victorian*...p188.
17. Mary Quarterman, 4 weeks at 2/6 (12p) a week for cleaning and dusting Spelsbury School. O.A., DIL 1/e/14. April 1893 and Betz (sic) Clarke: 'Thoroughly cleaning house at Fulwell

- which was in a filthy state.' 2/- plus 12 days beer-£1 4/6 (£1.22p). O.A., DIL/q/91 footnote Nov. 24th 1876.
18. R.C., 1868-69, vol. xiii, Part II, p343.
 19. Maud Davies, *A history...*p127.
 20. *Charlbury School Board Minute Book*. O.A., T/SM4, 10th February 1888 and 3rd August 1888.
 21. See also local newspapers for advertisements for domestic servants.
 22. Nancy Grey Osterud, 'Gender divisions and the organisation of work in the Leicester hosiery industry', in Angela John (ed.), *Unequal...*p65.
 23. Maud Davies, *A history...*p126.
 24. Judith Fay and Richard Martin (eds.), *The Jubilee boy. The life and recollections of George Swerford of Filkins*. Filkins: The Filkins Press, 1987, p11.
 25. Flora Thompson, *Lark...*p157.
 26. Patricia E. Malcolmson, *English...*pp.13-14.
 27. Sara Horrell and Jane Humphries, 'Women's labour force participation and the transition to the male breadwinner family, 1790-1865', *Economic History Review*, vol. xlviii, no.1, February 1995, p105.
 28. *ibid*, p106.
 29. Elizabeth Roberts, *Women's...*p241.
 30. N.L. Leyland and J.E. Troughton, *Glovemaking...*p8. See also Chapter 3, section 3.3.3 on settlement patterns and family connections.
 31. John Higgs, *Farming ...*p13.
 32. Judy Lown, *Women and industrialisation. Gender at work in nineteenth century England*. Oxford: Polity Press/ Basil Blackwell, 1990, p
 33. Joan Perkin, *Women and marriage in nineteenth century England*. Routledge, 1989, p313. See also chapter 5, section 5.1.1 on household roles and gender.
 34. D. N. Bates, *The agricultural...*Recollections of Mrs. Timms of Charlbury, p68; see also Sid Knight, *A Cotswold...* p52.
 35. Edith Brill, *Cotswold...* p159. See also chapter 3, section 3.2.1 on gloving.
 36. Maud Davies, *A history...* pp124-125.
 37. Flora Thompson, *Lark...* p163. She gives the example of scullery maids eventually becoming cook-housekeepers.
 38. Pamela Horn, *Victorian...* p209. Mary Hodges warns against laying too much emphasis on upward mobility for working class women teachers. 'Schools and schooling', Oxford University Department for Continuing Education Day School, 20th February 1993.
 39. See chapter 3, section 3.3.3.1 on settlement patterns.

40. Elizabeth A. M. Roberts, *Women's work...* p50. See also Maxine Berg, *Women's work...* p4 and Shelly Pennington, *Women as...* p326 on the value of women's wages.
41. For a clear explanation of domestic ideology see Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family...*
42. R. C, 1868-9, vol. xvii, p viii.
43. B.L., G.J. Dew Papers Temporary box no. D. MSS. D.D. Dew d.17, 11th July 1873.
44. R. C, 1868 vol. xiii, Part II, answer to question 22, p313. The reply of the Reverend J. Hosky Abraham of Combe. See also section A of the report, p85, for George Culley's comments '...unhappily a disregard for chastity is very common amongst unmarried women of the labouring class...'
45. B.L., G.J. Dew Papers Papers Temporary box no. D. MSS. D.D. Dew, 17th October 1873.
46. Mrs. Henry Wood, *Mrs Haliburton's troubles*. Richard Bentley and Son, 1897, p99.
47. Richard Jefferies, *The toilers...* p154. For a discussion of the sexuality of the urban poor see Francoise Barret-Ducrocq, *Love in the time of Victoria. Sexuality and desire among working-class men and women in London*. Penguin, 1992.
48. *Second Report of the Royal Commission on the Employment of Children, Young Persons and Women in Agriculture*. PP 1868-69, vol. xii, Appendix part 1 (K) p206 cited in Jennie Kitteringham, *Country...* p118.
49. O.A., *Combe School Logbook, 1872-1900*. SO 71/1/A1/1, 15th September 1876.
50. R. C, 1868-69, vol. xiii, part 1, p87.
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52. *ibid*, 8th March 1891.
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54. R.C, 1868, vol.,xiii, part II, appendix C. Mr. C. Kent, Relieving Officer and Inspector of Nuisances for Woodstock District, p357. *ibid*, Reverend W. A. Plumtre of Woodstock, question 22L, p332.
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56. R.C, 1868, vol. xiii, part II, question 22F, p331.
57. *ibid*.
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59. See chapter 3. section 3.3.1, on home-based employments.

60. *Third Report of the Royal Commission on the Employment of Children, Young Persons and Women in Agriculture*. PP 1870, vol. xiii. Report by Mr. F. H. Norman on Surrey, Wiltshire, Warwickshire, Worcestershire and Herefordshire p54'. Cited in Pamela Horn, *Victorian...* p146.
61. R. C, 1868, vol. xiii, part I, p84.
62. Clementina Black, *Married...* p232.
63. See chapter 7, section 7.2 on domestic support by kin and section 7.3 on domestic support provided by the neighbourhood.
64. See chapters 5 and 6 on household management for a discussion of these tasks.
65. The Reverend Edward Girdlestone in *Fraser's Magazine*, vol. 78, 1868, p729, cited in: *The Working classes in the Victorian age. Debates on the issue from 19th Century critical journals*. Introduced by C. J. Wrigley. Vol. iv. Rural Conditions 1815-1870. Farnborough: Gregg, 1973.
66. George Swerford of Filkins gives the example of his mother who was six feet tall and weighed seventeen stones in Judith Fay and Richard Martin (eds.), *The Jubilee...* p11.
67. Richard Heath, *The Victorian ...* pp.168-169. Four of this woman's seven children had died.
68. *Sixth Report of the Medical Officer of the Privy Council with Appendix*, 1863 (1864), vol. xxviii, John Simon, Appendix report no. 6, p225.
69. Edith Brill, *Cotswold...* p159.
70. R. C, 1868 vol.xiii, part II, Appendix C. Letter from H. H. Parry, District Medical Officer to Woodstock Union to George Culley, 1st December 1868, p357.
71. *ibid*, part I, p84.
72. See chapter 3, section 3.3.2.
73. *Oxford Chronicle*, 22nd December 1866. Cited in *Victoria County History of Oxford*, vol. xii, p367.
74. Clementina Black, *Married...* p236.
75. D. N. Bates, *The agricultural...* p69.
76. Shelley Pennington, *Women as...* p326.
77. Sara Horrell and Jane Humphries, *Women's labour...* p113.
78. *ibid*, pp. 108-109. See also Jane Humphries, *From work...*
79. R.C, 1868, vol. xiii, part II, p43.
80. Richard Heath, *The Victorian...* p71.
81. *The Working classes...* p729.
82. Clementina Black, *Married...* p12.

SECTION C HOUSEHOLD MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

‘The wife was in charge of the household budget and her efficiency, ingenuity and courage in a crisis were crucial to the economic survival of the family’.

David Vincent, *Bread, knowledge and freedom. A study of nineteenth century working-class autobiography*. Methuen, 1982, p53.

‘They [the wives] were faced with a well-nigh insoluble problem of making ends meet on an indeterminate allowance which only approximated the real wage’.

Melanie Tebbutt, *Making ends meet. Pawnbroking and working-class credit*. Methuen, 1984, p12.

Section B related to the money and resources women could bring into their households through employment. The key issue in this section is the way women used their money and resources to make ends meet because the way women spent and saved money determined, to a large extent, whether a family could or could not manage. The mismanagement of money and resources could lead to extreme poverty, even destitution.¹

Section C is divided into two chapters. The first chapter focuses on the overall management of the household and in particular the allocation of money and

resources, the divisions of labour and the gender-based power relationships created as a result. It then examines the ways women spent and saved money in order to manage their households more effectively.

The second chapter concentrates on the resources and skills used by the women. The resources considered are gardens and allotments, animal husbandry, countryside resources and good accommodation and the skills are food preparation and sewing. The concluding part of this chapter provides an overall assessment of the value of household management as a strategy against poverty balanced against the constraints which made effective management difficult.

Chapter 5. The management of the household: income generation, spending and saving

5.1 Introduction

Whilst female employment has been the subject of considerable attention from researchers, the ways women managed their households has received relatively little. Yet the gains made by employment need to be considered in the light of how they were used. Joanna Bourke suggests: 'Although the struggle to make ends meet is frequently acknowledged, it is portrayed as a rather pointless one producing little of intrinsic value'.¹ She blames this on the filter that many historians bring to such a study: '...historians do not generally share the values of the housewives they are studying, and they have trouble taking these values seriously'.²

Even when researchers have been prepared to study housework in an academically rigorous way, their conclusions appear to concentrate on what they consider to be the negative aspects of housewifery. These are a lack of recognition and remuneration, the repetitive operation of dreary tasks within the home and the withdrawal from the workplace.³

It is vital to uncover the details of the work that kept many women busy for the majority of their time; housework.

All these servile occupations, cleaning, cooking, and propagating the species, have been omitted from the grand catalogue of academic history, as the subject is at present defined. The total redefinition of history to include many of the everyday experiences of women in the past (insignificant though they may be, if measured in terms of power politics) is not the least of the tasks facing feminist historians.⁴

It is important to move away from thinking of the home as a backwater. David Vincent refers to the home as ‘...the cockpit...the arena in which the consequences of exploitation and inequality were battled with’.⁵

If modern research is often sparse or unhelpful, in contrast contemporary sources are plentiful, but frequently filter their material through the concept of domestic ideology. In reality, even if working class women desired to hallow their homes, for many it was not possible. Household manuals provide prescriptive rather than descriptive accounts and the use of such sources has been likened ‘...to using ‘Vogue’ to reconstruct the lifestyle of a typical modern family’. The application of these sources has therefore been limited to those manuals specifically aimed at the poor.⁶

There is a need to uncover what one researcher has referred to as the ‘miracles of domestic management’ of the women’s budgets.⁷ To this end household management must be placed firmly in the mainstream historical agenda. When amounts of money coming into a household were low, careful household management was essential. The dividing line between having just enough to manage and not having enough could be very fine, as this example illustrates.

Mrs. Bowerman of Kidlington, when asked about her household finances for the Royal Commission on the Employment of Young Persons, Children and Women in Agriculture commented:

My husband’s a milkman, so has 12/- (60p) a week. We pay 1/9 (9p) rent, I have only one bedroom and no back door. ...Last week I got 3d (1p) for a bit of sewing, so we had 12s. 3d, and I spent it this way. Meat 3/7.5 (17p), Bread 3/- (15p), Rent 1/9 (8p), Tea, sugar, flour, soap, soda 3/7.5 (17p), Boy’s schooling 2d (1p). Total 12/2 (61p). So I had a penny left.⁸

Effective household management consists of a number of sub-strategies dealing with different aspects of the household. These sub-strategies needed to be part of a dynamic package as women responded to crises such as sickness and unemployment, long-term and seasonal changes. Winter was a particularly difficult time for many women. In Finstock and Fawler it was reported: 'The long and severe weather has put our village to great hardship. Many often have been unable to feed their children and shoe and clothe them as they require in such weather'.⁹

Strategies had to be responsive to lifecycle changes as well. There were particular points in families' lifecycles when resources were stretched to their limits. B.S. Rowntree had concluded this from his research and Helen Bosanquet suggested that the ten years or so when the children were between 4 and 14 was a particularly difficult time.¹⁰

Women used household management as a strategy in two ways; by bringing additional resources into the household and using their skills to make the best use of these resources. A study of these resources and skills will occupy the major part of this section, although the initial focus will be on the dynamics of the household into which these resources were brought and skills were used.

5.1.1 Household roles and gender: the divisions of labour and the balance of power within the household

Women needed a power base within the household to be able to exercise effective management and therefore it is vital to ascertain whether they had this. Research appears to suggest that women, assisted by their children, performed most of the general duties such as cooking, cleaning and washing.¹¹ This could lead to the conclusion that women, by performing these allegedly low-skilled tasks, lacked power within the household.¹² However, power is not necessarily indicated by the

performance or non-performance of tasks or by wage earning. Power concerns control over one's environment and over one's time; it is also the ability to ensure that other people do not question your authority within a specific sphere.¹³ It does not necessarily involve control of someone and can exist where individuals within a unit have and accept clearly defined boundaries. Elizabeth Roberts suggests: '...marriage was seen as a life-long working partnership, both husband and wife having different clearly defined roles. The men were seen as the basic wage earners and the women as the household managers with prime responsibility for rearing children'.¹⁴

Within the acceptance of clearly defined roles and codes of behaviour was the right of women to income earned by the household members and to be treated honestly and fairly.¹⁵ Less clear is the proportion of a family's income that was given to a woman. Rowntree cites a Mrs Smith who received 18/-(90p) of her husband's 20/-(£1) wage; Flora Thompson suggested that women received the total wage and then the woman would hand a little pocket money back to the husband.¹⁶ Women did not always know what their husband earned however. Mrs John Horn of Combe commented: 'My husband [a farm labourer] has 10/-(50p) a week, he had 11/5(57p) up to last week (October 27th); he gets hoeing by 'the great'. I don't know what he has in hay time; I can't tell what he earns in harvest. He never tells me'.¹⁷

It has been suggested that it was customary for a husband to give his wife a set amount each week and keep the rest for himself; what Ellen Ross terms 'the internal wage system'.¹⁸ At this point women gained their power, but also responsibility too, for once a woman had the money she was expected to manage. 'Her business was to make do, to eke out with her own toil if she can, but never to dream of questioning the man's right to the exclusive disposal of the rest'.¹⁹

This enabled women to build up a power base around their domestic responsibilities and could result in the creation of largely matrifocal homes. John Gillis suggested: 'Mothers controlled key economic resources within families, shaped their internal relationships, and were their chief representatives to the outside world'.²⁰ Gillis also considered that women had external power within the wider community.²¹ Sources appear to suggest that women were not afraid of authority figures such as teachers. An entry in the Combe School log book illustrates this. Jas. (sic) Bishop threatened to slap a teacher, Miss Whitely, if she kept him in. She wrote: 'He was very cheeky and impudent for which I punished him. His mother afterwards came and abused me in a most violent temper'.²² Within this power base women were expected to manage household tasks.

5.2 Income generation

It is important to be aware of the financial contributions of all household members since most women lived in a group setting.²³ Internal factors such as number in household and ages of children, skills and physical health affected the amounts of money coming into a household. External factors such as the availability of employment should also be considered. Alterations in these factors affected the income generation of family members. This could create a precarious position for the woman as the main spender of income.

Preliminary research on male employment patterns within the case study area shows that there was often a pattern of masculine portfolios of employment too. Many men performed a variety of part-time or casual occupations such as contract work, one-off jobs and regular odd jobs.²⁴ Some of these jobs were more stable than others. Labourers working with animals usually had more secure jobs than general labourers. On the Duke of Marlborough's estate it was reported that 35 men were employed all year round with free rent and firing, except for carters.²⁵

Contract workers faced a more insecure future as the comments of a labourer's wife from Combe illustrated: 'My husband is a farm labourer; he has 10/-(50p) if they make [work] all the time; sometimes he loses a day or two from wet, and they take it off'.²⁶

Children were also expected to make a contribution. 'The pressure of hard circumstances, the endless battle with poverty, rendered women both callous to other's feelings, and particularly strict to those over whom they possess unlimited authority'.²⁷ Children were expected to work, such as collecting snails for 1/4 farthing (c.8 farthings = 1p) per dozen, or care for siblings to release the mother for work.²⁸ Richard Jefferies commented: 'The cottage child is often locked out by her parents, who go out to work and leave her in charge of her still smaller brothers and sisters'.²⁹ Mothers had no qualms in keeping them away from school to attend to domestic concerns. In Finstock and Fawler school log book it was recorded: 'Eva Dore's mother, also Evelyn Hadland's found domestic affairs very pressing and wanted them for one week more'.³⁰ Children understood and accepted this role. Joseph Ashby commented: 'To 'help' was the price of contact with beloved and admired parents; even tiny ones understood that our parents could not manage without us'.³¹

Children continued to contribute to the family income throughout the second half of the nineteenth century. In times of plenty such as hay making and harvest, employment became a family strategy involving all able-bodied members of the household. Mrs Walter Huckens of Combe took her children aged 3 and 6 to help with the harvest. She was paid 9/-(45p) an acre. Charles Byles, a cattleman from Begbroke was normally paid 11/-(55p) a week but at harvest time earned extra: '...it is all the chance I have in a year of adding to the 11/- a week.', he commented.³² The duration of harvest work could be extended if people were prepared to travel to other parts of the country.³³

Such additional money was a valuable supplement to regular earnings. Oxfordshire was part of a region in the south of the country where labourer's wages were generally low; around 9/-(45p) a week, although there were variations in weekly rates. Assistant Commissioner George Culley reported: '...I found some difficulty in ascertaining the actual payments made for twelve consecutive months, and more especially for a succession of years...'³⁴ Even a detailed balance sheet of a labouring family's earnings which shows additional payments over and above the weekly rates, does not reflect fluctuations in income as a result of being laid off or sick.

Fig. 12 The labourer's balance sheet as outlined in the Family Economist, 1852.

| | £ | s. |
|---|----|------|
| 48 weeks labour at 8/-(40p) a week..... | 19 | 4/- |
| 4 weeks harvest at 21/6(£1.07)..... | 4 | 6/- |
| Extra wages earned by occasional hoe and dibbing..... | 1 | |
| Wife's earnings- weeding, gleaning etc..... | 1 | |
| 4 bushels of wheat in gardens at 5/-(25p) a bushel..... | 1 | |
| Total | 26 | 10/- |

Source: The Family Economist, vol.5, 1852, p52.

Such figures fail to show what Raphael Samuel calls the 'higgledy-piggledy' way that earnings were built up.³⁵ Even high wages do not necessarily equate with a comfortable lifestyle. In Stonesfield for example, men could enjoy the luxury of all year employment; field work for much of the year with slate mine work during the slack winter months. The Rector, Frank Robinson, suggested that much of this additional wage would '...no doubt be spent in beer shops...' but presents no evidence to back up what appears to be a moralistic viewpoint.³⁶

The complex nature of employment patterns and therefore of income generation made it difficult for women to plan their spending and saving. Each week they were required to manage with what they were given although the degree to which male fluctuations in income were passed on to the wife is not clear.

5.3 Spending

Prudent spending of hard earned money was a vitally important strategy: '...The real value [of wages] to the individual family was by no means altogether determined by any ruling range of prices, but also to a great extent by the habits and capacities of the wife'.³⁷

By far the largest portion of expenditure went on food so it was essential for women to shop carefully. 'It was the woman's task to buy and cook this food, and her choices and abilities obviously affected the overall balance of the budget, and, of course, her family's health', suggests Elizabeth Roberts.³⁸

Household manuals exhorted women to purchase from good shops, obtain fresh produce, buy large quantities, bake bread and store food well.³⁹ This was sound advice, but impractical since many women had insufficient funds to buy in bulk, little storage space and scant knowledge of food values. Some women feared spending too much money in one go and tried to eke out their weekly housekeeping by daily shopping. 'A halfpenny candle... 1/4oz tea, 1/4lb sugar, 1/4lb bacon, 1/4lb cheese with some treacle - this would be a typical cottage woman's order repeated three times a week if the husband were in full work'.⁴⁰

Careful spending was made difficult by the limited range of retail outlets in rural areas. In the case study area there was a range of shops in the two market towns

and the individual villages and hamlets were served by a few local shops and itinerant traders.⁴¹ It has been suggested that rural women purchased most meat, vegetables and household stores from the market and itinerant traders.⁴² Saturday evening markets were popular; dealers knew that women had money and so prices were increased and inferior quality served. Village shops were not necessarily any better. The village shopkeeper and baker '...sold him [the labourer] bad goods at high prices and during winter entangled him in a web of debt from which in many cases he was not able to free himself'.⁴³

As the cost of good quality produce was generally high, women had to resort to the purchase of inferior items. This was particularly true of tea. Caroline Pumphrey recalled the following practice at her uncle's shop in Charlbury. 'The aristocracy used 6/- or 5/- (30p or 25p) tea or perhaps higher...one woman - an old washerwoman came daily for tea leaves 'tea'. With tea the price it was many a poor family were content to use again richer peoples' tea'.⁴⁴

Loss of income could produce severe hardship. George Filkins recalled:

I remember seeing the men's [labourers] wives, standing with the babies by the little shop at the gate waiting for their husbands to come out, so that they could go into the shop and buy groceries for the week, and if the man had some of his pay docked the wife would cry.⁴⁵

Women were forced into hand to mouth expenditures that could only be planned with short-term horizons. To middle-class contemporary observers this appeared as 'muddling along'. 'The word muddle is the right word for such marketing - the money is muddled away, the meals are muddled, waste and want meet together and sit down at the same table'.⁴⁶ Women used whatever ways they could to save money and this included attending sales to purchase clothes. An American fair (bring and buy sale) advertised in Kidlington Parish Magazine in 1889 was

successful, the September issue reporting: ‘...being very largely attended by purchasers who evidently appreciated their Bargains showing that such a medium was wanted for transferring articles no longer useful in the house, to another where they supply a need, at merely nominal prices’.⁴⁷

Even with careful spending, there were times when balancing the budget was impossible. If the money in Figure 12 is set against what has been referred to as the expenditure of an average family; a man, woman and three children, then there is a clear shortfall. This is illustrated in Figure 13.

Figure 13. Weekly expenditure for an average family as outlined in the ‘Family Economist’, vol.5, 1852

| Item | Cost (£sd) |
|---|------------|
| 9 x 4Ib loaves at 5d each. | 3/9 |
| 1.5Ib fat of pork at 6d | 9 |
| 1Ib cheese | 7 |
| 0.5Ib butter | 6 |
| 2oz tea | 6 |
| 1Ib soft sugar | 4 |
| 0.5Ib soap | 3 |
| 0.5Ib candles | 2.75 |
| Coals and firing | 8 |
| Boots for man | 4.5 |
| Boots and shoes for family | 4.5 |
| Clothes for man | 7 |
| Clothes for woman and family | 9 |
| Pins, needles, thread and worsted | 1 |
| Confines (Doctor’s fees, etc.) | 4 |
| General medical attendance by 5/- annual club pay | 1 |

.....
10/1.75 weekly

52 weeks - £26.7/7, plus rent - £3. 10/- Total for year - £29. 17/7

Source: Family Economist, vol.5, 1852 p52.

At times when women did not have the money to pay for goods they had to resort to other options. First, they could exchange goods or services for their purchases. George Filkins remembers his mother having an arrangement with the grocer from Clanfield. 'We settled with him once a year as he had one of our pigs'.⁴⁸ Surplus produce from gardens and allotments could also be sold.⁴⁹ The exchange of services such as sewing for items was rarely recorded and no sources were found relating to this in the case study area.

Second, credit could be used. General studies on credit which have mainly focused on urban areas, suggest that credit, and in particular pawning, were commonplace aspects of women's lives. 'Routine pawning, an almost exclusively female method of raising cash, extended the resources wives had available for housekeeping'.⁵⁰ However, to be forever using credit created problems for families.

Credit is given until the family are hopelessly in debt and then they are forced to deal at a shop where any price is charged. Under the most favourable circumstances, these retailers charge some 25% more than the ordinary retail price...⁵¹

Women unable to obtain credit locally had to travel to get it. A woman from Milton-under-Wychwood with four children under ten and 13/- coming in each week was unable to pay off her debts and sometimes walked miles to get a bit of credit.⁵² As well as obtaining credit through formal channels women borrowed money from friends and relations. An Oxfordshire woman, a Mrs. Shaw, cited by Rowntree, was able to obtain a little credit from her sister who had a small shop.⁵³

In urban areas it is known that women sometimes resorted to pawning goods.⁵⁴ There is little evidence of pawning in the countryside or indeed of borrowing generally. It was a subject where few records were kept and nothing is known about how credit was viewed by women in the case study area. The views of contemporary middle-class observers are better known. They criticised its use. 'Do not go into credit. You are apt to buy more than you will find easy to pay for', commented the author of one household manual.⁵⁵ The seasonal nature of rural employment patterns made this difficult. However, there were times when women could save, notably at haymaking and harvest time.

5.4 Saving

In theory, if women spent carefully, they would then have money left over which could be saved to cover lean times and unpredictable events such as illness. A commonly held middle-class view was that saving was a matter of self-control.⁵⁶ Poor women needed to save for expensive purchases such as coats and footwear and used a number of methods to do so. First, saving could be carried out through formal groups such as friendly societies. The benefit to women of this form of saving was largely indirect since it was usually the husband who saved. Rarely could a family afford to make male and female contributions and it has been suggested: '...the needs of the men took priority.'⁵⁷ Formal savings groups were particularly aimed at providing security for life's uncertainties such as illness, injury or death, which were major fears for many people. '...Sickness for the poor often represented the threat of destitution'. In addition, there was a real fear of being buried as a pauper.⁵⁸

There were a number of types of saving club. In accumulating societies money was accumulated in a reserve fund with the annual excess of contributions over benefits

providing for sickness claims. Some societies were affiliated; organised on a branch system such as the Ancient Order of Forresters, others were small, localised societies.⁵⁹ The poor were probably attracted to the latter which included annual dividing up clubs where small sickness benefits were paid and any money left over divided up at Christmas.⁶⁰

It has been suggested that there were relatively few friendly societies in Oxfordshire, largely because of low wages and the paucity of rural industry. Instead, the poor turned to poor relief and private charities.⁶¹ Whilst the first part of this assertion may be correct, it cannot be assumed that the poor necessarily turned to poor relief and charity. Many saving clubs were small, kept few records and often had a relatively short life. In Charlbury, for example, five societies had been established by 1857 including one for glovers. The local curate, G. J. Davies, noted the disappearance of two of these attached to the Bell and Crown Inns.⁶² In 1858 a new club was set up at the Rose and Crown Inn which by 1880-81 had 161 members. At this time there was also a Loyal Amicable Forresters Benefit Society as well.⁶³ In Kidlington, there was another large friendly society which in 1846 had 4 stewards and 113 members and was supported by the vicar and surgeon. It has been suggested that by 1876 it was the most popular benefit society in the county with funds totalling £2,084. 10/-.⁶⁴

Although the large friendly societies were generally for men, womens' interests were safeguarded. Rule 1 of the Stonesfield Friendly Society stated: 'The object of this society is to raise by subscription by the members thereof a fund for the mutual relief of members in old age, sickness and infirmity and for the relief of widows and children of deceased members'.⁶⁵ In addition, if a man who had been in the Society for more than three years died, his widow was to receive £2 for the funeral and the following month £5 as a free gift to her or a nominee and to this end every member was expected to pay an extra 1/- that month.⁶⁶

As well as practical help, the rules were designed to engender respect for widows and encourage moral behaviour. Members were expected to attend the funerals of deceased members and benefit would not be given to members whose sickness or injuries had arisen while drinking at work or in the case of sickness from venereal disease, fighting, wrestling, football or smallpox inoculations.⁶⁷ The Stonesfield Society appears to have prospered and must have had a significant impact on villagers' security. In 1854 weekly benefit was increased to 8/8 per week for the first 52 weeks, then 4/- for a further 52 weeks so long as at least £200 remained in the funds.⁶⁸

The degree of control that women had over male saving methods and amounts is not known. However women had their own methods of saving. Women who saved either part of their housekeeping or wages rarely did so through formal clubs such as friendly societies because they could not guarantee regular contributions. Furthermore, with frequent pregnancies, the cost of sickness insurance would be high.⁶⁹

The earning of wages could affect patterns of saving. In Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire the large number of friendly societies was attributed to the wages women earned working in the straw plait industry.⁷⁰ This may have parallels in the glove stitching industry. Certainly there were local societies in Oxfordshire such as one at Shipton-under-Wychwood which provided 4/-(20p) a week to sick members for a subscription of 2/6(12p) per quarter. This was a lower rate than the contribution to Stonesfield Friendly Society which was 3/6-4/6(17p-22p). Every summer, surplus funds from the Shipton Society were divided up and used for a grand tea. Membership was low, with few young women members. It was still in existence in 1891 and, despite much sickness that year, 6/6(32p) was available to pay each of the 25 members.⁷¹

Most poor women if they saved at all used these locally-based, co-operative groups and small savings clubs which have left few or no records. It is known that a Co-operative society was formed at Chipping Norton in 1867; bread was made and delivered to surrounding villages and households were invited to become members of the Society which extended its retailing to include general grocery. 'The village housewives valued their 'divi' which, if they could keep their hands off it, grew in a pleasing way and would pay for a good domestic pot or children's boots'.⁷² Services also included funeral provision and life insurance. The degree to which the poor benefited from such societies is not known. 'The cottages were still wretched. Some families were dependent on poor relief on the slightest misfortune. None of the labourers could make provision for old age'.⁷³

As well as co-operatives which were organised on an area basis, there were small village savings clubs for specific items such as boots, shoes, clothing and pigs.⁷⁴ Some were organised by local shopkeepers and Flora Thompson recalled one such boot club. 'Some careful housewives paid a few pence every week into a boot club run by a shopkeeper in the market town'.⁷⁵ Other clubs were organised by middle and upper class ladies. The Charlbury Clothing Club's list of subscribers included wealthy and influential Quaker families such as the Albrights and Sessions.⁷⁶

Generally, few records were kept of these local clubs and often sources only made passing reference to them. The Combe School Logbook entry for the 8th November 1872 states: 'Clothing club food distributed which caused a decrease in the av. (sic) attendance'.⁷⁷ There was a penny bank at Ascot-under-Wychwood; 27 people are recorded as having a total of around £18.⁷⁸ Even children saved. One Oxfordshire child was paid a penny for errands and had the money put into a penny bank.⁷⁹

It is virtually impossible to assess the value of such clubs; so little is known about their history and certain elements cannot be quantified such as security, peace of mind and social contact as well as the anxiety created by having to make regular payments. No records could be found for the most informal type of saving, keeping money at home such as under the mattress.

Saving was not a strategy without risk as it relied on the integrity of those administering the scheme. Edward Field, the curate of Kidlington, complained that he knew of two friendly society members who had not received any money and that there was drunkenness and rowdiness at the club feasts and monthly meetings. Thomas Casey, steward of Nuneham Courtenay Benefit Society (Oxfordshire) appeared before Bullingdon Petty Sessions accused of failing to pay a number of women, including Fanny Rumble, widow of Jacob Rumble, who had been a member of the sick society.⁸⁰

5.5 Conclusion

Spending was a constant activity and borrowing and saving were strategies of coping with financial insecurities and difficulties. Saving and borrowing may be more closely related strategies than is initially obvious; families needed to use both strategies to cover all eventualities. Borrowing had to be used with care and many families existed on the see-saw of borrowing and saving, saving when they could and borrowing when they had to.

In Oxford, at the beginning of the twentieth century, it was suggested that:

...The practice of thrift [among women] wanders down by many and devious channels, through the parish and chapel clothing cards, through the children's savings cards at school, through the much valued clothing societies of nearly five hundred members...There is a great deal of rudimentary providence in the air.⁸¹

Saving, like owning a pig or working an allotment, was less a strategy to improve one's lot, more for getting by and for preventing a precarious financial situation from getting worse.⁸² Whether it became easier for poor people to save towards the end of the nineteenth century is not certain. In the Thame Poor Law Union (Oxfordshire) in the 1890s more than half the labourers were reported as belonging to a benefit society or club, the rest putting their money in the Post Office or not saving. However, the report concluded that the majority of labourers: '...are unable to save anything for their old age, or for times when they are out of work. An immense number of them live in a chronic state of debt and anxiety...'⁸³ It would seem that improved facilities for saving did not necessarily lead to more people being able to save.

Saving and credit were bound together as strategies against poverty.

They were both used to tide over periods of financial stringency, and at the same time to preserve a family's status by preventing a fall into public destitution, or to elevate it by permitting an accumulation of additional goods and services. They were opposite sides of the same coin that working-class households constantly juggled to maintain a financial balance.⁸⁴

The next chapter will examine the non-monetary resources and skills that women used as strategies to manage their households as effectively as possible.

Footnote to Introduction to Section C

1. B.S. Rowntree suggested that poverty could be caused by mismanagement; what he referred to as 'secondary poverty'. See *Poverty...especially chapter v* on the immediate causes of poverty.

Footnotes to Chapter 5

1. Joanna Bourke, *Housewifery...* p170. She suggests the exceptions to this are the work of Melanie Tebbutt, *Making ends meet. Pawnbroking and working-class credit*. Methuen, 1984 and Paul Johnson, *Saving and spending. The working-class economy in Britain 1870-1939*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985. (Oxford Historical Monographs). The works of Ellen Ross and Carl Chinn are also pioneering exceptions. See also Joanna Bourke's book on which her thesis is based: *Husbandry to housewifery. Women, economic change and housework in Ireland 1890-1914*. Oxford University Press, 1993.
2. *ibid.* p172.
3. *ibid.* p169. Joanna Bourke cites in particular the work of sociologist Ann Oakley, *Women's ...* Note on terminology: household management is the preferred term as it encompasses everything pertaining to the household, both inside and out. See also Caroline Davidson, *A woman's work is never done. A history of housework in the British Isles 1650-1950*. Chatto and Windus, new ed., 1968 and Christina Hardyment, *From mangle to microwave: the mechanisation of household work*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989. For a 19th century view see Mrs Bernard [Helen] Bosanquet, *Rich and poor*. Macmillan, 2nd ed., 1896. 'One of the most hopeful signs of social improvement is the extent to which married women are withdrawing from the labour market; that the working classes should recognise the importance of women's home duties is a sign of their higher intellectual standards...' p80.
4. Deirdre Beddoe, *Discovering...* p8.
5. David Vincent, *Bread...* p55. See the following section on the balance of power within the household.
6. Edward Higgs, *Domestic...* p203. Care must still be taken with these journals; for example, *The Family Economist; a penny monthly magazine devoted to the moral, physical and domestic improvement of the industrious classes*. Groombridge and Sons, vols.1-6, 1848-53.
7. Michael E. Rose, *Poverty...* p4.
8. R.C., 1868, vol .xiii, part II, parish evidence, Kidlington p343.
9. O.A., *Finstock and Fawler School Log Book*. T/SL 26(i), 28th February 1895.
10. B.S. Rowntree, *Poverty...*; Mrs Bernard [Helen] Bosanquet, *Rich...* p78.
11. Caroline Davidson, *A woman's...* p7.
12. Joanna Bourke, *Housewifery...* p182. See also her footnote 59. 'Many historical and sociological studies of women treat task allocation as the indicator of power, rather than as a process requiring study'.
13. *ibid.* p182.

14. Elizabeth Roberts, *A woman's...*p83. See also Flora Thompson, *Lark...*pp.170-173.
15. Joanna Bourke, *Housewifery...*p191.
16. B. Seebohm Rowntree, *How....*p140; Flora Thompson, *Lark...*p62.
17. R.C., 1868, vol.xiii, part II, parish evidence, Combe,p341.
18. Ellen Ross, *Love...*p76. *The Family Economist*, vol.1, p44 suggests that if the husband 'keeps the purse' the wife should know how much he earns.
19. C.L. Balfour, *Homely...*p107.
20. John R. Gillis, *For better...*p255.
21. See Chapter 7 on informal networks of support for further examples of a woman's external power.
22. O.A., SO 71/1/A1/1 *Combe School Log Book 1872-1900...*10th June 1895. See also 8th December 1898: A mother made '...many wild and unfounded charges of neglect and ill-treatment.' See also Chapter 4, section 4.3.1.2 on the effects of employment on education.
23. See census returns 1851-91 for the case study area to show group settings in which women lived.
24. See census returns PRO HO 107/ 1730,1731 for example and for the following decades up to 1891.
25. R.C., 1868, vol.xiii, part I, p165.
26. *ibid.*, part II, p165.
27. Richard Jefferies, *The toilers...*p93.
28. Maude Robinson, *A South Downs farm in the sixties*. J.M. Dent and Sons, 1938, p46.
29. Richard Jefferies, *Hodge...*p241.
30. O.A., T/SL 26 *Finstock and Fawler School Log Book* 11th August 1896.
31. M.K. Ashby, *Joseph Ashby of Tysoe 1859-1919. A study of English village life*. Merlin Press, 2nd ed., 1974, pp.168-169.
32. R.C., 1868, vol.xiii, part II, Appendix B, p341; *ibid* p34. See also *ibid.* part I, p80 10/- (50p) a day/acre for a man and his wife.
33. David Hoseason Morgan, *Harvesters and harvesting, 1840-1900: a study of the rural proletariat*. Croom Helm, 1982. See especially p118. See also David Morgan, 'Oxfordshire's travelling harvesters', *Oxford Magazine*, 22nd May 1970, pp.261-263. For children travelling see *Finstock and Fawler School Log Book*. O.A., T/SL 26... 29th July 1887.
34. R.C., 1868, vol.xiii, part I, p79. See also James Caird, *English...*p511. Oxfordshire wages 1850-51 9/- (45p) a week. In addition, the average weekly wages of ordinary agricultural labourers taken from a table compiled by Lord Ernle, part of Appendix X of *English farming past and present* and cited in Ernest Selley, *Village trade unions in two centuries*. Allen and Unwin. 1919, p172. Oxfordshire: 1839 9/-(45p), peak in 1882 13/-(65p) and in 1910 12/-(60p).

35. Raphael Samuel, *Quarry*...p206.
36. Bishop Wilberforce's *Visitation of Oxfordshire* 1854. Cited in M.A. Aston, *Stonesfield*...p32.
37. The Economic Society, *Family*...p9.
38. Elizabeth Roberts, *A woman's*...p151. See also Ellen Ross, *Love*...p27, pp.51-53 and pp.81-84.
39. C.L. Balfour, *Homely*...pp.38-39.
40. M. Sturge Gretton, *A corner*... pp.126-127.
41. See local directories and newspapers for details of retail outlets.
42. David Alexander, *A history*...p110.
43. Jonathan Brown, *The English*...p44; E.W. Martin, *The secret people. English village life after 1750*. Phoenix House, 1954, p178. See also J.C. Drummond and Anne Wilbraum, *Englishman's food: five centuries of English diet*. Pimlico, 1991.
44. C.W. Pumphrey, *The Charlbury*...p27, p31 and p32.
45. Judith Fay and Richard Martin (eds)., *The jubilee*...p53.
46. C.L. Balfour, *Homely*...p37.
47. O.A., Ms. d.d. Par. Kidlington d.20. *Kidlington Parish magazine* October 1889. See also 1893-94 for the first jumble sale to be organised by the church and George Bourne (Sturt), *Change in the village*. Duckworth, reset ed., 1955, p64.
48. Judith Fay and Richard Martin (eds)., *The jubilee*...p8. A payment of 7.5d (3p) per lb was made.
49. See Chapter 6, sections 6.2.1 and 6.2.2.
50. Ellen Ross, *Love*...p7; Melanie Tebbutt, *Making*... and Paul Johnson, *Spending*.... See also Pat Thane, *Foundations of the welfare state*. Longman, 1982. (Social Policy in Modern Britain), p19. She suggests that the pawn shop enabled families to survive from week to week.
51. R.C., 1893-94, vol.xxxv, p46 evidence of Mr Treplin of Wiltshire.
52. B.S. Rowntree and May Kendall, *How*...Study x, p62.
53. *ibid.* study i, p43.
54. See Melanie Tebbutt, *Making*...
55. C.L. Balfour, *Homely*...p39.
56. For an example of an article on thrift see *Kidlington Parish Magazine*...March 1889. O.A., Ms. d.d. Par. Kidlington d.20.
57. Pat Thane, *Foundations*...pp.29-30.
58. Mary Chamberlain, *Fenwomen*...p94. See also chapter 8, section 8.3.1 for attitudes towards the Poor Law.

59. Paul Johnson, *Spending...*p55.
60. Pat Thane, *Foundations...*p30.
61. David Eastwood, *The benefits...* pp.161-162.
62. G.J. Davies, *A farewell letter to the parishioners of Charlbury*. Joseph Masters, 1857.
63. C.O.S., *Chipping Norton Deanery Magazine*, 1880-81.
64. O.A., Ms. d.d. Par. Kidlington c.9, item g. *Parish papers 1826-1969* including Kidlington Friendly Society reports, 1846-1849; William Wing, *Annals of Kidlington and its annexes...* [Reprint Oxford Chronicle 1881] p15.
65. O.A., STON III/1/1 Rules and regulations, amendments 1823, rule 1.
66. *ibid.* rule 11.
67. *ibid.* rules 10 and 7.
68. O.A., STON I/i/a/i *Stonesfield Friendly Society Accounts*, 1850-1894. Raised to 9/-(45p) and 4/6(22p) respectively in 1858.
69. Violet Butler, *Social conditions in Oxford*. Sidgwick and Jackson, 1912, p61; P.H.J.H. Gosden, *The friendly societies in England 1815-1875*. Manchester University Press, 1961, p61.
70. *Royal Commission on Friendly Societies. First report*, 1874, p30. Cited in P.H.J.H. Gosden, *The friendly...*p64.
71. C.O.S., *Chipping Norton Deanery Magazine*, 1880-81; September 1891.
72. M.K. Ashby, *The changing English village. A history of Bledington, Gloucestershire in its setting 1066-1914*. Kington: The Roundabout Press, 1974, pp.377-78.
73. *ibid.* p378.
74. George Swerford of Filkins commented: 'A pair of shoes for one of the family cost 10/0 (50p) and that was a farm labourer's whole week's wages.' Judith Fay and Richard Martin (eds), *The jubilee...*p14.
75. Flora Thompson, *Lark...*p31.
76. *Chipping Norton Deanery Magazine*, 1880-81.
77. O.A., SO 71/1/A1/1. *Combe School Log Book 1872-1900*. See also *Chipping Norton Deanery Magazine*, 1880-81, Spelsbury section.
78. *Chipping Norton Deanery Magazine*, 1881.
79. B.S. Rowntree and May Kendall, *How...*Study III. See also study XLI, p289. Money given to children was put in the penny bank to save for summer clothes.
80. O.A., Ms. d.d. Par. c.9 Kidlington Friendly Society; O.A., Bullingdon Petty Sessions, PS 1/3/A13, April 1849-September 1853, 21st December 1849. See also B.L., Ms. D.D. Dew d.17, The diaries of G.J. Dew, 12th June 1876, on drinking and rowdiness at Kirtlington Friendly Society annual holidays.

81. Violet Butler, *Social...*p243.
82. See Chapter 6 on household management resources.
83. R.C., 1893-94, vol.xxxv, Thame Poor Law Union, p39 and p46.
84. Paul Johnson, *Spending...*p192.

'...the real value [of earnings] to the individual family will by no means altogether be determined by the ruling range of prices, but to a very great extent by the habits and capacities of the wife'.

Economic Society, *Family budgets...*, p9.

Chapter 6 Household management: resource and skill strategies

6.1 Introduction

In chapter 5 the financial aspects of household management were examined. It established the woman as the key financial manager; a position of power and responsibility. As such she could use strategies of careful spending, saving and credit to help her money go further.

Chapter 6 seeks to examine the non-financial aspects of household management; the resource and skill strategies that were available to women. To this end the chapter is divided into two sections. The first part will focus on four resources available to women; allotments and gardens, animal husbandry, countryside resources and adequate accommodation. The next section concentrates on two skill strategies; food preparation and sewing. The concluding section provides an assessment of the value of resource and skill strategies and second, a more general conclusion of the value of household management within the overall strategic framework.

6.2 Resources to assist with household management

Four resources are considered. The first three are provision-based; gardens and allotments, animal husbandry and the countryside. These are resources which saved women having to spend money in shops. The fourth resource, adequate accommodation, is of indirect influence in that it could facilitate household management skills.

6.2.1 Gardens and allotments

The renting of a garden and/or an allotment had a number of benefits such as providing food for home consumption and excess for sale. There were significant variations in garden and allotment provision and not all poor families had access to them. In Oxfordshire at the beginning of the nineteenth century Arthur Young suggested that there were gardens to nine-tenths of the cottages that he had seen. By 1833 there were allotment schemes in 61-70% of parishes in Oxfordshire and in the 1890s in the Thame Poor Law Union it was reported that nearly every village had gardens [allotments?] of between 5 and 20 poles attached to cottages.¹

The information provided by the report on the Thame Poor Law Union highlights the problem of distinguishing between allotments and gardens. An allotment has been defined as a 'piece of land which fulfilled the main condition of being cultivated by the labourers with no other help than his family and only in his leisure hours'.² However, this definition could equally apply to a garden. There were a number of types of land for cultivation; potato ground, cottage garden, vegetable garden, allotment and fuel allotment and the distinction between these categories is not always clear. For the purpose of this thesis the most important distinction is between those who had access to land and those who did not.

In West Oxfordshire, access to allotments increased between 1840-1870 to about two thousand allotments; one allotment for every three or four labourers. In Charlbury before 1830, 13 acres of land was devoted to allotments; by 1860 it was 80 acres and by 1890, 110 acres. At Stonesfield there were five groups of allotments covering 86 acres and on the Duke of Marlborough's estate, Mr. Napier, the Duke's agent, reported that there were 914 allotments and 360 cottages. A few allotments were 20 poles each but most were 40 poles. The average rent was £2 per acre. Even very small settlements such as Hampton Poyle

had allotments. It was noted in the Vestry Minutes: 'Agreed to divide Poor's Piece of land into allotments and let to cottages'.³

Access to a garden or allotment could assist a family in a number of ways. Fruit and vegetables, and in particular potatoes, could be grown for home consumption. Sometimes wheat was grown which could be milled into flour. Animals could be kept on the land, enriching the soil and providing meat and by-products for the family.⁴ Herbs were grown for flavouring food and medicinal purposes and surplus produce could be taken to market.⁵

The working of an allotment did not automatically bring advantages. A number of variables affected yield; size of allotment or garden, soil type, the weather, skills and motivation of the family and even distance from a family's dwelling. Other factors included organisation of the land such as through an allotment association, animal / crop divisions of the land and the uses to which produce was put.

At Stonesfield the soil was favourable and land was productive.

The soil is light and dry, yet yields good crops of barley and potatoes which are of the utmost value to the labourer in feeding his family and his pigs, and as the land can be worked during the slack time from November to February considerable economic benefit is obtained.⁶

Figure 14 Allotment rentals found in and around the case study area

Rent

1. £2, £3 and £4 an acre
2. 40 poles 5/7(27p), 80 poles 11/3(56p),
160 poles £1 2/6(£1.12), 640 poles 40/-(£2)
3. £3-£6 per acre, 4.5-5d(1-2p) per pole
4. 40/- to 80/- (£2-£4) per acre
5. 8/- (40p) 20 poles

Sources: [Note 1 pole=30.25 sq. yards]

1. James Caird, *English...*p29; 2. O.A., Wootton *P.C.* xvi/a /1a; 3. R.C., 1893-94, vol.xxxv, Thame Poor Law Union, p6; 4.C.S. Read, *On the...*pp.78-79; 5.R.C., 1868-69, vol.xiii, part II, parish evidence, p340, Mrs Wilden.

Sometimes families obtained land free from their employers. A Somerset agricultural labourer recorded by the Economic Society received both a house and 0.75 acre garden rent free.⁷ Productive land was generally used for vegetable growing with an emphasis on potatoes. If a family had two allotments they were often put to different purposes. George Swerford of Filkins recalled his family having one allotment for vegetables and a second to grow barley for the pig.⁸ The rental of two allotments suggests a commitment on the part of a family to working the land.

At their inception in the late eighteenth century farmers opposed allotments because they feared the diversion of their labourers' effort from their own land. C.S. Read suggested that the size and location of an allotment was an important factor in its success or failure.

Ground allotments are common and have been found to have been of much service to the poor. Their value, however, greatly depends on their extent and situation. If above a quarter of an acre more time is required for attending to it than a labouring man has at his disposal, and if the allotments are remote from the village, the time and extent of the walk thither and back after a hard day's work is more than a garden is worth.⁹

How far allotment keeping was a woman's strategy is debatable. Much depended on her age, physical health, number and ages of children and whether in paid employment during the day. Allotment holders lists mainly record men, although women could have taken an active part.¹⁰ An exception to this can be found in details of the holders of allotment gardens at Lees Rest smallholdings near Charlbury which listed 9 women, 7 of whom were widows.¹¹ In Shropshire, Richard Millard commented on the 1.5 acre allotment and one-sixteenth acre garden which his wife largely cared for; weeding, planting, selling early vegetables and growing turnips for pigs. 'The wife managed the ground in a particular manner for 13 years with potatoes and wheat, chiefly by her own labour, and in a way which yields good crops'.¹²

The relationship between the desire of some women to move into a private rather than a public sphere and allotment keeping is not clear. A survey carried out at the beginning of the twentieth century suggests: 'The disinclination to engage in other than household work which spread very widely among the wives and daughters of farmers about 1870 spread later to the labourers and their wives'.¹³ Maud Davies found women working in cottage gardens in Corsley, Wiltshire at the beginning of the twentieth century. One woman grew a lot of fruit, boiling it for jam to use in the winter, in addition to selling flowers and vegetables. In one year she sold £8 8/5(42p) worth of produce.¹⁴

Working the land was not without cost. Some allotment societies had strict rules with penalties for failing to adhere to them. These varied from banning machinery; at the Islip (Oxfordshire) Glebe Allotments ‘...the land shall be solely cultivated by spade husbandry’, to not allowing sub-letting, trespass or Sunday working. At Hampton Poyle ‘...any occupier who shall plough his Allotment contrary to this rule [spade husbandry] shall forfeit the produce thereof’ and failure to pay rent on the correct day resulted in crop forfeit.¹⁵

The most unpleasant forfeit found was the ‘blackmail’ approach of the Charlbury vicar, Reverend Dr. Silver. In 1845 he decided to establish a school to challenge the Quaker monopoly on education in the town. Many poor parishioners had some allotment land for potato growing administered by the vicar and he used this to put pressure on the holders, directing his agent to send the following notice to all allotment holders. However, he later withdrew his ultimatum.

I am directed by the Reverend Dr. Silver to inform you that he wishes you to send your children to his schools; the girls to Miss South’s school and the boys to Mr Hill’s and to attend church Sunday School; and you and your wife attend the church. And, unless these rules are attended to, the allotment or land you occupy will be taken away.¹⁶

In conclusion, some families gained a tremendous amount, others very little, but those with an allotment or garden must have at least gained over those who did not. Families testified to the value of their land but could not always quantify its value.

I cannot tell you, Sir...what my land is worth to me in money: it helps me in so many ways: a bit here and a bit there. It helps the children and feeds the pigs and the fowls. It is the best thing that was ever done for a poor man.¹⁷

However, some budgets recorded by the Economic Society are useful. For a Leicestershire collier and groom his garden yielded all the vegetables needed

including potatoes, and a Somerset agricultural labourer and his family had produce from their ground of 30/- (£1.50) net value. One of Rowntree's case studies revealed that for one Oxfordshire family, but for their ground, it would have been impossible to live; they consumed 38lbs potatoes every week. For another family nearly a quarter of the food consumed was home produce.¹⁸

Sale of produce could be important too. In the Thame Poor Law Union it was found useful to pay off debts. It was reported that: '...it is only through the harvest work and the sale of garden produce etc. that these people are enabled to pay off their debts contracted in the winter'.¹⁹ Cultivating land for both home consumption and sale of produce was not an easy option. It was a strategy that required commitment and hard physical labour. John Archer suggests that allotments failed to reach those most in need because they were given to the 'respectable' poor who were then under obligation to the allotment provider which was sometimes their employer.²⁰ How far this applied to the case study area is not known.

The access to land could provide food, a little financial gain through the sale of surplus produce which could free wages to be spent on other basic foodstuffs that could not be grown or expensive purchases such as footwear. John Benson suggested it was: '...among the most popular, not to say most successful of the many manifestations of nineteenth and early twentieth century penny capitalism'.²¹

6.2.2 Animal husbandry

A pre-requisite for keeping animals was land and the amount required varied, depending on the type of animal. Cows needed a considerable amount, pigs, chickens and rabbits relatively little. It is not clear how much this was a woman's strategy. Women were involved in the feeding of animals but Flora Thompson

suggests that it was usually the men who took overall responsibility for the care of pigs. Women may have been responsible for the feeding of pigs and were involved in the preparation and distribution of meat.²²

The type of animal kept was affected by regional and local considerations such as the availability of water, the provision of pigsties, family tradition and the amount of money a family had available; chickens and rabbits being the cheapest animals to buy and keep.²³ Sufficient and appropriate space were particularly important. Pigsties were provided at Yarnton and Wootton and there was a large quantity of common ground available to cottagers at Wolvercote where flocks of geese were kept.²⁴ Although chickens and rabbits were widely kept, like so many daily aspects of the life of the poor, it was not deemed worth recording.

The advantages to a family of animal husbandry could be considerable; providing meat and by-products for use by the family, for sale, payment of debts and as acts of charity or reciprocity with friends and neighbours.²⁵ In addition, there was the security of being able to sell animals in a crisis as well as the interest and diversion they provided. In particular, great claims were made for the ownership of pigs. They have been called '...the great softeners of temper and promoters of domestic harmony, a couple of hitches of bacon are worth 50,000 Methodist sermons and religious tracts...' and '...they are the embodiment of peasant prosperity...' and '...poor men's savings banks'.²⁶

Pig meat could also be traded for other products. In Ascot-under-Wychwood at the end of the nineteenth century cottagers sometimes paid for a year's grocery with a pig, or if they had two, drew cash for the other one.²⁷ George Swerford's family from Filkins kept two pigs. 'We had two pigs in March and two at Michaelmas. Mother was a good judge of pigs and did the buying'.²⁸

Keeping animals was not total profit; costs included the purchase price, food and shelter. Pig accommodation was not always popular with neighbours. At Yarnton it was reported that Widow French's pigsty was '...filthy and offensive...the worst of all is Geo. Hall's. Its stench is dangerous to Mr. Hill's family, and as Mrs. W. Hill keeps a school for very young children it ought to be remedied or rather removed immediately'.²⁹

Pig keeping was not always allowed. At Kidlington College Gardens one rule stated: 'No tenant shall place any fence, pig sty or other building upon his garden'.³⁰ Some farmers were unhappy about their labourers keeping pigs, fearing they would steal food for them from the farm. This problem could be circumvented by farmers keeping pigs for their labourers. '...Labourers living in farm cottages have a pig kept and fattened for them by the farmer so as to prevent it being fed upon the farmer's land', it was reported in the Thame Poor Law Union.³¹ With so much vested in a pig it was vital that it should thrive, and to guard against problems of disease some labourers joined pig clubs to ensure against loss. Poor labourers unable to purchase a whole pig sometimes bought a share in part of a pig. Records of such clubs were rarely kept.

It is difficult to quantify the value of animal husbandry. A Somerset agricultural labourer made a net profit of 10/- (50p) a year from the sale of his pig in February, although other sources suggest higher figures of between £1 and £1 10/-. A good profit could be made from poultry keeping. Mrs. Abbott from Oxfordshire reckoned on £2 per annum clear profit, selling her eggs for 7d (3p) a dozen.³² In addition, there were benefits other than financial ones to be made from animal husbandry.

The value of a pig to a labourer is not limited to the bacon or pork which a man consumes or sells, for it helps to make the manure for his garden and

allotment. It also creates a feeling of confidence in a labourer's mind that there is something to fall back on when luck goes against him...³³

Animal husbandry could also foster good relations within the community. '...A whole network of reciprocities and transactions grew up around the keeping of them'.³⁴ Keith Snell suggests that this social / psychological value of animal husbandry is something that modern researchers find difficult to appreciate.³⁵ For many people animal husbandry was a valuable dietary addition, an insurance and an interest as well as providing a sense of peasant proprietorship of a freeborn Englishman's right to land.

6.2.3 Countryside resources

Countryside resources could be used to facilitate a number of aspects of household management; food, medicine, fuel, lighting, cleaning and washing. Women were largely responsible for these areas, sometimes assisted by children. For some women it was a more obvious strategy than others; dependent in part on geographical location and the knowledge and motivation of the women themselves.

Food could be obtained from the countryside; fruit, nuts, berries and mushrooms for example. The boundary between free and owned food was sometimes hazy such as apples in orchards and vegetables in employers' fields.³⁶ The debatable legitimacy of taking such produce stems from the tradition of use rights; the taking of produce as established by custom. Gleaning, the picking up of stray ears and straws of corn from a field after reaping, was perhaps the most common use right.. It has been suggested that it was a general custom in parts of England in the 1840s.³⁷ It was strongly defended by the poor and continued well into the nineteenth century.

Gleaning was largely the job of women and children, even the very young. A woman from Sussex recalled that in the mid 1870s: 'After an early breakfast, I used to start with my children for one of the Hall fields, carrying our dinner with us...even the toddlers could help by twisting the straws into bends and also helping me tie up my shears'.³⁸ M.K. Ashby stated: 'Each gleaner had a linsey-woolsey bag hanging from her waist. Tiny boys and girls had tiny bags...The family's total gleanings were laid out on a sheet and bundled for carrying'.³⁹ At Spelsbury School on the 28th September 1885 it was noted: 'Attendance poor owing to gleaning'.⁴⁰

Gleaning was still possible in the 1870s and 1880s despite the mechanisation of farming. Much depended on local factors such as the degree to which machinery was used, the attitudes of farmers, Justices of the Peace and the gleaners themselves.⁴¹ The gleaning of barley probably declined before that of wheat. William Wing, writing of the period 1826-1880, lamented that gleaners were no longer allowed a day in each barley field: '...rakings are left to sprout or be spoiled and become useless alike to either farmer or gleaner, the latter class being debarred from all stubble but those of wheat'.⁴²

The value of gleaning to families varied. Wheat gleanings were used for flour and barley for the pig. G.E. Mingay considers it: '...is impossible to assess and was doubtless extremely valuable'.⁴³ Industrious families could glean 11 bushels of wheat, although other estimates vary between 2 to 6/7 bushels. Flora Thompson referred to just 1 to 2 bushels or more. Whatever was collected it was: '...a great asset to the food supply of the household during the autumn and early winter...' and could also be sold to pay debts and buy items such as shoes.⁴⁴ Other foodstuffs such as crab-apples, berries and even acorns could be collected. Children gathered acorns which were sold to farms for up to 15/- (75p) a bushel where they were mixed with salt to feed pigs and sheep.⁴⁵

Countryside resources could also be used for medicinal purposes. Women learned about remedies from their mothers and particular cures were passed from one generation to the next: '...most working-class medicine was self-prescribed and self-administered. Outside advice came from the chemist but rarely from a doctor... the bulk of poor people dealt with everyday ailments themselves'.⁴⁶

Remedies were included in a variety of publications such as household manuals and parish magazines. In Kidlington Parish Magazine for April 1890 the remedy for a cold was given as a poultice of mustard and linseed in a muslin cloth and for burns egg white applied with a feather.⁴⁷ Women made herbal medicines taken from the garden, fields and roadsides. Cures for many common ailments were well known and passed on orally. Celandines were used for warts and raspberry leaves during pregnancy. Some remedies are still used or the ingredients have been incorporated into modern products.⁴⁸

Fuel could be obtained from the countryside and was used for cooking, heating, personal and clothes washing, and lighting to a certain extent. 'The poor burned an astonishing variety of substances in an effort to keep warm and cook their food'.⁴⁹ These included wood, furze, sticks, cattle dung, broom, potato peelings and even leather.⁵⁰ As with gleaning, the collection of firewood was perceived as a use right and was largely exercised by women and children. George Swerford remembered his mother 'wooding'. 'Another thing Mother did was to go wooding with other women. They took trucks or prams or whatever they had got and went into the Squire's woods to pick up chippings from the axe'.⁵¹ Again, like gleaning, it has been suggested that the collection of wood gradually became less permissible and less possible, through the enclosure of land.⁵² Alternative provision was sometimes made. At Ramsden Heath in West Oxfordshire people were allowed to collect fallen timber for kindling provided a wheeled vehicle was not used.⁵³ A

considerable blow to the people living in the vicinity of Wychwood Forest was its enclosure around the middle of the nineteenth century although there was an initial gain in terms of fuel, work and food.⁵⁴

Gradually people turned to coal as their main source of fuel although wood must have been a valuable supplement, particularly in times of hardship. Coal charities and clubs where coal could be purchased at a reduced price or donated to those most in need were set up.⁵⁵ Employers sometimes helped out; a Surrey gardener received coals and lighting from his employer. Fuel provided some light, but women also collected rushes to use with fat to make a cheap but feeble light.⁵⁶ Finally, cleaning and washing jobs could be aided by countryside resources. Women used straw, wood and bran for cleaning. Afterwards the bran could be fed to the pig.⁵⁷ Dung, plant ashes and stale urine were used for laundry purposes and washing could be done in rivers, ponds and streams.⁵⁸

Women often took the resources of the countryside for granted; access to them being part of their tradition. Their use was rarely recorded.

6.2.4 Housing

The provision of adequate accommodation was a valuable, if not very obvious strategy. A well-constructed, well-ventilated, spacious dwelling facilitated the maintenance of a home. There could be a clear delineation of spaces for cooking and sleeping and sometimes room to accommodate lodgers.⁵⁹ Unfortunately, for many poor women this strategy was unrealistic and they and their families had to put up with far from decent accommodation.⁶⁰

There were significant regional variations and much depended on the attitudes of the owners of the cottages. The most useful strategy for a family would be to try to

obtain a cottage with a job. This was most likely for farm workers who cared for animals as they were skilled workers taken on by the year. For single women one option was going into service, another was sharing with friends or relations.⁶¹ Contemporary middle-class observers had an ambivalent attitude towards the cottages of the poor. Cottage life was viewed as picturesque and cosy and was glorified in the paintings of the period, yet cottagers were criticised for their dirty, cramped and immoral living conditions.⁶²

The Royal Commission on the Employment of Children, Young Persons and Women in Agriculture described Oxfordshire cottages as 'good or fair' or 'bad'. In Woodstock accommodation was deemed: '...inconvenient and insufficient generally'.⁶³ Bladon and Stonesfield appear to have had a better standard of accommodation. New cottages in Bladon and owned by the Duke of Marlborough had been: '...built with a desire to give every necessity...' to his employees. They were built of stone with slate roofs and several had both a sitting room and three bedrooms.⁶⁴ A more surprising example is that of Stonesfield. It was an open village and they usually had worse accommodation than closed ones where some landowners provided good accommodation for their workers. In Stonesfield most cottages had two bedrooms, a sitting room and a pantry. Reverend F. Robin commented:

The cottages belong in the most part to different individuals, not to any great landowner. Scarcely any are owned by tradesmen with whom the people are obliged to deal; most cottages are pretty well ventilated. The water supply is sometimes short but much better than in many places; the people have for the most part not that far to go for it.⁶⁵

Many families, however, had to cope with severe housing problems. This created a depressing atmosphere within which women were expected to manage their households. Reverend Vaughan Williams of Yarnton highlighted some of the problems in a housing survey he carried out on the village in 1853. Of the 39

labourer's cottages he surveyed, the main problems were the want of privies, unpleasant pig sties and poor ventilation. The water, which came from a natural spring, was declared 'excellent'.⁶⁶

Some elderly women and widows were able to obtain almshouse accommodation. Such women were seen as deserving in that their circumstances were not their own fault. There were a number of almshouses in the case study area. Widows living in cottages on the Ditchley Estate appear to have paid reduced rentals.⁶⁷

Figure 15 List of cottage rentals for widows living on the Ditchley Estate, 1857

| Name | Settlement | Rental per half year |
|----------------|----------------|-------------------------|
| Widow Crofts | Taston | £1 |
| Widow Beck | Enstone | £1 5/-. In arrears 10/- |
| Widow Bennett | " | " |
| Widow Claridge | Church Enstone | " |
| Widow Kench | " | £1 10/- |
| Widow Rook | - | £1 |

Source: O.A., DIL1/1/9b, Ditchley Agents' Account Books for Estate Business

For comparative purposes a cottage in Bladon a decade later cost 1/-(5p) to 2/6(12p) per week to rent, excluding a garden. Thus in a half year period people could expect to pay between £2 6/-(30p) and £6 5/-(25p); considerably more than that paid by the widows.⁶⁸ For the majority of the poor, the inadequate nature of such of their housing ensured that it was usually a liability. The next section focuses on the skills that women could use to make their income and resources go further; food preparation and sewing skills.

6.3 Skills to assist with household management

Household manuals, imbued with the Smilesian ethic of self-help suggested that skills were a vital part of being an economic housewife. 'Skill is a great part of household management. This is to be got through thought and practice'.⁶⁹ Skills were essential adjuncts to careful spending and the acquiring and use of non-financial resources. Women could not perform miracles; skills without the backing of money and resources could only be of limited value. Food preparation and sewing were particularly valuable skills.

6.3.1 Food preparation

Women needed to be skilful in the way they acquired and used foodstuffs in order to provide economical and nutritious meals with little waste. Household manuals suggest: '...the making up of a meal is a most essential part of the duties of housewives...' and it seems likely that many poor women would agree with this.⁷⁰ However, managing on a limited budget with scant knowledge of good nutrition must have meant that the provision of well-balanced meals was far from easy.

Contemporary middle-class observers were totally unrealistic in their expectations of the meals provided by poor women.

There is no connection with the condition of the agricultural poor that is better worth the attention of improvers than the style of cookery pursued in these cottages. A more wretched cookery probably does not exist on the face of the earth. The soddened cabbage is typical of the whole thing.[It was, however, conceded that such food was suited to]...the coarse tastes and hearty appetites of their husbands.⁷¹

The work of Dr. Edward Smith on the food eaten by the labouring classes for a Government report is useful because it included research on female gloveresses from Yeovil and their tastes may not have been dissimilar to the gloveresses in the case study area.⁷² Ten gloveress families (22 persons) were investigated.

Table 5 Summary of findings of Dr Edward Smith on the food of the labouring classes, 1863

| Food | No. families |
|---|--------------|
| Purchased baked bread | All |
| Potatoes-5.25lbs per week (adult) | 7 |
| 0.5lb fresh vegetables per week | " |
| Sugar | 8 |
| Meat (butcher meat) | Nearly all |
| Bacon | 9 |
| Fish | Rare |
| Milk (1.75 pints a day) | 7 |
| Skimmed milk and cheese | All |
| Eggs (1 kept fowl) | 3 |
| Tea (1.75oz per week) | 9 |
| Coffee | - |
| Beer (ordinary quality) | 4 |
| Total average food value per adult per week 2/9.5 (14p) | |
| 3-4 meals per day | |
| Meat around twice a week | |

Source: Sixth Report of the Medical Officer of the Privy Council with Appendix, 1863, published 1864, vol.xxxviii., p226.

Dr Smith's conclusions were unfavourable; the general state of health of the gloveresses was '...not good. The women and children were commonly pale, and

had thin, sensitive skins, and when they were emaciated they were very weak...’ His research on what he referred to as the ‘outdoor class’ was more favourable. They were not ill fed and had a lower sickness rate than the gloveresses. However, he also noted that less nourishment was given to the family and suggested that the worst scenario was where a family had several children under ten, no labour was available for the wife, rents were high, families were neither able to grow vegetables in abundance nor were they near enough to a town to purchase goods.⁷³

Table 6 Diets from Oxfordshire families researched by Dr Edward Smith: outdoor occupations

| <u>Case</u> | <u>Breakfast</u> | <u>Dinner</u> | <u>Tea/Supper</u> |
|-------------|---|---|--------------------------|
| 388. | Tea, bread, butter, dripping | Bacon 3 days, bread, butter other days, tea | Bread, tea |
| 387. | Coffee, bread, butter. Husband-bacon | Boiled bacon, vegetables. Pudding 2 days | Bread, butter tea |
| 384. | Bread, butter, tea, treacle | Bread, cheese, tea-wife and child. Bread, cheese, tea or potatoes and herring for others | Hot bacon and vegetables |

Source: Sixth Report of the Medical Officer of the Privy Council with Appendix, 1863, published 1864, cases 388, 387, 384, p259.

The items outlined in tables 5 and 6 were very basic and families appear to have had a monotonous diet. ‘For six days a week they [the poor] live on vegetables,

bacon and bread, and on Sunday the change is more often to pork than to beef or mutton'.⁷⁴ Using food from allotments and gardens was one way of making food go further and be more appetising. Of particular value was the growing of potatoes; a filling carbohydrate. Many regional recipes were based on them as they stretched the precious meat ration. Cornish pasties, Lancashire hotpot, Bedfordshire clanger and Norfolk suet roll were all filling, cheap dishes.

*The poor find in practice that they can make up a dinner or a hot supper with potatoes added to a morsel of meat or bacon which they have, when otherwise it would be a dry, cold and uninteresting meal...any cooked potatoes which have been left from dinner may be warmed up with a little fat for supper without much cost in fuel.*⁷⁵

Bread was another useful filling carbohydrate food and was very economical if women used gleaned wheat and baked the bread themselves. 'You will notice that where bread is least bought, there is the most thrifty housekeeper', it was noted in a report on the labourers of the Thame Poor Law Union.⁷⁶ Bread making was a time-consuming operation and its making may have depended on whether a woman was in paid employment. The Yeovil gloveresses are known to have purchased baked bread; Elizabeth Roberts suggests that women baked their own and Pamela Horn that they made it but did not bake it.⁷⁷

The large-scale use of vegetables depended on whether families grew them. Land was often primarily devoted to potatoes as it was a staple part of the labouring family diet.⁷⁸ Another staple was a warm drink. It enlivened a monotonous diet, particularly cold meals. Tea was especially favoured. Women economised by using tea over and over again until it lost all its strength. Sometimes roasted acorns were used as a coffee substitute: '...a beverage scarcely less agreeable'. Tea substitutes could also be made such as toast tea, by pouring water over burned toast. Tea kettle broth was made from thick stale bread, dripping, salt and pepper and herb

teas such as camomile and rose hip could be made from garden or countryside resources.⁷⁹

These are some of the ways women could eke out food. The number who did so is not clear; women learned their housewifery skills from their mothers and grandmothers and this could lead to generations of careful managers or otherwise. Joanna Bourke suggests that there was a desire among women to learn more housewifery skills.⁸⁰ How possible this was in rural areas is not known, but organisations such as the Mothers' Union must have begun to meet this need.⁸¹ The purchase and preparation of food was largely the preserve of women; it gave a degree of power and control over the family: '...it was she who created and sustained both her family's preferences and prejudices in their taste for food'.⁸²

Women whose husbands were the sole family breadwinners had to provide sufficient food to ensure a reasonably high male labour productivity which could result in a gendered dimension to food distribution.⁸³ When husband and wife worked, particularly in some form of hard manual labour, it is not clear how food priorities were decided.

The cookery skills of women varied, so for some food preparation was a very effective strategy, but for others it was less successful. Skill was not enough though; factors such as the amount of money coming into the household and its size, the availability of home-grown food, the quality of shopping facilities and the time available for cooking were all important.

As yet, relatively little is known about the attitude of women towards the food they ate. They used much carbohydrate and seasonal produce and little meat and sugar. Paradoxically this created a healthy diet. Women with more money to spend

sometimes used it to purchase more expensive cuts of meat or something sweet. This did not necessarily lead to an improvement in nutrition.

6.3.2 Sewing

'Modern historians have been slow to recognise the importance of dress in our understanding of society'.⁸⁴ Equally, the skills associated with dressmaking; making, altering and mending clothes have been neglected. Yet to be skilled in these areas could save a family money. Furthermore, it was a readily available skill which could be passed from one generation to the next. Most women could mend and alter garments. The sewing needle was referred to as: '...woman's indispensably useful instrument' 'A woman who is a good mender, even if she be poor, will have all her family neat, and free from rags which are a disgrace to decent working people'.⁸⁵

Sewing was used in a number of ways to combat poverty. Women used garments until they were worn out, passing them from one family member to another, altering and mending them as necessary. 'The same old garments pass from one to another'... 'they adapt as best they can for their own or their children's wear'.⁸⁶ Women rarely recorded these commonplace activities.

As well as making full use of what was in the home, women were vigilant in their search for cheap and free clothes. Some were provided by relations such as daughters in service. Rowntree reported Mrs 'C' from Oxfordshire receiving cast-off clothing from relations.⁸⁷ Charities could be a useful source for expensive items such as winter coats and pieces of cloth.⁸⁸ Upper and middle-class women sewed for the poor. 'The honourable Mrs Brassey sent us some clothing from the Needle Guild which Mrs Marwood Cox distributed to the best advantage in the parish [Spelsbury] among those in need'.⁸⁹

Women sometimes purchased clothes cheaply through clothing clubs and jumble sales.⁹⁰ Jumble sales were a good source for keen sewers. George Swerford recalled the Filkins jumble sales: 'The women used to fight each other over the dresses. Mother was always collecting pieces for her rag rugs'.⁹¹ Sewing skills could also be extended to shoe repair. The census returns for the case study area list a few female shoe binders and Rowntree mentioned a Mrs 'C' from Oxfordshire who mended her children's shoes, however, shoe makers were usually male.⁹² Although sewing could be a valuable skill, the fact that most villages, even small ones, had a number of sewing women, suggests that some women did not always use their skills to a great extent.⁹³

6.4 Conclusion

It is clear that household management could be a very effective strategy, particularly for families teetering on the brink of poverty. Quantifying its effectiveness is more difficult. Many variables need to be taken into account such as income, skill levels, attitudes of household members towards spending, saving and other prudent practices. Careful household management could be a continuous strategy whereas employment tended to be variable. Although it could be continuous it should not be seen as a static strategy. It needed to alter as circumstances within the family changed such as pregnancy, illness or children growing up. When a Leicestershire collier and groom found his work became slack and two of his children had left home to get married and so no longer contributed to the family income, his wife was forced to do odd jobs to make ends meet.⁹⁴

As well as internal changes to a family's or an individual's circumstances, external changes such as the development of transport and retail networks played a part.

Such changes required women to be vigilant in their approaches to household management, ready to respond to changes with new strategies if necessary.

The skills of the women were powerful weapons against poverty. Poverty was fought but in some ways was accepted; it was part of life, ever present or periodic, but did not necessarily involve loss of respect or shame. As one woman commented: 'Poverty's no disgrace - but it's a great inconvenience'.⁹⁵ A homely atmosphere with touches of light relief even when in need could be created, as this description of a Wootton woman's cottage illustrates: 'Many gaudy little pictures adorn the walls and a quantity of crockery from a peddler's basket lined the narrow shelves. Flower pots filled the long window sills.' Gloveress cottages were also reported to be 'neat and clean'.⁹⁶

Effective household management was not a cure-all for poverty. Women needed a certain basic income to be able to manage; no amount of careful management on a totally inadequate income could stave off destitution. Once a woman experienced regular inadequate income and became trapped by debt, it must have been extremely difficult to cope. Living on the knife-edge of poverty could create considerable anxiety.⁹⁷ Rowntree refers to three such Oxfordshire women. Mrs Shaw he described as: '...a tall, thin, very worn woman with a pale face full of anxiety.' Mrs 'D' commented: 'You can't call it a living, it's a dragging of yourself along'. Finally, Mrs West said: 'I couldn't tell you how we manage; the thing is to get it past'.⁹⁸

These quotations suggest that some women merely existed rather than lived. Health meant an absence of illness rather than a vitality of being. However, care must be taken because comments were sometimes made according to what women thought they were expected to say rather than what they felt. Rowntree's overall conclusion for rural women was more optimistic than the individual quotations

suggest: '...there is a slow disturbance - something that is not yet rebellion, and not yet hope, that seems to hold the dim promise of hope'.⁹⁹

Household management appears to have been a strategy of greater importance than employment for two reasons. First, it was a strategy open to every woman. All women were responsible for household management but not all were involved in external employment. All women had the potential to make a difference to the lives of their families by careful management. Second, household management was a permanently available strategy; women could use it all their lives whereas employment was not necessarily available all the time.

Considering that household management was a universal occupation among women it is surprising that it has not received the same degree of scholarly attention as less widespread aspects such as employment. Lack of sources may be one reason but there are others such as the low-esteem in which some researchers hold the subject. Second, these studies will have a bearing on other subject areas such as the economy of the family and the issue of power relationships. Joanna Bourke makes a persuasive argument for this redress.

Housework was not 'invisible' work. It was very visible-especially to other housewives, who competed with each other and punished (through social ostracism and gossip) those who were seen as lowering standards. They worked to increase their power-base within the household in this period [1860-1914] by focusing on the irreplaceability and indispensability of their skills and resources. The home was not known by many housewives as a place of confinement. Rather, for many, it was a neighbourhood power-base but a power-base none the less.¹⁰⁰

Household management study involves exploring the minutiae of family life; aspects of living which, on their own, may seem of little value, but when combined with other elements could make a difference to a family's standard of living as well as having wider social and economic implications.

The true economy of housekeeping is simply the art of gathering up all the fragments, so that nothing be lost. Nothing should be thrown away so long as it is possible to make use of it, however trifling that use may be; and whatever be the size of a family, every member should be employed either in earning or saving money [or both].¹⁰¹

Household manuals, although of limited value for much of this chapter because of their classist approach and lack of understanding of the needs, priorities and capabilities of the poor, were right to stress the value of household management skills. 'A mother's domestic work - sewing, cleaning, nursing, and especially supplying and preparing food - was often essential to her family's sheer physical survival. Women schemed, struggled and starved themselves to provide these things...'¹⁰² This is why household management is arguably the pivotal strategy in making ends meet; income and other resources were important but what women did with them was even more important in determining whether a family could manage.

Footnotes to Chapter 6

1. D. C. Barnett, 'Allotments and the problem of rural poverty, 1780-1840' in E. L. Jones and G. E. Mingay (eds.), *Land, labour and population in the industrial revolution. Essays presented to the J. D. Chambers*. Edward Arnold, 1967, p163.
2. D. C. Barnett, *Allotments...* p165; R. C. 1893-94, vol. xxxv, Thame Poor Law Union, p55.
3. D. N. Bates, *The agricultural...* p78; Jessie Clifford, *My reminiscences of Charlbury*. Gloucester [n.p.], [1892], pp.26-27. Taken from a letter dated 15th February 1892 to the 'Daily News'; Arthur W. Ashby, *Allotments and smallholdings in Oxfordshire. A survey*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1917, p38; R. C. 1868-69, vol.xiii, part II, Parish evidence; O.A., Ms. d.d. Par. Hampton Poyle d.4. *Vestry minutes 1859-92*, including church accounts 1875-92, 11th October 1875.
4. See section 6.2.2 on animal husbandry.
5. Household manuals frequently list the culinary and medicinal uses of herbs. For retail outlets see chapter 5, section 5.3.
6. Arthur W. Ashby, *Allotments...* p38. This is interesting because although November to February was generally a slack time for farmworkers, many men in Stonesfield worked in the slate industry during the winter months.
7. Economic Society, *Family...* Budget 18, p48.
8. Judith Fay and Richard Martin (eds.), *The Jubilee...* p7.
9. C. S. Read, *On the farming...* pp.79-80.
10. See for example O.A., Ms. d.d. Par Hampton Poyle e.3. 23rd July 1877 - 17 allotment holders listed, all male. By 13th November 1877 3 women listed.
11. O.A., DIL 1/1/95 Ditchley Estate, part of a list of 4 rentals, 1857-1910. (94-97).
12. Cuthbert W. Johnson, *The cottage farmer's assistant in the cultivation of his land and the book of the household*. James Ridgeway, 1842, p8.
13. Arthur W. Ashby, *Allotments...* p5.
14. Maud Davies, *A history...* p136.
15. B.L., G.J. Dew Papers Temporary box no. D. MSS. D.D. Dew, 26th September 1879; O.A., Ms. d.d. Par. Hampton Poyle e.3, Rules and table of fines.
16. J. J. Maling, 'No church - no potatoes. When Charlbury defied the Vicar', *Chiltern and Oxfordshire Life*, no. 30, November / December 1974, p21. Note changes c. 1870 in parish vestry, giving ordinary people control over parochial charity including allotments.
17. Sir H.E. Bunbury, 'On the allotment system', *Journal of The Royal Agricultural Society*, 1845, p391.
18. Economic Society, *Family...* Budget 27, p61 and Budget 19, p49; B.S. Rowntree and May Kendall, *How...* Study 1 p44 and Study 2 p51.

19. R.C., 1893-94, vol. xxxv, Thame Poor Law Union. Appendix A, p58, Mr. Sanson. Comment from Mr. Lively: 'Were it not for the potatoes from the allotments, it would be starvation'.
20. John E. Archer, 'The 19th century allotment: half an acre and a row', *Economic History Review*, vol.L, no.1, February 1997, pp.31-32 and pp.36-37.
21. John Benson, *The penny...*p29. See also E.N. Martin, *The secret...*p176. He suggests that: 'Once the housewife could no longer rely upon home-grown produce and home-manufactured goods for feeding and clothing the family she came to know the meaning of want and experienced a difficulty balancing the weekly budget.'
22. Flora Thompson, *Lark...*pp.22-24 but see also pp.26-27.
23. John Benson, *The penny...*p22.
24. Reverend Vaughan Thomas, *A sanitary survey of the parish of Yarnton...*October 7th and 14th 1853; R.C., 1868-69, vol.xiii, part II, Appendix B, parish evidence, p345.
25. See Flora Thompson, *Lark...*pp.22-24 on the reciprocity associated with pig meat.
26. William Cobbett, *Cottage economy*. Peter Davies, new ed., 1926; H. Winn, Diary 28th September 1844, cited in James Obelkevich, *Religion and rural society: South Lindsey 1825-1875*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976, p63.
27. D. M. Warner, *My personal...* [p4].
28. Judith Fay and Richard Martin (eds), *A Jubilee...* p7.
29. Reverend Vaughan Thomas, *A sanitary...* p10. Similarly at Wootton, Reverend W. B. Lee commented: 'The pigsties are a very serious nuisance, producing dirt and often disease.' R.C., 1868-69, vol. xiii, part II, p345.
30. O.A., Ms. d.d. Par. Kidlington c.9, item g. *Parish papers 1826-1969*. Kidlington College Gardens rules, 1831.
31. R.C., 1893-94, vol. xxxv, Thame Poor Law Union, p56. See also Economic Society, *Family...*Budget 18. A Somerset agricultural labourer purchased a pig for 17/- (85p) from his employer in October and covered this cost by having 1/-(5p) deducted from his wages each week.
32. Economic Society, *Family...*Budget 18, p48; R.C., 1893-94, vol.xxxv, Thame Poor Law Union, p39; Economic Society, *Family...*Sussex woodman, p50; B.S. Rowntree and May Kendall, *How...*Study xxxiii, p262.
33. R.C., 1893-94, vol.xxxv, Thame Poor Law Union, p39.
34. Raphael Samuel. *Quarry...*p206.
35. K.D.M. Snell, *Annals...*p178.
36. See for example B.S. Rowntree and May Kendall, *How...*Study xxxviii, Oxfordshire, Mrs Abbott, pp. 264-65. 'She is a contriving woman. In the season her boys go round gathering crabs and berries...'. See also Economic Society, *Family...*Budget 21, p50. A Surrey labourer was provided with a gun licence by his employer so that he was able to shoot rabbits.
37. G.E. Mingay (ed), *The agrarian history of England and Wales*. Vol. vi, 1750-1850. Cambridge University Press, 1989, p734. See also P. King, 'Gleaners, farmers and the failure of legal sanctions in England 1750-1850', *Past and Present*, 22, 1989, pp.116-150.

38. Alice C. Day, *Glimpses of Sussex rural life*. 1929, pp.20-21.
39. M.K. Ashby, *Joseph...*pp.25-26.c.1870.
40. O.A., T/SL/ 48/i *Spelsbury School Log Book*, 28th September 1885.
41. Clive Emsley, *Crime and society in England, 1750-1900*. Longman, 1987. (Themes in British Social History). p106. He suggests that mechanised binders and reapers eliminated gleaning towards the end of the nineteenth century.
42. William Wing, *Changes in farming and the rural economy during the 55 years, 1826-1880*. Reprint from the Oxford Chronicle, 1880; Edwin Grey, *Cottage...* p26. He suggested that people did not like barley gleaning.
43. G.E. Mingay (ed)., *The Agrarian...*p743.
44. Maude Robinson, *A South...*p15; Edwin Grey, *Cottage...*p124 and pp.118-19; Flora Thompson, *Lark...*p28; M.K. Ashby, *Joseph...*p26.
45. Edwin Grey, *Cottage...*p93.
46. Virginia Berridge, 'Health and medicine', in F.M.L. Thompson (ed)., *Cambridge Social History of Britain 1750-1850*. Cambridge University Press, 1990, p186. See also *ibid.* p178.
47. O.A., Ms. d.d.. Par. Kidlington d.20-41.*Kidlington Parish Magazines*, 1889-1922, April 1890.
48. For example, C. W. Alexander, *The housewife's friend and family help*. William Walker and Sons, c.1880. See also parish magazines such as Kidlington for April 1890.
49. Caroline Davidson, *A woman's...*p71.
50. Edwin Grey, *Cottage...*p53; Caroline Davidson, *A woman's...*p71.
51. Judith Fay and Richard Martin (eds)., *The Jubilee...*p10; George Bourne (Sturt), *Change...*p23. He commented: 'On the roads too, women were, and still are, frequently noticeable, bringing home on their backs faggots of fir wood a mile away or more.'
52. Caroline Davidson, *A woman's...*p77. See also Clive Emsley, *Crime...*on use rights, especially p107.
53. D.H. Allport, *Ramsden. The story of a Wychwood village*. Witney: The Witney Press, reprint with a supplement 1963, p31; Edwin Grey, *Cottage...*p53.
54. C. Belcher, 'On the reclaiming...' p274. See also Caroline Pumphrey, *The Charlbury...*p57. She recalled old women in Cornbury Park picking up firewood. See also Edna Mason, 'Headington Quarry c.1820-1860: a study of a nineteenth century open village'. *Oxoniensia*, vol. liv, 1989, p376 in which she mentions the picking up of firewood from Shotover Forest.
55. See Chapter 8 on formal methods of support, section 8.2.3.1.
56. Economic Society, *Family...*Budget 21, p50.
57. *ibid.* pp.121-122, 125 and 128.
58. Doris Coates, *Tuppenny rice and treacle. Cottage housekeeping (1900-20)*. Newton Abbott: David and Charles, 1975, p17; Edwin Grey, *Cottage...*pp.48-49; Judith Fay and Richard Martin (eds)., *The Jubilee...*p10.

59. See Chapter 2, section 2.4.9. on providing accommodation.
60. On housing see for example Jenni Calder, *The Victorian home*. Batsford: 1977; Jonathan Brown, *A history... on market town cottages* pp.132-136; C.S. Read, *On the...*pp.78-79; R.C., 1868-69, vol. xiii, part I, especially pp.92-93 and part II, parish evidence p340 on Begbroke and Bladon; C.W. Allen, 'On the housing of the agricultural labourer', *Journal of the Royal Agricultural Society*, vol.lxxv, 1914.
61. See Chapter 2, section 2.4.4. on domestic service and Chapter 7 on support provided by kin and neighbours.
62. See Christopher Wood, *Paradise lost. Paintings of English country life and landscape 1850-1914*.Barrie & Jenkins, 1988. For contemporary observers views of what cottages should be like see: Alexis Soyer, *A shilling cookery for the people*. Routledge, 1855, p174.
63. R.C., 1868-69, vol. xiii, part i, p92; D.C. Barnett, *Allotments...*pp.78-79.
64. R.C., 1868-69, vol.xiii, Part II, parish evidence, p340. Reverend H.A. Collier.
65. *ibid.* p344, evidence of Reverend F. Robin.
66. Reverend Vaughan Thomas, *A sanitary...*See especially the first part of the survey pp.2-17.
67. O.A., DIL 1/IV9b. *List of cottage rentals, Ditchley Estate*, 1857. See Chapter 8 on formal provision, section 8.2.1.4 on housing.
68. R.C., 1868-69, vol. xiii, Part II, parish evidence, p340.
69. C.L. Balfour, *Homely...*pp.80-81; *Domestic economy for rich and poor by a Lady*. Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown and Green, 1827, p22.
70. C.L. Balfour, *Homely...*pp.72-73. See C.W. Johnson, *The cottage...*for examples of food, p63 treacle not butter, water with milk, p75 recipe for cabbage soup, p76 gruel. *The Family save-all* by the editor of 'Enquire Within'. W. Kent and Co., 2nd. ed., 1861 suggested on p iv that by following the recipes in the book that the total expenditure on food could be cut by a quarter.
71. Richard Jefferies, *The toilers...* p79 and pp.103-104.
72. *Sixth Report of the Medical Officer of the Privy Council with Appendix* 1863, published 1864, vol. xxviii. See especially report no. 6 by Dr. Edward Smith on the food of the labouring classes in England. For Yeovil gloveresses see pp.225-233. See also D.J. Oddy, 'Working-class diets in late nineteenth century Britain', *Economic History Review*, Second series, vol.xxiii, no.3, 1970, pp.314-323. The article has an urban emphasis.
73. Sixth Report...p226 and pp.261-262.
74. R.C., 1893-94, vol.xxxv, Thame Poor Law Union, p46.
75. Sixth Report...p22.
76. R.C., 1893-94, vol.xxxv, Thame Poor Law Union, p46.
77. Sixth Report...p57; Elizabeth Roberts, *Working-class...*p313; Pamela Horn, *Victorian countrywomen...*p22.
78. See section 6.2.1 on allotments and gardens.

79. *The Family*...p288 hint 1119; M. Sturge Gretton, *A corner*...p127.
80. Joanna Bourke, *Housewifery*...pp.172-173.
81. See Chapter 7, section 7.3.1 on institutional support.
82. Elizabeth Roberts, *Working-class*...p322.
83. Sixth Report...p26. Dr. Smith noted a deficiency in food quantities among women and children.
84. Angela V. John, 'Introduction', in *Unequal opportunities*...p21.
85. C.L. Balfour, *Homely*...p42.
86. Mrs Bernard [Helen] Bosanquet, *The family*...p84 and see also p97; George Bourne [Sturt], *Change*... p64.
87. B.S. Rowntree and May Kendall, *How*... Study xli, p289.
88. See Chapter 8, section 8.2.1.2.
89. *Chipping Norton Deanery Magazine*, January 1897.
90. See also Chapter 5, section 5.3; Chapter 6, section 6.3.2 and Chapter 8, section 8.2.1.2.
91. Judith Fay and Richard Martin (eds), *The Jubilee*... p9.
92. See Census HO 107/1730, 1731; B. S. Rowntree and May Kendall, *How*... Study xli, p289.
93. See Chapter 2, section 2.4.6. on sewing. See also Census HO 107/1730, 1732 and RG 12/1173, 1178.
94. Economic Society, *Family*..., Budget 27, p59 and p61.
95. Flora Thompson, *Lark*... p31.
96. Richard Heath, *The Victorian*... p170; K. S. Woods, *The rural*... pp.145-146.
97. Ellen Ross, *Love*... p8. She suggests that if women failed to provide '...they were angry, heartbroken or depressed.'
98. B. S. Rowntree and May Kendall, *How*... Study i p42, Study ii p50 and Study iii p54.
99. *ibid* p331.
100. Joanna Bourke, *Housewifery*... p197. See also Chapter 7 on informal networks of support and Ellen Ross, *Love*... p8.
101. L. Maria Child, *The frugal housewife*. Thomas Tegg, 1832, p1.
102. Ellen Ross, *Love*... p8. See also B.S. Rowntree, *Poverty*...on secondary poverty.

SECTION D. COMMUNITY STRATEGIES

Section C dealt with the strategies women used within the household. They involved the participation of other household members who provided assistance with household tasks. Community strategies moves the emphasis beyond that of the nuclear family to the role of wider networks of people. Two types of network will be examined in this section. Chapter 7 will cover informal networks; the support provided by extended kin and neighbourhood groups. The latter encompass people with a physical proximity or a specific interest within a locality such as religious or recreational groupings. At this informal level the networks are primarily concerned with the help the poor gave to each other. Chapter 8 will examine formal networks; the support mainly provided across classes from the upper and middle classes to the poor through charitable help and poor relief.

This section explores the ways in which women drew on these networks in times of need.¹ It also attempts to examine the relationship between informal and formal networks and assess the overall value of community strategies within the taxonomy. However, it should be emphasised that, despite extensive searches for sources, this proved the most difficult topic in the thesis for which to provide evidence.

Women appear to have had choices about the types and levels of community support they received and, whilst it is not easy to assess how they made their choices because of the paucity of sources, the first step must be to examine the range of options open to them within the framework of the community.

Chapter 7 Informal Networks of Support

7.1 Introduction

Informal networks involved the support of the extended family and the neighbourhood such as people living within the locality, or specific groups such as those of a religious or recreational nature. This chapter is primarily concerned with the poor supporting each other and in particular the ways women gave and received support. Giving at this level was rarely recorded. 'Much working-class charity was ... local, spontaneous and independent, which rarely leaves a trace behind in the records'. However, a reply to Henry Mayhew by a female needleworker does provide a glimpse of the care the poor gave to each other. 'Ah sir, the poor is generally very kind to the poor. If we wasn't to help one another whatever would become of us'.¹

The concept of community was relatively well defined. Rural settlements were small, clearly delineated areas; mainly hamlets, villages and market towns. As most rural settlements were small, inhabitants had a good working knowledge of both kin and non-kin and so were well placed to offer support in times of need, although it cannot be assumed that support was always forthcoming.

Satisfying basic domestic needs such as the provision of food and clothing was a key part of community support so it is not surprising that women had a central position as both givers and receivers of support within this informal network. John Gillis suggests that: '... By and large, a wife's most intimate relations were not with her husband, but with her children (especially the girls) or with other women'.² Female relationships were important in the dissemination of information about needy inhabitants within the community as well as playing a part in determining

community culture. 'Women had a pivotal place in working-class life, however, not only in organising sheer group survival, but in the structuring of culture itself...'³ The following sections explore the ways women gave and received support, beginning with kin support then moving on to neighbourhood support.

7.2 Kin - extended family networks of support

The family was, to a large extent, the core of working-class culture and upheld bonds of duty and obligation. 'Helping was part of the family's duty as understood in working-class mores and an enormous amount was given and received as a matter of course'.⁴ Factors such as affection and the battle against the common enemy of poverty played a part in strengthening bonds. One source suggested that the poorer the neighbourhood, the more likely it was to be characterised by the strengths of inter-family relations.⁵

Women appear to have played a key role in the giving and receiving of kinship support. This is not surprising since they were largely responsible for managing the household budget as well as managing external relations: '...women played the major part in its functioning [the extended family]; with their control of the family budget, their dominance within the immediate family and home, and the close affective ties with their family relations'.⁶

7.2.1 Types of support provided by kin

Three types of support appear to have been available; providing accommodation, domestic support and financial help.⁷ In an attempt to explore the first type, providing accommodation, a small sample of settlements from the case study area was used, based on the 1851 and 1891 censuses. The market town, Charlbury, and two nearby villages, Finstock and Fawler were used because copies of the census

returns for these settlements had already been obtained for work on a study of female employment. The extended family members in the households were recorded.

Table 7 Numbers of households which included extended family members in Charlbury, Finstock and Fawler, 1851

| Settlement | Total no. households | No. with extended family |
|------------|----------------------|--------------------------|
| Fawler | 27 | 10 (37%) |
| Finstock | 94 | 22 (23%) |
| Charlbury | 100 * | 23 (23%) |

Only the first 100 households were examined because of the large numbers of households in Charlbury.

Source: 1851 Census PRO HO 107/1732

Table 7 shows that the percentage of households with extended kin varied from around a quarter to over a third. Percentages for 1891, as shown in Table 8 illustrate a slight fall in the case of Finstock and Charlbury whereas in Fawler the percentage fell by a half. Numbers of families with extended kin showed little change; 10 in 1851 and 7 in 1891, but the number of households in Fawler increased by 10 (27%).

Table 8 Numbers of households which included extended family members in Charlbury, Finstock and Fawler, 1891.

| Settlement | Total no. households | No. with extended family |
|------------|----------------------|--------------------------|
| Fawler | 37 | 7(19%) |
| Finstock | 124 | 25(20%) |
| Charlbury | 100* | 16(16%) |

* Only the first 100 households were examined because of the large number of households in Charlbury.

Source: 1851 1891 Census RG 12/1178

Table 7 shows that the range of households with extended family members generally varied from between a fifth to a third in each settlement. Apart from Fawler, where the percentage of households with extended kin was approximately half in 1891 of the 1851 figure, the other settlements exhibited little change between the 1851 and 1891 percentages.⁸ The familial types within these extended households were then tabulated and can be seen in Tables 9 and 10.

Table 9 Familial types of extended kin in Charlbury, Finstock and Fawler, 1851

| Familial type | Settlement | | | Total No. | % of Total |
|---------------|------------|--------|------------|-----------|------------|
| | Finstock | Fawler | Charlbury* | | |
| Mother | 1 | | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| Father | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| Mother-in-Law | 1 | 1 | 2 | 4 | 5 |
| Father-in-Law | 1 | | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| Sister | 1 | 2 | 2 | 5 | 6 |
| Brother | 3 | | | 3 | 4 |
| Sister-in-Law | 1 | | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| Grandchildren | 21 | 4 | 7 | 32 | 40 |

| | | | | | |
|---------------------|---|---|---|----|-----|
| Nephew | 2 | | 3 | 5 | 6 |
| Niece | 3 | | 3 | 6 | 8 |
| Cousin | 1 | | | 1 | 1 |
| Nephew's children | 5 | | | 5 | 6 |
| Stepchildren | 2 | 2 | | 4 | 5 |
| Son-in-Law | 1 | | | 1 | 1 |
| Daughter (& family) | 1 | | | 1 | 1 |
| Totals | | | | 80 | 100 |

*Note: Charlbury sample based on first hundred households.

Source: 1851 Census, PRO HO 107,1730

This table clearly shows the dominance of grandchildren within the homes of kin (40% of all extended kin). This ties in with what W.M. Williams found in his study of Ashworthy; most extended kin were close relations, and there was a high proportion of grandchildren.⁹ Although a number of elderly parents were accommodated with their grown-up children in the sample, 12(15%) of extended family members were such, none of the children accommodated both parents. Flora Thompson suggested space was the main reason for this. 'A father or mother could usually be squeezed in, but there was never room for both, so one child would take one parent and the other the other'.¹⁰

Table 10 Familial types of extended kin in Charlbury, Finstock and Fawler, 1891.

| Familial type | Settlement | | | Total No. | % of Total |
|---------------------|------------|--------|------------|-----------|------------|
| | Finstock | Fawler | Charlbury* | | |
| Mother | 1 | 1 | 2 | 4 | 6 |
| Father | 1 | | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| Sister | 2 | | 6 | 8 | 11 |
| Brother | 2 | | | 2 | 3 |
| Brother-in Law | 1 | | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| Sister-in -Law | 1 | 2 | 1 | 4 | 6 |
| Grandchildren | 17 | 3 | 5 | 25 | 37 |
| Great Grandchildren | 1 | | | 1 | 2 |
| Nephew | 1 | | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| Niece | 6 | | 4 | 10 | 15 |
| Step children | 1 | 3 | | 4 | 6 |
| Daughter-in-Law | | | 2 | 2 | 3 |
| Aunt | | | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| Totals | | | | 67 | 100 |

Note: Charlbury sample based on the first hundred households

Source: 1891 Census, RG 12/1178

Similar results were found when the 1891 census was examined, as shown in Table 10. Grandchildren were the dominant category of extended kin; 40% in 1851 and 37% in 1891. Nephews and nieces were also important categories; 14% in 1851 and 18% in 1891.

From this small sample the most common accommodation strategy used by mothers was to put their children with grandparents. Age of child does not appear to have been a factor in determining who should be accommodated with grandparents as Tables 11 and 12 show.

Table 11 Extended kin under 20 years of age in Charlbury, Finstock and Fawler, 1851

| Age group | No. extended kin | % of total under 20 |
|-----------|------------------|---------------------|
| 0-5 | 7 | 22 |
| 6-10 | 13 | 39 |
| 11-15 | 9 | 27 |
| 16-19 | 4 | 12 |
| Total | 33 | 100 |

Source: 1851 Census, PRO HO 107/1730

Of the total number of extended kin, 33 (41%) were under 20 years. From Table 11 it can be seen that over 60% of the children living with extended kin were 10 years or under.

Table 12 Extended kin under 20 years of age in Charlbury, Finstock and Fawler, 1891

| Age group | No. extended kin | % of total under 20 |
|-----------|------------------|---------------------|
| 0-5 | 11 | 32 |
| 6-10 | 9 | 26 |
| 11-15 | 8 | 24 |
| 16-19 | 6 | 18 |
| Totals | 34 | 100 |

Source: 1891 Census, RG 12/1178

The findings shown in Table 12 for the 1891 Census were very similar to those of 1851. Of the total number of extended kin 34 (51%) were under 20 years and around 60% were 10 years or under: 61% in 1851 and 58% in 1891.

Such a survey presents a snapshot in time and it cannot be assumed that these living arrangements were necessarily long-term. This is illustrated by an example from the Economic Society budgets where a widow aged 80 moved in with her son on the death of her husband. She was unhappy so moved back to her old cottage. Her grandchild aged 10 went to her cottage after school and spent the night with her.¹¹ Accommodation provision appears to have been a fluid strategy based on prevailing needs and desires.¹²

The second type of support, domestic help, appears to have been obtained in a number of ways, but particularly through children, the provision of food and clothing and nursing. In the first part of this section it was shown that grandparents could play a significant role in accommodating their grandchildren in their own

homes. However, they also provided day care along with other members of the extended family when mothers were employed or ill.

The provision of food and clothing by kin could be of great help to families. At the annual killing of the pig local relations received an invitation to the pig feast as well as a pig product.¹³ Maud Davies cited an elderly widow being sent bacon, butter and potatoes by her daughter and Rowntree mentions a woman having her father to dinner two or three times a week and he brings '...a bit of bacon'.¹⁴

Rowntree suggested that the most frequent mode of help provided by relations was cast-off clothing.¹⁵ The passing on of clothes by better off relations was particularly valued. 'For outer garments they [women at home] had to depend on daughters, sisters and aunts far away in service, who sent parcels, not only of their own clothes, but also of those they could beg from their mistresses'.¹⁶ Women performed other services such as washing or even personal care such as hair cutting.¹⁷ In times of sickness, pregnancy, childbirth and the post-partum period women would help each other out. Sometimes they would 'keep an eye' on an elderly relation; Maud Davies cited an elderly aunt who was looked after by her niece in Corsley.¹⁸ Most small acts of kindness were not deemed worthy of recording and very little evidence could be found for the case study area.

The third type of support women received was financial through informal loans, donations, the payment of a debt or regular assistance with financial outgoings such as club money or school pence.¹⁹ However, without oral sources, the response of kin to financial need will remain a private matter that is difficult to uncover. Janet Finch suggested that: 'Financial need, even on the part of a close relation, has apparently never been seen as a situation which required an automatic response'.²⁰

7.2.2 The value of kin support

In the late twentieth century there is a tendency to look back on the past as a time of strong family bonds but, while close ties existed, help was not always automatically forthcoming. 'The idea of a golden age in which family responsibilities were stronger than they are today is clearly a myth, without foundation in historical evidence', suggested Janet Finch.²¹

Historical evidence is, however, a problem. Sources relating to kin support in the case study area were rare. It seems likely that this was because kin support was a commonplace activity, not deemed necessary to record. Until oral testimony became available little can be uncovered about the attitudes the poor themselves held and any emotional support that may have been provided.

7.3 Neighbourhood networks of support

In villages and hamlets the idea of neighbourhood was clearly defined with the parish being an important boundary. In market towns the concept was more fluid; it could be a few houses, a street or a district. As well as a geographical dimension, neighbourhood had a social importance. 'It meant mutually beneficial relations one formed with others, a sort of social symbiosis'.²² The foundations of neighbourhood ties lay in physical proximity and shared local experiences such as church attendance and meeting at market. These ties could be deepened by bonds of affection and obligation. As with kinship connections, these bonds were largely taken for granted and hence generally unrecorded. 'The mutual aid of neighbours in working-class communities was silently given and received without troubling the historical record'.²³

Research on neighbourhood bonds seems to have been largely urban in nature. Ellen Ross, from her study on inner London concluded: '...the safety net for most families was the neighbourhood itself'.²⁴ Richard Jefferies referred to rural people as a charitable race, and eager to help each other. 'They will wait by the bedsides of their sick neighbours, divide the loaf of bread, look after the children and trudge weary miles to the town for medicine'.²⁵ However, sources for the case study area were very limited.

A number of neighbourhood bonds existed which helped women. First, there were bonds created by physical proximity; being a good neighbour was a part of rural culture. Second, daily household routines created bonds which involved both immediate neighbours and people from the wider community too. These bonds developed out of regular meetings when shopping, collecting firewood, fetching water and other routines.²⁶ Third, there were organisational groupings around place of work, clubs such as clothing clubs and chapels and churches. It has been suggested that: '...the Church provided for many women the only regular formal opportunity to get out of the house and meet each other, serving them in this respect as a pub served men'.²⁷ Women mainly met at services, but towards the end of the nineteenth century at mid-week meetings too, such as Mothers' Union groups. These groups aimed to provide both practical and spiritual support. The aims of the Mothers' Union as set out in the Chipping Norton Deanery Magazine were as follows:

...to awaken in mothers a sense of their great responsibility as mothers in their training of their boys and girls...and to organise in every place a band of mothers who will unite in prayer, and seek by their own example to lead their families in purity and holiness of life.²⁸

Church attendance and membership of such groups only reveals a partial picture of female spirituality; it is more difficult to uncover their religious beliefs. Gail Malmgreen suggests that this is '...a daunting assignment' and warns feminist

historians [and others] not to '...ignore religion, or confine themselves to the wider fringes of female spirituality [or] we will have forfeited our understanding of the mental universe of the no doubt substantial majority of women who are believers'.²⁹ Richard Jefferies referred to the rural poor as '...generally inclined to be religious after a fashion...'.³⁰

7.3.1 Types of support provided by the neighbourhood

Women were able to draw on two main types of support from their neighbourhood; accommodation and domestic. Financial help, an aspect of kin support, is not thought to be a major factor unless it was provided on a formal basis by local moneylenders.³¹

Providing accommodation was a key area of kin support and, although evident, it was less common among neighbours and provided on a different basis. 'Relations would be expected to take in kin for long periods, neighbours often provided temporary relief in emergencies'.³² On examination of the settlements of Charlbury, Fawler and Finstock in the 1851 and 1891 censuses there appear to have been few non-kin lodging with neighbours. However, record linkage is a notoriously difficult methodology and without additional family information it is very easy to make incorrect assumptions about family bonds.

Practical support was a two way process. It tended to be conditional: 'The borrowers were usually repaid, or there would soon have been nowhere to borrow from; but often an insufficient quantity or an insufficient quality were returned; and the result was a smouldering resentment against habitual borrowers'.³³ Elizabeth Roberts suggested: 'They [women] were especially proud of being self-reliant. But they also cherished ideals of co-operation...', while Ellen Ross suggested that the

patterns of neighbourhood change were tantamount to an 'intermediate economy'.³⁴

Women looked to neighbours for a variety of practical supports. A Leicestershire bootmaker's wife helped her crippled neighbour and her son fetched water for her. An Oxfordshire family passed on bones and scraps to a neighbouring family and in another Oxfordshire example: 'A kindly neighbour whose boys are earning gives Mrs. West the use of her 'furnace' on washing day, making up the fire for her with small coal and potato peelings'.³⁵

Clothes were passed between neighbours although the personal nature of such items frequently made it more often a strategy adopted by kin.³⁶ Nursing, however, seems to have been a significant task of neighbours, both in a crisis and long-term. In part this was because of their proximity: '...men who had been working all day would give up their night's rest to sit up with the ill or dying, and women would carry big bundles of bed linen to wash with their own'.³⁷ Nursing was a useful way for elderly women to earn a little money because of the proximity of the work and their available time. 'These payments constituted a significant element in the survival of those in precarious circumstances...'³⁸

A further, indirect way of providing domestic support was the passing on of useful information about saving money such as the best place to shop or where to get credit. Melanie Tebbutt's work on what she calls 'verbal strategies' - the passing on of information to help, advise and support - is of particular relevance, referring to gossip as a creative outlet for women although Richard Jefferies, a male observer, was more scathing: '...their [women's] chief intellectual amusement consists in tittle tattle and gossip'.³⁹ Again, the degree of emotional support that women gave each other is not recorded.

7.3.2 The value of neighbourhood support

For most women the neighbourhood was their world; the workings of it were both well known and important to them. 'These small geographical areas were of the greatest importance in the lives of working-class families; they offered a system of support and with it a system of social control'.⁴⁰

7.4 Conclusion

This chapter has examined the dimensions of informal methods of support, provided by kin and the neighbourhood. From the fragmentary and very incomplete evidence that has survived it is arguable that women needed the support of both.

The quantification of practical support is problematic since so little of it has been recorded; it may continue to be a strategy largely hidden from view. Rowntree suggests the considerable value of this strategy but even he cannot provide the minutiae of its outworkings.

But without the kindness of richer neighbours, grown-up children in service, or relations who send occasional parcels many of the families under review in the words of the Yorkshire man (study xviii) would 'hae ter black thersels ower an'go naykt'.⁴¹

Footnote to Section D of community strategies introduction

1. Frank Prochaska, *The voluntary impulse. Philanthropy in modern Britain*. Faber and Faber, 1988 (Historical Handbook Series), pp.28-29. He suggested that philanthropy at its broadest definition is '...an activity or an inclination which promotes the well-being of others.' p7.

Footnotes to Chapter 7

1. Frank Prochaska, *The voluntary...* pp.28-29; Henry Mayhew, *The Morning ...* Vol.4, Letter ix, 16.11.1849, pp.171-173. Cited in Helen Rogers, *The good...* p10..
2. John R. Gillis, *For better...* p249.
3. Ellen Ross, *Love...* p4.
4. F.A. Prochaska, 'Philanthropy', in F.M.L. Thompson (ed.), *Cambridge Social History of Britain 1750-1950*. Cambridge University Press, 1990, vol.3, p361; Elizabeth A.M. Roberts, *Women's...* p242.
5. Carl Chinn, *They...* p28.
6. Elizabeth Roberts, *A Woman's...* p180.
7. Janet Finch, *Family...* p61. She suggests the following categories: economic (gifts, inheritance, finding work, migration), accommodation, personal care including nursing and domestic tasks, practical support and childcare and emotional support. Her study mainly relates to the twentieth century but is put in historical context.
8. W. M. Williams, *A West Country village, Ashworthy. Family, kinship and land*. Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963, p142. Ashworthy, a small rural community, was found to have 22% of households with at least one additional member of the family present mid-century. Taking craft families alone the percentage was 38.3% and farming families alone 28.8%.
9. *ibid*, pp. 143-158. Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family...* p354. Although a study of the middle-class, they found many girls living with grandmothers.
10. Flora Thompson, *Lark...* p76. See also D. Thomson, 'The welfare of the elderly in the past: a family or community responsibility?'. In: M. Pelling and R.M. Smith (eds), *Life, death and the elderly*. Routledge, 1991.
11. The Economic Society, *Family...* Budget 22, p51.
12. R.E. Pahl, *Divisions of labour*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984, p20. He suggested that in pre-industrial groups '...members moved back and forth at different stages in the life cycle.' See also Janet Finch, *Family...* p65.
13. Flora Thompson, *Lark...* p27.
14. Maud Davies, *A history...* p195; B. S. Rowntree and May Kendall, *How...* p64, Study v.
15. B. S. Rowntree and May Kendall, *How...* p335.
16. Flora Thompson, *Lark...* p26.
17. Edwin Grey, *Cottage...* p74.
18. Maud Davies, *A history...* p195, Budget 193.

19. See chapter 5, sections 5.3 and 5.4.
20. Janet Finch, *Family...* pp. 67-68.
21. *ibid.* pp. 67-68.
22. Standish Meacham, *A life apart. The English working-class 1890-1914*. Thames and Hudson, 1977, p45.
23. Edward Royle, *Modern Britain. A social history 1750-1885*. Edward Arnold, 1987, p186.
24. Ellen Ross, *Love...* p8.
25. Richard Jefferies, *The toilers ...*, p104.
26. See Chapter 6 on the management of the household.
27. K.S. Inglis, *Churches and the working-classes in Victorian England*. Routledge and Kegan-Paul, 1963, (Studies in Social History), p332. For details of the spiritual health of some of the villages in the case study area see C.O.S., *Woodstock Herald*. For example Shipton-on-Cherwell was reported on in January 1876, p4.
28. C.O.S., *Chipping Norton Deanery Magazine*, February 1895. A Mothers' Union group was set up at Spelsbury on the 21st August 1889, *ibid*, 1889.
29. Gail Malmgreen (ed.), *Religion in the lives of English women, 1760-1930*. Croom Helm, 1986, p4.
30. Richard Jefferies, *The toilers...* pp.103-104; James Obelkevich, 'Religion', in F.L.M. Thompson (ed.), *Cambridge Social...* vol. 3, p317. He called it '...institutional superstition'.
31. See section 7.2.1 for financial support provided by kin.
32. Flora Thompson, *Lark...* p104.
33. *ibid.* p104. See also Elizabeth A. M. Roberts, *Womens'...* p241.
34. Elizabeth A.M. Roberts, *Womens'...* p241; Ellen Ross, 'Survival networks: women's neighbourhood sharing in London before World War One', *History Workshop Journal*, 15, Spring 1983, p7.
35. Economic Society, *Family...* Budget 25, p57; B.S. Rowntree and May Kendall, *How...* p46, Study 1 and p57, Study 3.
36. See section 7.2.1
37. Flora Thompson, *Lark...* p220. See also C. L. Balfour, *Homely...* p64.
38. Ellen Ross, *Survival...* p11.
39. Melanie Tebbutt, *Women's talk: Gossips and women's words in working-class communities 1880-1945*. Oxford University Department for Continuing Education Day School 'Women in History', 28th March 1992 and Melanie Tebbutt, *Women's talk: a social history of gossip in working-class neighbourhoods, 1880-1960*. Scholar Press, 1995; Richard Jefferies, *The toilers...* pp.103-104.

40. B. S. Rowntree and May Kendall, *How...* p184.

41. *ibid.* pp.310-311.

Chapter 8 Formal networks of support

8.1 Introduction

The previous chapter examined informal networks of support and suggested that the poor, whether kin or neighbours, helped each other in a number of ways. This chapter extends the analysis by examining formal networks of support; the provision of mainly structured assistance by the upper and middle-classes for the alleged benefit of the working-classes. Provision was made in two ways, through charities and the Poor Law, and the chapter is divided into two sections to examine these. First, however, it is important to understand the philosophy underpinning these formal networks.

Throughout the nineteenth century the poor continued to care for their kin and neighbours much as they had always done, but formal attitudes towards the poor changed. Anne Digby suggested that in the period prior to the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834: 'The traditional rights of the poor were being eroded, and a humane relationship between men of different status and income was often replaced by a narrower cash nexus'.¹ A much harder attitude towards the poor developed and distinctions were drawn between what Michael Rose referred to as '...an honourable and economically necessary state, and indigence or pauperism...'²

The idea that severe poverty was the result of an individual's failure to cope had a number of implications. First, it placed the onus on the poor; to work and be morally upright was seen to be a vital part of tackling poverty. Second, it resulted in a change of attitude amongst the providers of formal help to the poor, to a two tier system whereby the poor should be encouraged to help themselves, aided by charity for those who were deserving whilst the poor law would be reserved only for the destitute. This approach was crystallised in 1869 with the formation of the

Charity Organisation Society to co-ordinate the work of private philanthropic bodies who would concentrate their efforts on the 'deserving poor'. This coincided with the President of the Poor Law Board issuing the Goschen Minute: '...in which he put forward a policy of separate spheres of influence for the poor law and charity'.³

It was not until the end of the nineteenth century that a better understanding of the nature and extent of poverty was uncovered and gradually accepted.⁴ Despite the work of Charles Booth and B.S. Rowntree, who stressed the economic rather than moral causes of poverty, it took some time for legislative changes to be put into practice so that the poor had a more humane and comprehensive system of formal support.⁵ For much of the period covered by this thesis, formal support was characterised by this dual approach; the majority of the poor either forced to rely upon themselves or provided with variable support from charities, and the destitute reliant on a restrictive and harsh poor law system.

8.2 Charitable provision

There were two main types of charitable provision. First, there was endowed charity, that is, past generosity, mainly in the form of bequests.⁶ G.A Best has described endowed charities as 'prudential charity'; money was put into the establishment of institutions designed to relieve poverty, to bring order to the lower classes and to provide for a degree of self-elevation for those who were morally deserving. Provision usually took the form of doles, food and clothing charities, schools, almshouses and hospitals.⁷ The second type was voluntary charity, that is contemporary private benevolence, again often intended to raise the moral character of the recipient.⁸ It could be piecemeal or well-organised, regular support and covered a range of provision.

In rural areas many charitable traditions had been laid down over the years and become embedded in local culture. Such charity was particularly associated with landowners. Clear examples of benevolence can be found on the Ditchley Estate.

Twice during the past month Lord Dillon entertained to tea, bread and butter and cake the wives of the workers on the estate- approximately 30 women. All seemed pleased and grateful to his Lordship for the kind entertainment he gave them.⁹

The degree to which social paternalism was affected by the gaining of power among agricultural labourers through the union movement is not clear. The case study area was not far from the Warwickshire border, the region where Joseph Arch set up the National Agricultural Labourers' Union, and branches were soon established in Oxfordshire.¹⁰

The streamlining of charitable provision brought about by the formation of the Charity Organisation Society in 1869 may have resulted in a decline in the provision and use of social paternalism. Although the influence of this organisation was never strong in rural areas, elements of the system were copied, often in the form of local visiting groups. Here charity administrators were able to bring into play a detailed local knowledge of individuals that was not so readily available to their urban counterparts. One such scheme was set up by the Rector and Curate of Kidlington in 1870. The Curate commented:

I resolved as a first step, to invite the co-operation of the young ladies of the parish, and others who were willing to help in the work of the systematic visitation of the poor...to form a Parochial Association for the purposes of...ministering to the spiritual and temporal relief of the people.¹¹

A report on the scheme two years later revealed the village had been divided into twelve districts each with a visitor who would call on the poor in their homes and write recommendations for relief or pastoral visiting. The Rector suggested that

the people were 'ripe' for such a system and needed much awakening to improve their spiritual interests.

Against this background women sought charity to help them make ends meet. As household managers and representatives of their families to the outside world, they were likely to have had the main dealings with charity administrators. Women therefore had the responsibility of seeking out appropriate charities, some of which were only available at certain times a year. They needed to know who to approach and the conditions of receipt. The Charity Organisation Society and local visiting societies attempted to bring order to, and avoid the duplication of, charitable support, but this had the effect of deterring some women from applying. G.J. Davies, a curate at Charlbury between 1853-56, commented: 'The fact that an enquiry would be made into the circumstances, [of the family] of itself stops two-thirds of applicants, as it has been found to do in this case'.¹² This visiting scheme, set up by Davies is of particular interest because it pre-dates the formation of the Charity Organisation Society. He divided the parish into five districts, each looked after by two visitors who visited applicants in their homes to collect all the relevant details. The scheme also had a hidden agenda of encouraging children to go to school, inculcating cleanliness in cottages and teaching saving and economy.¹³

It is not easy to make firm conclusions about the ways women perceived and used charity. Sources, particularly on endowed charities are plentiful, but mainly concern what was supposed to be provided rather than the attitudes of those who received it. It cannot be established with any certainty that provision always reached the recipients. The next section explores what women could obtain, in theory at least and then assesses the overall value of using charity as a strategy against poverty.

8.2.1 Types of charitable provision

G.A. Best suggested that by 1850 there was 'a great quantity of charity'.¹⁴ This was true of the case study area as well as nationally. The market towns of Charlbury and Woodstock had the largest number of charities but most villages and some hamlets had them in addition to ad hoc provision. The nature of a settlement could affect provision. Closed villages were generally considered to have more endowed charities, with a greater emphasis on social paternalism from the local landowners. Open villages were generally considered to have informal, voluntary type charity. However, the nature of charitable provision in the case study area appears to have been more uniform than the open / closed theme suggests. Most settlements, even small ones, had a number of charities, particularly bread and dole charities.¹⁵ These types of provision as well as others will be examined in the next section.

8.2.1.1 Food

The previous chapters have shown that women obtained food in a variety of ways; free from the countryside, growing their own, purchasing from shops and markets, loans and gifts from neighbours and kin, and perquisites from employers. Food could also be obtained from charities; the most usual provision being bread, a staple item in the diet of the poor.¹⁶ There were a large number of bread charities in the case study area.¹⁷ It was discovered that the nature of provision was such that charitable supplies were only ever a supplement; it was impossible for a woman and her family to manage only with bread supplied by charities. There were a number of reasons for this. First, some bread charities only provided bread at certain times of the year such as the religious festivals of Easter and Christmas. For example, a number of Good Friday bread charities were brought together in 1848 to streamline provision.¹⁸ Such occasional provision only brought minimal benefit.

Second, amounts of bread provided were often small. Arthur Freeborn, a curate from Kidlington commented: 'The bread took the form of attractive little loaves and there was a general scramble for them...in fact bread used to be fought for and thrown about...The children had devoured their bread before they reached school'.¹⁹ Third, large families do not always appear to have received the most bread. Of 78 Bladon families who received bread 14 were female headed households. These are shown in Table 13 and illustrate that families with the most children did not always receive the most bread nor is frequency of provision stated.

Table 13 List of names for the suggested receipt of bread in Bladon, 1872

| Name | No. children | Bread | |
|------------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|
| | | Half quarter | Quarten (2lb) |
| Widow Savage | 5 | 1 | 2 |
| Widow Kench | 2 | 2 | 4 |
| Widow Tompkins | 2 | 1 | 2 |
| Widow Temple | 2 | 2 | 4 |
| Widow Woodward | 5 | 3.5 | 7 |
| Keziah Timms | 1 | 1.5 | 3 |
| Widow Long | 1 | 1.5 | 3 |
| Widow Cooper | 5 | 1 | 2 |
| Widow Beechy | 1 | 1.5 | 3 |
| Widow Skidmore | 3 | 1 | 2 |
| Widow Griffin | 5 | 3.5 | 7 |
| Elizabeth Tollet | 2 | 1 | 2 |
| Widow Moulder | 2 | 2 | 4 |
| Widow Rhoades | 2 | 2 | 4 |

Source: O.A., Bladon P.C., VI/i/2b. Suggested list of receivers of bread, 2nd April 1872.

The Bladon bread charities also provide an example of the fourth problem of charitable provision. Bread charities, along with other charities, often had moral or religious provisos so that only the 'deserving' poor received help. In a letter to the incumbent of Bladon it was requested that he should check the list of names on the bread charity list adding or omitting names as he saw fit. The writer of the letter added: 'I have, of course, left out of consideration all illegitimate children'.²⁰ This reason illustrates the way in which charity and the poor law were intended to be complementary. It was the poor law that was supposed to cope with the 'undeserving' and this included illegitimate children. Provisos were sometimes made regarding church attendance as well. At Yarnton, Alderman Fletcher's bread charity was altered by those administering it so that bread was only given to those who attended church and not to those who '...seldom or never enter it...and live their lives as heathens'.²¹

Food was sometimes provided on an ad hoc basis by ladies of the parish. Often this was given at times of severe distress such as harsh winters or to individual families in times of crisis. The Quaker ladies of Charlbury keenly supported this type of provision.

All the Albright houses [a strong Quaker family in the town] were good to the poor and covered basins wrapped in a cloth were habitually to be seen of old at their side doors about 1 o'clock when hot joints might be expected, sometimes with this plea: 'Her's got nothin' but bread and drippin' and that don't suit her stomach.'²²

Not all families received such bounty, however. One farmer's wife recommended 'brewis' for the poor; a far cry from a 'hot joint'.

Cut a thick upper crust of bread and put it into the pot where the salt beef is boiling, and nearly ready; it will attract some of the fat, and when swelled out will be very palatable to those who seldom taste meat.²³

These two quotations reveal different dimensions of philanthropic giving and suggest that there may be variations in provision between different propertied groups within settlements.

Towards the end of the century, ad hoc food provision became more formalised. Soup kitchens were one such example. Arthur Wilkinson of Bladon remembered taking cans to Blenheim Palace for soup and dumplings around 1900 and in Charlbury soup kitchens were recorded as early as 1880-81.²⁴ Overall, however, the provision of food by charities was only of limited value to women and always had to be combined with a number of food-obtaining strategies.

8.2.1.2 Clothing

Clothing, or material for clothing, could be obtained using a variety of strategies; purchase, making, mending, altering, from clothing clubs and kin and neighbours.²⁵ It was potentially more valuable than the provision of charitable food because the cost of coats and dresses could be very high.

At Fifield, clothing and material was provided by the Countess Talbot's charity and in 1884 coats were given to Charles Cummings and Charly (sic) Paxford, gowns to Edward Bartlett's wife and Joseph Burson's wife and 60 yards of calico to 20 houses.²⁶ Sometimes money was given for clothes and in 1869, 70 people at Kingham received money for clothes from the Dowdeswell Charity. Of these, 53 (76%) were women.²⁷ Thus, over three quarters of the recipients were women and, as Table 14 illustrates, amounts given could be considerable; in some cases equivalent to one week's wages for an agricultural labourer.

Table 14 Women in receipt of the Dowdeswell Charity, Kingham, 1869

| Amounts given | No. women in receipt |
|---------------|----------------------|
| 2/- | 4 |
| 4/- | 4 |
| 5/- | 1 |
| 6/- | 1 |
| 7/- | 16 |
| 8/- | 5 |
| 9/- | 16 |
| 10/- | 4 |
| 11/- | 2 |

Source: O.A., Ms. d.d. Par. Kingham b.7(c), *Churchwarden's Accounts, 1759-1884.*

Sometimes women were able to obtain clothes for their children. The box of baby clothes provided by the vicarage in Flora Thompson's village of Juniper Hill contained six of everything for babies as well as gifts such as packets of tea, sugar and a tin of oats for gruel. 'The box was a popular institution...Any farm labourer's wife, whether she attended Church or not, was made welcome to the loan of it'.²⁸ This was one of the few cases found where no provisos for the receipt of charity were made. Provisos for the use of the Yarnton Parish Box were written on the box itself. All were allowed the loan of the box except '....1. The ungrateful woman, who will not go to her parish church to thank God for her delivery. 2. The cruel woman, who will not bring her baby to Christ in His appointed way, by Baptism'.²⁹ Children were sometimes given gifts of material to be made into garments. At Spelsbury school: 'Her Ladyship [Dillon] left some material to be made into garments by the children'.³⁰

In addition to clothes and material, blankets could be loaned too. In the Kidlington Parish Magazine of January 1895 the vicar warned the three people who had not returned the parish blankets to do so, otherwise he would publish their names in the parish magazine.³¹

Another useful strategy for women was the obtaining of money for clothing or footwear through sewing meetings or clothing clubs. These provided women with involvement, a degree of control over what took place and the added bonus of social contact.³² There were also middle-class sewing clubs such as the Dorcas meetings in Charlbury. Caroline Pumphrey recalled: 'I think it was Aunt Letitia who instituted Dorcas meetings, where Friends and others met in one another's homes to sew for the poor'.³³

Most everyday clothes came from a variety of sources. Charitable provision was of particular value for the more expensive items such as coats and boots and in this way met only a part, but a valuable part, of very real needs of women and their families.³⁴

8.2.1.3 Fuel

Women obtained fuel in a variety of ways; purchase, 'free' from the countryside or from coal clubs. It was required in abundance at one of the most straitened times of the year in terms of a woman's budgeting - the winter - often when clothing or footwear was also required. Women sometimes had a degree of involvement in fuel charities in the same way as they had with clothing charities. Hemming's Charity in Chadlington was set up to help the poor to afford coal. Some people received it free, others could purchase it at 2d. less than the cost price.³⁵

For vulnerable women, particularly if they were unsupported, such provision could be of considerable value. At Combe it was recorded in the churchwarden's accounts for December 1890: 'Coal to 26 aged and poor widows'.³⁶ Occasional gifts of coal, though useful, only supplemented the purchase of fuel. Chipping Norton Deanery Magazine recorded: 'Sincere thanks to Miss Dillon of the Ditchley Estate from the poor of Spelsbury and Taston for her gift of coal'.³⁷ Not everyone was keen on this type of provision. G.J. Davies, the Curate of Charlbury between 1853-56 commented: 'The giving of coal out in little pittances-besides the immense trouble it takes to distribute it-seems to destroy the independence of the poor man'.³⁸ It must, however, be remembered that G.J. Davies was responsible for setting up the Charlbury visiting scheme whose purpose was to cut out indiscriminate charity and appeared keen to deter 'worthless' people from applying for charity.³⁹

8.2.1.4 Housing

This strategy differs from most of the others discussed in this section in that it was largely the province of one particular group of women; elderly, 'respectable' widows or spinsters. In rural areas the main type of provision for these women was almshouses. For example, the Duke of Marlborough provided money for almshouses in Woodstock. They were intended for six poor women: 'Widows or maidens, of the age of 55 upwards'. Each resident received £1 per month and a gown, bonnet and cloak annually. Money was paid to a local doctor to attend them.⁴⁰ Only a limited number of places in almshouses was available although many women may have been in need of decent accommodation. Many villages had a small amount of provision. In Spelsbury, Cary's almshouses provided for four poor widows. The buildings were maintained by Lord Dillon of the Ditchley Estate who also provided doles and gowns. On the death of one resident, Marianne

Hitchcocks (?), Lord Dillon paid for her house to be whitewashed and disinfected.⁴¹

Occasionally cottages were made available to poor families, although this was much more common under the pre-1834 Poor Law. Later examples can be found in Spelsbury where three small cottages were provided rent-free and at Ascot-under-Wychwood.⁴² In the case of Ascot-under-Wychwood charitable provision did not preclude the payment of some money as the following letter from Naomi Honeybourne, a resident, to the agent of Ascot-under-Wychwood's Poor Estate Charity Trustees illustrates:

Sir, in answer to your letter i am sorry to say we have no money now but will pay as soon as ever we can my husband is suffering from Rheumatism so bad that some time he can work and sometime not we have six little children as wants bread my husband has seen Mr. Walford he say he will do what he can for us i don't know if you know this is a charity house left to the poor of Ascot i don't think anybody is any poorer than we. I have the honour to remain your obedient servant. Naomi Honeybourne.⁴³

The provision of housing was of great value for a relatively small number of women, often those who were elderly and / or widows. Charity-provided accommodation in rural areas appears to have been rarely available to younger women and their families.

8.2.1.5 Money

Money could be obtained by poor women in a variety of ways such as employment, selling items and formal and informal loans.⁴⁴ Charitable provision of money was through doles. In Woodstock there were a number of such charities. Thomas Fletcher left provision in his will for doles of 6d to the poor who attended a sermon, Sir Littleton Osbaldeston, Edward Fennimore and Sir Thomas Crispe left provision for doles of 6d to widows on Christmas day and Esther Morgan for doles

to widows on New Year's day.⁴⁵ Despite an abundance of dole charities, they appear to have been of limited value to poor women.

First, the provision of once yearly doles can have only been of temporary use for women experiencing constant, grinding poverty. Second, amounts of doles were generally low. Third, provisos such as attending a sermon or being a communicant of the Church of England may have deterred some women from seeking help.

8.2.1.6 Education, training and employment

Help with education and training was a long-term strategy which could improve employment prospects. It presented some women with a dilemma as they had to balance the short-term gain of their children in employment against the long-term gains of education.⁴⁶ With the development of Board schools after 1870 and in particular the abolition of school pence in 1891 making it 'free', women became more amenable regarding sending their children to school although many children continued to work out of school hours and in the holidays.⁴⁷

The provision of charitable help for training provided tangible help to a child in the form of a trade. At Charlbury, money from 2 acres of land, Poor Boy's Close, was used to apprentice children from large families. 'The children are always bound out of the parish to good trades. The boys are chosen from the poorer sort, from amongst the largest families'.⁴⁸ Evidence was also found of a charity set up to reward faithful service. William Hopkin's Charity, by will dated 26th March 1681 left £200 for the purchase of lands of inheritance, to reward domestic servants in Bladon who had performed three years of continuous service and had been of good conduct and character. The charity appears to have been strictly monitored; a certificate of 1823 signed by Elizabeth Clarke stated that Patience Smith, her hired servant, had lived with her for three years.⁴⁹ The charity was still in operation in

1886 as there was a notice for a cheque for £15 10/10 (£15.54p), being the sizeable amount of money awarded to Fanny Berry.⁵⁰ One applicant, Fanny Goffe, declared: 'I the undersigned having lived as a hired servant with Mr John Danbury of Bladon Lodge for the space of three years intend at Easter to make an application for the Bounty money left for servants known as Hopkin's Charity'.⁵¹

Finally, there were some adult education charitable endeavours such as village reading rooms. One such scheme was set up at Combe by Miss Adela Brooke because she formed: '...a strong desire to bring brightness into the lives of the dwellers in these homes. She thought much might be done by lending books to these men'.⁵² The opening of the institute was attended by labourers and their families, although membership was restricted to men, of which 120 became members. An optimistic picture of the Combe Institute was reported: '...and the notes of music float across the village green, and the honest old labourers read their papers, and new life and hope thrill the dwellers of the picturesque cottages'.⁵³ Other institutes appear to have been less successful. The Reading Room at Chadlington was: '...not appreciated', while the one at Kidlington: '...has never succeeded in drawing any working-class men but has been useful to the gentlemen of the village'.⁵⁴ How far such schemes benefited women is not known. Mothers' meetings where women could learn about housewifery and other related subjects were the main forms of female adult education. They were usually associated with the local Anglican church.⁵⁵

8.2.2 Conclusion to charitable provision

Women did not always find charitable provision a useful strategy against poverty, nor was it always a particularly profitable one. Unlike other strategies such as household management or kin support, charitable provision had a number of facets

that resulted in provision not matching need; religious or moral provisos and the paucity an infrequency of provision.

The idea that the poor have: ‘...well appreciated their gifts...’ and that ‘...their hearts have been gladdened by the timely assistance...’ was sometimes too optimistic a conclusion.⁵⁶ Instead, the response of the poor was far more complex than one of grateful acceptance for anything received. Women used charity in a variety of ways and the value they derived from it varied significantly.

First, women did not have equal access to this strategy. The number of charities in settlements varied, depending on factors such as the structure of the village, the history of charitable provision and the degree of enthusiasm of upper and middle-class residents for the setting up and administration of charities.

Second, women used charities where they had a degree of involvement and control such as boot or clothing clubs. Charities with moral or religious provisos made it seem that need was insufficient grounds for receiving help. Invasion of privacy by visitors attempting to establish nature and extent of need was also unpopular. Visiting societies were particularly disliked for this reason.⁵⁷ Middle and upper-class women involved in charitable provision had to tread a fine line between helping, but not taking over, the lives of their poorer counterparts.⁵⁸

Third, formal charity was rarely a first stop strategy. Pat Thane suggested: ‘When family and community resources were exhausted application to charity was the next step’.⁵⁹ There was an unappealing conditionality of much village charity.

Fourth, charity was not a strategy that could be used equally by all types of women. It was particularly geared to ‘respectable’ vulnerable women such as

elderly widows or spinsters who had limited access to other strategies such as employment because of old age, infirmity or both.

Fifth, the individual values of charities varied tremendously. Women needed to pick and choose to obtain something worthwhile such as a coat, gown or boots. Doles and bread charities generally appear to have been of little value.

Sixth, there appears to have been a seasonal dimension to charitable provision both in the giving and receipt of items. Some charitable provision was only available at certain times of the year in the Christian calendar such as Easter and Christmas.⁶⁰

Feelings of deference towards charitable providers were less common by the end of the nineteenth century. Far from tying social groups together, charitable provision could cause divisions. The Church was affected by this tide of opinion; clergy attempts at charity were often either criticised or taken for granted.⁶¹ The attitudes of the charitable providers and the provisos they put on provision made formal charity a more limited and less helpful strategy than it could have been.

8.3 Poor relief

Much research has been carried out on the poor relief system but the majority of it has focused on national administrative and statistical trends.⁶² This approach is important but needs to be balanced by more regional and national studies. There are two significant reasons for this. First, despite the setting up of a national system of poor relief by the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834 which was supposed to bring in uniform support, there continued to be much regional and local diversity.⁶³

Second, it is vital to consider those who were affected by the system as well as the system itself. Most research has been concerned with able-bodied male labourers rather than women, who have tended to receive indirect attention as wives, despite the fact that a large number of women were unmarried.⁶⁴

In order to assess the use women made of the poor law as a strategy against poverty, two continua need to be considered. First, a geographical continuum, which uses national, regional and local perspectives and second, a time continuum which charts the changes to the poor law during the nineteenth century. This sets the framework for the next section which seeks to draw out the attitudes of women towards poor relief, the types of women helped, the ways in which they were helped and the value of the help they received.

There were 9 Poor Law Unions within Oxfordshire, although their boundaries did not coincide with the county boundaries. Part of the case study area was within the Charlbury Union and part within the Woodstock Union. Detailed records for these Unions were unavailable, so a local perspective was provided by an adjacent area, the Bicester Poor Law Union, for which a wealth of material has been preserved.⁶⁵ Bicester Union was in the east of the county, a largely agricultural area, consisting of villages and hamlets with Bicester serving as its market town. It was the main administrative centre and location for the workhouse. The Union was made up of 42 parishes, including the Buckinghamshire parish of Boarstall. There were two districts in the Union: Bicester and Bletchingdon. Most of the examples used in this section were drawn from the Bletchingdon District which was made up of the parishes of Ardley, Bletchingdon, Bucknell, Charlton-on-Otmoor, Fencott and Murcott, Fritwell, Upper Heyford, Lower Heyford, Islip, Kirtlington, Middleton Stoney, Noke, Oddington, Somerton, Souldern, Wendlebury and Weston-on-the Green.⁶⁶

In addition to the detailed Union records, the Bletchington District's relieving officer kept a detailed diary which provides a wealth of material on the district as well as a fascinating and sometimes contrasting perspective to those of his employers. George Dew's diaries reveal his concern for the plight of the poor and underprivileged and his particular sympathy for farm workers and the trade union movement. This sometimes brought him into conflict with a system that he was expected to impose.⁶⁷ The minutiae of his recollections help to provide a more rounded perspective on the poor law; from the implementation of policies to their effects on the poor.

8.3.1 Poor relief as a strategy against poverty: geographical and time continua

Women's attitudes towards poor relief appear to have changed over time. Prior to the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act a parochial system of poor relief existed, based on a framework laid down by the Elizabethan Poor Law of 1597-1601. Largely designed for a then rural population, the system worked reasonably well, with the parish operating as '...an effective social service geared to local needs'.⁶⁸ It offered the poor a wide range of services; clothes, fuel, training of pauper children and medical facilities.⁶⁹

The Poor Law Amendment Act demolished this responsive parochial structure of support in favour of a more regionally based system under the national direction of a Poor Law Board. Parishes were grouped into districts and districts into unions. This destroyed much of the intimacy of the old system. The reasons for this change are complex; a mix of social and economic factors, accompanied by a hardening of attitudes towards the poor.⁷⁰ In some ways this Act was a watershed in terms of formal provision for the poor; its expressed policies were far reaching, particularly the abolition of outdoor relief (doles) for the adult able-bodied poor in favour of

indoor relief (the workhouse). The philosophy behind this was a desire to shift poor relief from being a general provision for the poor to one reserved for the destitute, while the majority of the poor were to be encouraged to look after themselves or use charities.

Had such change been immediately introduced, the poor would have suffered great hardship. As it was, they may have been aware of the new administration, but in many localities poor relief continued in much the same way as it had before 1834. The Act gave scant attention to the needs of women, who were mainly considered only as the wives of husbands. Women without male support were largely ignored by the Act. The only group specifically mentioned were unmarried mothers, who were made wholly responsible for their children. This was a harsh policy which left many families extremely vulnerable and constantly poverty-stricken.⁷¹

The 1834 Act provided some idea of the harsh policies to follow, although Anne Digby suggested that during 1840s there was widespread evasion of the prohibition on outdoor relief and that outdoor allowances were frequently given to able-bodied labourers on the alleged grounds of sickness. Many guardians were happy to do this; it made economic sense because outdoor relief cost half as much as indoor relief. Furthermore, it kept labourers in their own locality where the guardians, often farmers, had greater control over them.⁷²

Women obviously preferred the old system because they were able to maintain their families at home, or if elderly, in the homes of their children, as well as being able to engage in a number of other strategies.⁷³ The last-resort strategy was the workhouse and M.A. Crowther considered: '...old women did not enter the workhouse unless they were too infirm to care for themselves'.⁷⁴

Outdoor relief appears to have continued in the decades 1850-1870; indeed expenditure on it rose nationally by 40% and by 1870 the number of people classified as paupers exceeded a million.⁷⁵ At a local level, abstracts of outdoor relief for the Bletchingdon District of the Bicester Union reveal, if not increased expenditure, at least a general continuity. In March 1848 the half yearly figure for the total relief given to the parishes in the district was £949 19/3 (96p), rising to a peak of £1104 17/9 (84p) for September 1855, settling in the £700-£800 range in the mid to late 1860s. This continuity is not surprising when the parish populations are examined. Between 1851-1871 there was no dominant pattern of growth or decline; nine parishes increased their populations between 1851 and 1861 and 9 declined. Between 1861 and 1871 eight increases in population, 9 declined and one stayed the same. Of those receiving relief, Sir Henry Dashwood, a landowner from Kirtlington in the Bicester Union, commented for a Government report that in 1868 '...in this [Bicester] Union one person out of every 18 was receiving relief from the Rates...'. As there were 7,268 people living in the Bletchingdon District of the Bicester Union in 1871 it would indicate about 404 people received relief.⁷⁶

As well as outdoor relief, women could get help in other ways such as medical relief and vaccinations. At Stoke Lyne in the Bicester Union 8 children were vaccinated in November 1856 at a cost of 2/6 (12p) each.⁷⁷ When Frederick Peverell of Bletchingdon had an accident he was granted 7/6 (37p) for 4 weeks to support himself, his wife and 6 children, despite also obtaining money from a friendly society.⁷⁸ Sometimes, however, the use of one strategy prohibited gaining from another and the weighing up of which strategy was most beneficial would be required. Money was not the only consideration; in Bletchingdon District when Elizabeth Ryman's father was unwell they were granted a loaf, 2lb mutton and 3d for beer in addition to 2/-(10p). Their following application included 0.5 pint of cod liver oil as ordered by the doctor. This application was granted along with 2/-

and a loaf but the request for beer and mutton was refused.⁷⁹ Families could not rely on continued provision and needed constant vigilance, resorting to other strategies when a source dried up. Applications supported by a third party may have had greater influence on the Board of Guardians than those of the applicant.

The Rector of Islip wrote to the Bicester Board on 30th March 1865:

I have seen Maria Miles who I find is bedridden and in a very emaciated state suffering from a bad leg. The complaint of her neighbours is that they have waited on her, and they think she ought to have a nurse.⁸⁰

This example illustrates the essential matrix of strategies required to manage and a threshold point for neighbourhood support.⁸¹

The Application and Report Books of the Bicester Union show help continued to be provided in a variety of ways and women could still rely on the provision of outdoor relief. At a national level, however, it was considered that strong action was needed to curb this heavy expenditure. Changes to the system began to take place in the 1870s which, unlike the earlier changes in 1834, had an impact on poor women applying for relief in terms of provision and attitudes. Legislative change was not the sole reason for this, rather it was a meshing of three factors.

First, there were changes to the administration of the poor law. The Poor Law Board was abolished and a new administrative body, the Local Government Board was set up in 1871. New directives were issued in an attempt to enforce what has been called 'the crusade against outdoor relief'. One researcher suggested that in the decade after 1870 it was increasingly difficult for the poor to obtain outdoor relief, so that the prospect of indoor relief instead loomed large.⁸²

Second, the setting up of the Charity Organisation Society in 1869 to organise and streamline the running of charities was to direct the 'deserving' poor to charitable

help, leaving the 'undeserving' to the poor law provision of the workhouse. Although the Society had limited impact in rural areas, the organisation of village charities into local visiting schemes affected the way provision was made.⁸³

Third, the depression in agriculture in the last quarter of the nineteenth century caused widespread distress and exacerbated the need for support just when it was either being withdrawn or redirected.⁸⁴ These three factors affected the poor in two ways. Attacking outdoor relief removed the buffer between women and the workhouse and caused considerable fear amongst them. This dread was built into the psyche of poor women. George Dew vividly described this fear:

...but the workhouse among the paupers & poor classes is considered an abomination, & in the Bletchington District of the Bicester Union I do not think I could find a dozen poor persons who would not vote for pulling down Bicester workhouse ... the name to them is as the depths of fathomless degradation.⁸⁵

The justification of these fears is debatable. The workhouse was a last resort for many, it became a 'home' to the vulnerable such as the elderly infirm, widows, illegitimate children, the chronically sick and unmarried and deserted mothers. It was the psychological damage that it inflicted on women and their families that was most harmful; fear of the institution and, once inside, fear of not getting out, separation of family members, dull routine and feelings of loss of identity and respectability.

In practical terms, there were variations in levels of care. It would be wrong to suggest that all were '...barracks for the infirm and closets for the dying'.⁸⁶ Sometimes the care provided was better than that obtained in the community. The food provided, for example, was monotonous but at least it was regular and set amounts were required to be provided. The diet sheets for the aged and infirm show that meat was eaten three times a week, cheese twice and bacon once.

Children had meat four times a week and milk every day. This appears to compare favourably with some of the diets eaten at home if the food budgets given to researchers by families were accurate. Furthermore, workhouse diets were sometimes enlivened by charitable bequests. Woodstock Parish Magazine noted thanks from the inmates of the town's workhouse for gifts of apples, tobacco, snuff and tea. 'Miss Bell and Miss Hayes kindly assisted the Rector and Mrs Majendie in waiting on the company and pouring out the tea'.⁸⁷

Although records of Bicester Workhouse are extensive, they reveal very little about what inmates thought of the place. The number of paupers accommodated varied; generally more in the winter than the summer, suggesting that for some, the workhouse could have been a seasonal strategy. This must be tempered by the fact that once in, some feared that the only way they would leave was in a coffin and their fear of a pauper burial was considerable.

Table 15 Number of inmates in Bicester Workhouse

| Date | Number |
|--------------------|-----------|
| 1st September 1848 | 64 |
| 3rd November 1848 | 104 |
| 17th November 1848 | 125 |
| 24th November 1848 | 133- peak |
| 5th April 1849 | 76 |

Source: O.A., Bicester Poor Law Union PLU2 /W /2A/ 3, *Visiting Committee Book*, 3rd September 1848-December 1852.

As well as recording numbers of paupers on a weekly basis, the Visiting Committee, which was appointed by the Guardians to keep a check on workhouse

conditions, was to record answers every week to certain questions about the workhouse. Unfortunately, the answers reveal very little; few problems were reported and generally no complaints were recorded by paupers against workhouse staff.⁸⁸

The workhouse was, however, a feared institution and from the 1870s women had to cope with an increased likelihood of being placed in one if they applied for poor relief. Even if women continued to receive outdoor relief, doles were small. George Dew considered that the poor: '...ought to be better provided for than they are'.⁸⁹

George Dew was a fair-minded man. His sympathies for the poor were tempered by an understanding of those who supported them through the payment of poor rates: '... those men who have to pay the greater amount of Poor Rates will naturally be as careful as possible in the expenditure...'⁹⁰ Yet two years later his diary entry expressed disgust at the way things had changed. He mentioned one Guardian, the Reverend William John Day, Vicar of Weston-on-the-Green, who was nicknamed 'the Weston devil.'

....for some twelve months he [John Day] has been cutting off every atom of outdoor relief which it is possible to do; & I can most truthfully assert that I do not think any Union in the Kingdom can boast a district in which less relief in proportion to the destitution is given than in the Bletchingdon District of the Bicester Poor Law Union over which I am Relieving Officer.⁹¹

The Abstract of Outdoor Relief Lists, which were half-yearly figures showing total outdoor relief given to parishes in districts, clearly show a considerable decline in amounts given in Bletchingdon District.⁹²

Table 16 Abstract of outdoor relief list, 1871-1889. Half-yearly figures showing total outdoor relief given to parishes in Bletchington District.

| Date | Total relief given for half-year |
|-----------------|----------------------------------|
| September 1870 | £729 1/- |
| .. 1871 | £844 15/7 |
| 1872 | £617 19/- |
| 1873 | £534 19/10 |
| 1874 | £479 8/8 |
| 1875 | £492 2/11 |
| 1876 | £424 12/5 |
| 1877 | £390 12/6 |
| 1878 | £345 10/10 |
| Michaelmas 1879 | £308 8/4 |
| .. 1880 | £317 8/6 |
| 1881 | £349 15/6 |
| 1882 | £322 7/3 |
| Michaelmas 1883 | £292 13/10 |
| 1884 | £256 15/2 |
| 1885 | £221 15/1 |
| 1886 | £203 9/8 |
| 1887 | £243 |
| 1888 | - |
| 1889 | £272 11/0 |

Source: O.A., Bicester Poor Law Union PLU2 /RL /2A3 /1-388, Abstract of Outdoor Relief List.

These figures show a dramatic decline in amounts to a low of £203 9/8 in 1886, around a fifth of the amount of relief given in 1855. It can only be explained in part

by changes in population. Between 1871 and 1881 the populations of 16 parishes in the Bletchingdon District declined and only 2 increased. However, between 1881 and 1891 seven parishes increased their populations at a time when relief given was at its lowest. Although the population of the District had fallen overall from 7,531 in 1851 to 6,571 in 1881 this was only a decline of 960 persons, yet the amount of relief given was around a fifth of what it had been in 1855.⁹³ The difficulties for families in obtaining doles were compounded by the way in which the poor were perceived by the middle-classes, who considered that their poverty was caused by moral failure. This was the antithesis of the attitude held by the poor themselves which is best summed up by one poor woman: 'Poverty's a great inconvenience, but 'tis no disgrace'.⁹⁴

Anne Digby referred to the poor law during this period of cutting back as: 'A system of moral imprisonment and social control'.⁹⁵ Many women had little choice but to accept what was offered, particularly if they were unsupported, such as widows. Michael Rose suggested that widowhood was the most important cause of destitution and Joan Perkins commented: 'To be old, widowed, and poor was probably the worst possible situation for a woman'.⁹⁶ In the case study area there seems to have been mixed support for widows. George Dew made the following contrasting comments:

Business went smoothly at the Board [16th February 1872] but they relentlessly oppress some of the poor old widows, especially so at Kirtlington. [Yet in 1873 he commented]. A few old widows who live alone in this Bletchingdon District have received today 7d per week extra; i.e. their relief amounts in the whole to 3/2 (16p): the same scale allowance as for a man.⁹⁷

Young widows also suffered as a result of the new regulations. A Local Government Board circular of 1871 stated that if a widow had a child her need should be tested by taking her child to the workhouse rather than offering outdoor relief. If she had more than one child outdoor relief should be refused.⁹⁸ This was

extremely harsh, although prior to 1870 some women fared little better. In Bletchingdon District Marika Tonnister, a widow of 40, had her relief application refused because her son of 14 earned 3/6 (18p) a week and her 12 year old earned 2/- (10p) a week.⁹⁹

The situation was no better for deserted wives. It was suggested that they: '...possessed a difficult and largely unresolved problem throughout the history of the New Poor Law'.¹⁰⁰ After 1870 a Local Government Board circular suggested that outdoor relief should not be given for the first twelve months after desertion. A harsh ruling, it was based on the suspicion that husbands were merely working away from home. In Bletchingdon District, Lucy East, aged 40, had her order for the 'house' confirmed although she was able-bodied and had five children between 6 and 14. Her husband was reported as 'away'.¹⁰¹

Such harsh rulings show little concern for women and children facing the traumas of bereavement or desertion. An application for relief to the Bicester Board of Guardians on the 11th July 1873 by a deserted woman was only made after she had sent her 7 year old child to work. George Dew was present at the discussion of this case and reported that only two of the Guardians had felt it was not good for the young boy to work; indeed two or three considered it good for him to begin at such an early age.¹⁰²

Obviously it cannot be certain that women were always totally honest about their circumstances. Feigned desertion or women's fear of desertion even when a husband had only left to seek temporary employment must have sometimes occurred. In the case of Joshua Franklin's family, his wife and four children were sent to Bicester Workhouse on the 23rd December 1862 when he went missing. The family had been turned out of their accommodation; their goods being left in the street.¹⁰³

Despite stringent recommendations and some equally unfeeling actions, some guardians exercised humanitarian concern. Women themselves were rarely guardians before 1894 but their gradual infiltration into local government, formal charities and the poor law may have had a softening influence on the system.¹⁰⁴ Clergy too, whether guardians or not, were sometimes able to influence Board decisions. George Dew suggested:

...Many of the clergy pull wires behind the scenes with the chairman, & I had today an instance of it. I had the relief of a pauper at Kirtlington reduced last week 1/- and one Loaf on account of the man's wife being able to go out to work. She said that she could go out to work but was afraid her relief would be reduced. The woman today when she applied said she had been to the vicar of Kirtlington & he had written to the chairman, and her extra relief was put on again without any difficulty.¹⁰⁵

In the case of Mrs. Cox, a poor young widow, the Rector of Islip requested her 1/- a week relief plus a loaf be continued over the winter months. He said she would work but could not as yet earn enough to support herself and her child.¹⁰⁶ Sometimes kin mediated with the Board of Guardians. Thomas Aldridge, writing to the Bicester Board concerning his mother Ann, said that if the Guardians would allow her 2/6 (12p) a week he would take charge of her but stressed that he could not undertake to find a doctor for her if she was sick or funeral expenses when she died. He added that he was 62 years old and had to work hard for a living.¹⁰⁷

As part of a reaction to these harsh circulars there gradually developed a softening of attitudes towards the poor and the aged poor in particular. One middle-class concern was that cutbacks on outdoor relief meant that workhouses were taking 'deserving' as well as 'undeserving' cases. This concern coincided with a period during the 1890s when there was a much greater interest in the nature and extent of poverty.¹⁰⁸

The findings of Charles Booth and B. Seebohm Rowntree were important both generally in uncovering more about poverty and specifically in terms of poor law provision.¹⁰⁹ The discovery that poverty was caused by casual and irregular employment leading to low wages, as well as widowhood, illness, old age and family size, destroyed the philosophy underpinning the poor law; that is poverty was caused by moral weakness and should thus be dealt with correspondingly. It led to an acceptance that poor law reform was needed and that a new approach towards helping the poor by improving the economic structure of society was required.

It took time for changes to the system to be put into operation. Women did not suddenly find that poor relief became a more viable strategy. As a prerequisite to changing the system, surveys such as the Royal Commission on Labour (1892-94), the Royal Commission on the Aged Poor (1893-95), the Select Committee of the House of Commons on Distress from Want of Employment and the Royal Commission on the Poor Law and Relief of Distress - Majority and Minority Reports (1909) were carried out.¹¹⁰

At a local level, in the Bletchington District, there was a steady rise in outdoor relief after an all time low in the mid 1880s. As population declined in all but one of the parishes in the District between 1891 and 1901, those who stayed appear to have received a better deal.¹¹¹

Table 17 Abstract of outdoor relief list, 1890-1900. Half-yearly figures showing total relief given to parishes in Bletchington District

| Date | Total relief given for half year |
|-----------------|----------------------------------|
| Michaelmas 1890 | £358 0/6 |
| .. 1891 | £336 2/9 |
| 1892 | £302 7/0 |
| 1893 | £374 8/11 |
| 1894 | £426 19/5 |
| 1895 | £515 5/1 |
| 1896 | £490 13/2 |
| 1897 | £572 19/6 |
| 1898 | £578 0/7 |
| 1899 | £483 16/1 |
| 1900 | £502 13/1 |

Source: O.A., Bicester Poor Law Union PLU2 /RL /2A3 /vol.3, Abstract of Outdoor Relief List.

Despite gradual attitudinal change and greater amounts of outdoor relief granted, no significant structural changes were made to the system during the period in focus. Women continued to dislike and fear a system they believed was set up to cause them hardship. The underlying factors that caused poverty remained and so life continued to be precarious for many women.

8.3.2 Conclusion to poor relief provision

Despite considerable socio-economic changes between 1850-1900, the poor law framework during the period after 1834 remained largely unchanged; it aimed to relieve destitution rather than poverty. Thankfully for the poor there appears to

have been considerable discrepancy between what was decreed at national level and what took place locally. The poor generally continued to be served by outdoor relief, albeit on a more selective and restrictive basis, in the decades after 1834 ensuring a basic continuity, despite administrative changes, of the pre-1834 system.

However, it should not be assumed that the poor were well-served by the system as a result of this continuity. Poor relief was rarely enough to support an individual or a family. Women needed to continue to use a whole series of strategies to make ends meet. Once certain strategies ceased, such as the termination of employment, some vulnerable women had little choice other than poor relief.

Despite the help that the poor law gave to some women, the basic framework of the system was flawed; it was never very responsive to the real needs of the poor. People were expected to fit within the system and many women clearly did not. Paradoxically, indoor relief encouraged dependency, whereas what many women needed was assistance until they could support themselves and their dependants again. For the majority of women and their families, it provided inappropriate, limited or no support.

8.4 Conclusion to formal networks of support

Formal strategies were generally viewed as a last resort. They were too public, they invaded privacy and involved a degree of social control. Charitable support and outdoor relief were used but much depended on their pre-conditions and the personalities and sympathies of those administering them. Indoor relief was avoided if at all possible. 'Respectability was lost irrevocably only when social excommunication - indoor relief in the workhouse - was exacted as the price of help'.¹¹²

Formal support systems were never really geared to the needs of the poor, despite the stress on the complementarity of charities and poor relief. 'A fundamental weakness in the scheme was the economic inadequacy of charitable resources to sustain that designated role of assisting the large numbers of deserving poor'.¹¹³ The framework of the formal system was based on a misunderstanding of the nature and extent of poverty. While poverty was seen to be caused by moral weakness rather than social and economic conditions, little could be done to support and help the poor. Furthermore, support and help were low on the agenda of priorities amongst some providers of formal support. They operated on a barely hidden agenda of social control which became more obvious as the century progressed. Even where charity was motivated by social paternalism there was still an element of social control. 'Indeed charity and patronage complemented the poor law as a means of social control. Charity was the carrot while the poor law represented the stick which was to engender harmonious class relations'.¹¹⁴

Footnotes to Chapter 8

1. Anne Digby, *The poor law in nineteenth century England*. The Historical Association, 1982. (General Series 104), pp.9-10.
2. Michael E. Rose, *Poverty...* p1. See also E. P. Hennock, 'Poverty and social theory in England: the experience of the 1880s', *Social History*, vol.1, no. 1, January 1976, pp. 67-91 and Gertrude Himmelfarb, *The idea...*
3. Anne Digby, *The poor law...*p26. For details of the Charity Organisation Society see C. L. Mowat, *The Charity Organisation Society, 1869-1913*. Methuen, 1961.
4. See chapter 1, section 1.2 on the redefinitions of poverty.
5. Anne Digby, *The poor law...*especially pp.36-38.
6. Anne Digby, *The rural poor...* p594.
7. G. A. Best, *Mid-Victorian...* pp.153-4.
8. Anne Digby, *The rural poor...* p594.
9. *Chipping Norton Deanery Magazine*, August 1887. See also *Spelsbury School Logbook, 1884-1902*. O.A., T/SL 48, 6th July 1894. 'Tea, by wagon to Ditchley, Lady Dillon presiding.'
10. For more information see Joseph Arch, *The autobiography ...*; Pamela Horn, 'Trade unionism in Oxfordshire, 1872-1881', *Oxfordshire Record Society*, 1974 (Oxon. Record Society, vol.48); Pamela Horn, 'Labour organisations', in G. E. Mingay (ed.), *The unquiet countryside*. Routledge, 1989, pp.99-110 and Pamela Horn, 'Oxfordshire and the labourers' revolt', *Oxfordshire Life*, Spring 1984, pp.7-8.
11. O.A., Ms. d.d. Par. Kidlington c 9, item g, *Parish Papers, 1826-1969*.
12. G. J. Davies, *A farewell...* pp.24-25.
13. *ibid* pp.24-25.
14. G. A. Best, *Mid-Victorian...* p155.
15. See *Charity Commission Reports*, nos. 4,8,10,12,18,20,23,24,25 as well as charities sections in the Victoria County History volumes. See also Charity Commissioners, *Report of the Commission for enquiring certain charities within the Hundreds of Banbury and Bloxham...*, 1826-44. 2 vols and *Endowed Charities*: copies of the general digest of endowed charities.. mentioned in the 14th report of the Charity Commissioners, 1861-71.
16. See chapter 6, section 6.3.1 on food preparation.
17. See *Charity Commission Reports*.
18. Alan Crossley (ed.), *A history...* Vol xii, 1990, pp.419-423.
19. O.A., Ms d.d. Par. Kidlington c 9, item g, *Parish Papers, 1826-1969*.
20. See Table 13, letter Bladon P.C. VII/i/2a 2nd April 1872.

21. *Alderman Fletcher's Charities to the poor inhabitants of Yarnton with directions for the distribution of them.* Oxford, 1843. Copy of the Deed of Trusts in the Parish Chest, 22nd March 1824.
22. C. W. Pumphrey, *The Charlbury...* p25.
23. Marcus Woodward, *The Mistress of Stanton's Farm.* Heath Cranton, 1938, p28.
24. Memories of Mr. Arthur Wilkinson of Bladon [n.p.], [n.d.], typed manuscript [p2]. See also *Chipping Norton Deanery Magazine*, 1880-81 and 1889.
25. See chapter 6, section 6.3.2.
26. O.A., Ms. d.d. Par. Fifield e.2. *Vestry Minutes 1894-1923*, including distribution of charity clothing, 1884-1937.
27. O.A., Ms. d.d. Par. Kingham b.7. *Miscellaneous book* containing amongst other items (c) a volume of statements and accounts of the Dowdeswell, Harvey, Laskey and Trenchard charities, 1869-1909.
28. Flora Thompson, *Lark...* pp.133-4.
29. O.M.S.; Yarnton Parish Box. Located in reception on display.
30. *Spelsbury School Logbook*, O.A., T/SL48 (i) 28th September 1885.
31. O.A., *Kidlington Parish Magazine*, January 1895.
32. See chapter 5, section 5.4 on saving.
33. C. W. Pumphrey, *The Charlbury...* p16.
34. See chapter 7 on informal networks, sections 7.2.1 and 7.3.1 on domestic support and chapter 6, section 6.3.2. on sewing.
35. *The Commission for Inquiry into Charities of England and Wales.* Report 12, 1825, PP x, p180.
36. O.A., Ms. d.d. Par. Combe c.3. *Churchwardens' accounts of receipts and payments 1886-1962; December 1890.*
37. *Chipping Norton Deanery Magazine*, January 1885, Spelsbury.
38. G. J. Davies, *A farewell...* pp.25-26.
39. See section 8.2.1.
40. *The Commission for Inquiry...* Report 12, pp. 319-320.
41. *Chipping Norton Deanery Magazine*, 1880-81, Spelsbury.
42. *The Commission for Inquiry...* Report 12, p281; O.A., *Ascot-under-Wychwood Poor Estate Charity Trustees*, AS.P.E.C. I/xii/2.
43. O.A., AS.P.E.C. I/xii/2, January 1902. See also O.A., AS.P.E.C. I/xi/1-18. *Series of certificates* acknowledging tenants by the month of the properties in Ascot-under-Wychwood held under the Trustees of the Ascot Charity Estate, 1874-1893. Rent 1/- to 2/- a week, extra for garden.

44. See chapter 4, section 4.2.1; chapter 5, section 5.3 and chapter 7, section 7.2.1
45. *The Commission for Inquiry... Report 12*, p328.
46. See chapter 4, section 4.3.1.2.
47. *The Commission for Inquiry... Report 12*, p317.
48. *ibid* p176.
49. O.A., Bladon PC, III/iii/1. *Certificate regarding Hopkins charity*, 1823.
50. O.A., Bladon PC, III/vi/1a-1,(k). *Receipts and Accounts relating to William Hopkin's Charity*.
51. O.A., Bladon PC, II/v/7 (ii), 31st January 1883.
52. J. Manners, Duchess of Rutland, *Miss Adela Brooke's village institute and reading room at Combe, near Woodstock*. (Reprint *Queen*, 3rd December 1892), [no pag.].
53. *ibid*
54. *Chipping Norton Deanery Magazine*, 1881, Chadlington.
55. See F.K. Prochaska, 'A mother's country: Mothers' meetings and family welfare in Britain, 1850-1950', *History*, 74, 1989, pp.379-399.
56. O.A., Ms. d.d. Par. Kidlington, c.9, item g. Included in survey of church in Kidlington, 1866-67.
57. Joanna Bourke, *Housewifery...*
58. See for example the Mothers' Union branch set up by Miss D'Oyley, a keen helper of the poor in Woodstock. *Bladon and Woodstock Parish Magazine*, October 1889. See also F.K. Prochaska, *A mother's ...*
59. Pat Thane, *Foundations...* p19.
60. This was particularly true of bread and dole charities. See *The Commission for Enquiry*, Report 12.
61. G. Kitson Clark, *Churchmen and the condition of England 1832-1885*. Methuen, 1973, p166. For Oxfordshire clergy see Diana McClatchey, *Oxfordshire clergy 1777-1869: a study of the Established Church and the role of its clergy in local society*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1960. For an example of an individual clergyman see Pamela Horn, 'Problems of a nineteenth century vicar', *Oxford Diocesan Magazine*, vol.2, no.10, October 1969, pp.16-18. For an example of attitudes towards the clergy see Flora Thompson, *Lark...*p134.
62. See the works of Anne Digby relating to the poor law, especially her booklet *The poor law in nineteenth century Britain*, which is a good introduction. For rural areas see K.D.M. Snell, *Annals...*,chapter 3; Derek Fraser (ed.), *The New Poor Law in the nineteenth century*. Macmillan, 1976, chapter 7 and G.E. Mingay (ed.),*The Agrarian...*chapter 8.
63. For regional studies see for example W. Apfel and R. Dunkley, 'English rural society and the new poor law in Bedfordshire, 1834-47', *Social History*, vol.10, 1985, pp.37-68 and Anne Digby, 'The labour market and the continuity of social policy after 1834: the case of the Eastern counties', *Economic History Review*, vol.xxvii, 1975, pp.69-83.

64. Pat Thane, 'Women and the poor law in Victorian and Edwardian England', *History Workshop Journal*, issue 6, Autumn 1978, pp. 29-51 is a concise, useful article.
65. Poor Law records for Oxfordshire are kept at Oxfordshire Archives in County Hall, Oxford.
66. O.A., Catalogue of Oxfordshire Poor Law Union manuscripts. For background information on Bicester Union see John Dunkin, *The history and antiquities of the Hundreds of Bullingdon and Ploughley*. Harding, Mavor and Lepard, 1823. 2 vols. and R. K. Pugh (ed.), *A history... Vol. vi*.
67. B.L., G.J. Dew Papers Temporary box no D. MSS. D.D. Dew. Pamela Horn has edited some of the earlier diaries: G.J. Dew, *Oxfordshire village life: the diaries of George James Dew (1846-1928), relieving officer*. Ed. Pamela Horn Sutton Courtenay: Beacon Publications, 1983.
68. E.G. Thomas, *The treatment of poverty in Berkshire, Essex and Oxfordshire, 1723-1834*. Ph.D., University of London, 1970, p296. For a national perspective see Krishnan Kumar, 'From work to employment and unemployment: the English experience', in R.E. Pahl (ed.), *On work.. Historical, comparative and theoretical approaches*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988, p139; George R. Boyer, *An economic history of the English poor law 1750-1850*. Cambridge University Press, 1990, chapter 1. For a local perspective see for example O.A., Ms. d.d. Par. Chadlington c.13. *Overseers of the Poor's papers*, f.2 inventories of workhouse goods 1819-26; e.3 f3-6 Poor Rate assessments 1823-35.
69. For a more detailed account see Anne Digby, *The poor law...* pp.5-8 and p10.
70. For details of the changes the 1834 Act was to bring about see S.G. and E.O.A. Checkland (eds). *The poor law report of 1834*. Penguin, 1974 and Anthony Brundage, *The making of the new poor law: the politics of inquiry, enactment and implication*. Hutchinson, 1978, especially chapter v. See also chapter 1, section 1.2 on the concept of poverty.
71. Jane Lewis, *Women...*p64. See also L. Hollen Lees, 'The survival of the unfit: welfare policies and family maintenance in nineteenth-century London', in: P. Mandler (ed.), *The uses of charity. The poor on relief in the nineteenth century metropolis*. University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990.
72. Anne Digby, *The poor law...*p23 and fig.1 p10. Other authors contest this; notably Karel Williams, *From pauperism to poverty*. Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981, who suggested that the workhouse test was effective.
73. See Chapter 7, section 7.2.1.. See also Sonya Rose, 'The varying household arrangements of the elderly in three English villages, Nottinghamshire, 1851-81', *Continuity and Change*, 3, 1988, pp.101-22.
74. M.A. Crowther, *The workhouse system 1834-1929. The history of an English social institution*. Batsford, 1981, p234.
75. Joan Perkin, *Victorian...*p145 and Anne Digby, *The poor law...*p25.
76. Bicester Poor Law Union. *Abstract of outdoor relief list, 1848-1870, half yearly figures for Bletchington District*. O.A., PLU2 /RL / 2A3 /1; William Page (ed.), *A history...* vol.2, p221; Sir Henry Dashwood in reply to questions from the Employment of Children, Young Persons and Women in Agriculture, 1969, in: *Kirtlington Village News*, 1996, p9.
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- 78 Bicester Poor Law Union. O.A., PLU2 /RL /2A1 /5. *Bletchington District Application and Report Book*, October 1896-March 1899, 7th October 1898.

79. Bicester Poor Law Union. O.A., PLU2 /RL /2A1 /5. *Bletchingdon District Application and Report Book for quarter ending June 1865.*
80. Bicester Poor Law Union. O.A., PLU2 /G /1C5 (3). *Correspondence*, item 150.
81. See also Chapter 7, section 7.3 on practical support provided by neighbours.
82. Mary Mackinnon, 'English poor law policy and the crusade against out relief', *Journal of Economic History*, vol.xlvii, no.3, September 1987, p603.
83. This second factor is explored more fully in section 8.2.
84. See Chapter 4 on the rewards and limitations of employment as well as S.B. Saul, *The myth of the great depression, 1873-1896*. Macmillan, 2nd rev. ed., 1985.
85. B.L., G.J. Dew Papers Temporary box no. D. MSS. D.D. Dew., 23rd May 1872; 15th December 1870.
86. Joan Perkin, *Victorian...*p149. For contrast see Anne Digby, *Pauper palaces*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978. (Studies in Economic History).
87. See Bicester Poor Law Union, *Diet sheet for aged and infirm, Bicester Workhouse*. O.A., PLU2/ G/1C5(3) and for pauper children O.A., PLU2/ G/ 1A19, 9th October 1857; *Woodstock Parish Magazine*, November 1889 (event took place on 27th October).
88. Bicester Poor Law Union. *Visiting Committee Report Book 1848-1852*. O.A., PLU2 /W/2A/3
89. B.L., G.J. Dew Papers Temporary box no. D. MSS. D.D. Dew, 24th March 1870.
90. *ibid* 24th March 1870.
91. *ibid* 9th August 1872. Of another Guardian, Sir Henry Dashwood, George Dew said that he sends '...every application for relief to the workhouse no matter what his circumstances might be'. In contrast, Reverend Chittendon, Vicar of Kirtlington, was an advocate of outdoor relief. 23rd May 1872 and 1st August 1873.
92. Bicester Poor Law Union. O.A., PLU2/ RL/ 2A3/ 1 *Abstract of outdoor relief list, Bletchingdon District, 1848-1870*. Figures were given for half yearly periods for the District and there was a high of £1104 17/11 and a low of £622 11/5.
93. *ibid*.
94. Flora Thompson, *Lark...*p31.
95. Anne Digby, *The poor law...*p32.
96. Michael E. Rose, *The relief...*p35; Joan Perkin, *Victorian...*p146.
97. B.L., G.J. Dew Papers Temporary box no. D. MSS. D.D. Dew, 16th February 1872; 3rd November 1873.
98. Jane Lewis, *Women...*p63.
99. Bicester Poor Law Union. *Bletchingdon District Application and Report Book* .O.A., PLU2 /RL /2A1 /5. Quarter ending June 1865.
100. Pat Thane, *Women...*p32.

101. Bicester Poor law Union. *Bletchington District Application and Report Book*. O.A., PLU2 /RL /2A1 /13. Quarter ending June 1877.
102. B.L., G.J. Dew Papers Temporary box no. D. MSS. D.D. Dew, 11th July 1873.
103. *ibid* 23rd December 1882.
104. See for example: Patricia Hollis, *Ladies elect. Women in English local government 1865-1914*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987.
105. B.L., G.J. Dew Temporary box no. D. MSS. D.D. Dew, 21st April 1871.
106. Bicester Poor Law Union. *Correspondence*. O.A., PLU2 /G /K5 (3), item 159, 19th December 1865.
107. *ibid* O.A., PLU2 /G /1C5 (3), item 164, 9th January 1869.
108. See beginning of section on poor relief 8.3. See also Geoffrey Drage, *The problem of the aged poor*. A. & C. Black, 1895.
109. Charles Booth, *Life...*; B.S. Rowntree, *Poverty...* and B.S. Rowntree and May Kendall, *How...*
110. Copies of these reports can be found in the Radcliffe Camera basement of the Bodleian Library.
111. See also Table 16 and population figures in *William Page (ed), A history...vol.2*, p221
112. Anne Digby, Typescript of a chapter on the Poor Law in rural areas in E.J.T. Collins (ed), *The agricultural history of England and Wales, 1850-1914*. Cambridge University Press. (Forthcoming) p596 of typescript.
113. *ibid* p594.
114. Howard Newby, *The deferential worker. A study of farm workers in East Anglia*. Allen Lane, 1977, p42.

SECTION E CONCLUSION

Chapter 9 Conclusion

9.1 Introduction

The idea of women using strategies to manage their households is not an original concept but this thesis has attempted to present it in an original way.¹ First, by studying strategies in relation to a particular theme; that is the poverty experienced by women living in rural areas. Second, by constructing a taxonomy of strategies to facilitate a systematic study of the ways poor women coped with poverty.

The conclusion is in three sections. The first section concentrates on the general and specific themes established in analysing the responses women made to poverty. The second section is more speculative; reflecting additional themes that emerged during the course of the research. The final section suggests why the strategic approach is a valuable way of studying women's history.

9.2 Themes drawn out by the research

I suggest that the taxonomy of strategies is an extremely valuable method of examining the ways poor rural women coped with poverty. The strategic method necessitates a comprehensive approach to women's history rather than a compartmentalised one. Women are not studied in isolation, but as members of a family unit, interacting with neighbours and kin, having an impact on the community in which they were living. This comprehensive approach is also reflected in the meshing of factors important in womens' lives; reproduction, production and consumption, bringing them together and highlighting their interrelationships rather than, as some researchers have done hitherto, considering

them separately. This organic approach seems a far more accurate reflection of how women lived their lives. In addition, the strategic approach raises specific issues regarding the ways women coped with poverty and these will be considered next.

First, women had power within the household both as managers and as the representatives of the family in the local community where domestic issues were concerned. The findings about the power base of women within the home suggest a radical rethink of the role and importance of women within the home is needed. Pamela Horn, for example, talks of women retreating into the home, suggesting: '...they were increasingly restricted to hearth and home'.² Language such as 'retreat' and 'restriction' needs to be avoided. First, because the home was not a retreat or haven for many poor women, it was the front line in the battle against poverty. Second, staying at home was not necessarily a retrogressive step for women and for some it was the most appropriate course of action, both economically and socially. Third, there was not a rigid divide between the public and private sector for poor women; they moved in and out of these sectors as their needs changed. The use of a more positive terminology for women within the home should help to clear away the intellectual baggage some researchers might bring to such a study.

A second point which emerged was the way women used strategies. It is clear that some strategies were more popular than others. Whilst it is not possible to suggest an overall order of popularity because much depended on the individual's preferences and the availability of strategies within an area, individual women did prioritise strategies. A women might first concentrate on what she could do, such as sell her labour or improve the way she managed her household; next she might turn to her immediate family, then to other kin followed by neighbours. Formal support was usually a last resort.

Women did not lurch from one strategy to another in search of support. They used a matrix of strategies to make ends meet. The matrix varied depending on need, personal preference and availability. Household management was, for example, a strategy that required continuous implementation. Others, such as neighbourhood support, might only be sought in a crisis like ill health or sudden unemployment. Women needed to construct their own matrix to enable them to cope with, what has been seen to be, a precarious way of living. Many women either lived in poverty or with the threat of poverty hanging over them; it was a fine boundary and women moved from one side of it to the other many times.

A third point to emerge concerns the nature of the strategies themselves; some had certain values over others and some were more useful to certain types of women than others. Five main themes emerged on the nature of strategies.

The first theme was that the duration of need affected the choice of strategies. Long-term needs were generally met by careful household management and employment. Short-term needs were met by neighbours and kin, charities and the poor law.

Secondly, strategies could have a seasonal dimension. Women could use employment when it was plentiful such as hay time and harvest, resorting to other strategies in winter when little work was available. Charitable strategies often exhibited a seasonal dimension; greater provision tended to be made in the winter when need was usually more severe. Women needed to adjust their strategies to exploit this seasonal dimension.

Third, certain strategies appear to have suited some groups of women more than others. Employment was more suited to younger women than those who were

elderly. To compensate for this, elderly women and widows were more likely to have received support from charities than young women. Kin and neighbourhood help, important for all groups of women, became vital as women grew older and the availability of other strategies such as employment lessened.

A fourth theme was that certain strategies appear to have been particularly suited to certain types of location. In market towns, for example, there was usually a greater range of charitable provision and employment opportunities. The factor of open / closed settlements did not appear to have affected strategies in the case study area although in theory there existed a tighter control on employment, and charitable provision exhibited a much more paternalistic character in closed than open parishes. Another dimension affecting location was tradition. The research suggested that certain settlements were known, indeed celebrated, for their gloving traditions. This had an impact on the employment strategies women used. Where employment traditions within settlements were not so strong, women had to be more flexible and opportunistic in looking for work.

Finally, certain strategies were freely available such as household management; others, such as charities and neighbourhood support, involved pre-conditions or reciprocity. This was clearly the case with formal support but was also true of informal support provided by kin and neighbours. Women choosing to use these strategies had to be sure they would be able to conform to the pre-conditions or reciprocate in some way. In contrast, household management was a freely available strategy, controlled by the women themselves and this could be one of the reasons why it was so popular and widespread.

This section has examined the key areas uncovered by the research which has resulted in a contribution to the understanding of the ways in which poor women coped with poverty, as well as further developing and refining the use of strategic

analysis in studying this subject. The next section, which is more speculative in nature, reflects additional themes that emerged during the course of the research.

9.3 Additional themes uncovered by the research

A number of additional themes emerged during the course of the research. The taxonomy was set up as a working framework and examining the sources reinforced this notion. A taxonomy of strategies must be an organic concept for two reasons. First, in an individual sense women constructed their own taxonomies which needed to evolve with lifecycle changes such as marriage and motherhood, but also crises such as illness or unemployment. Second, it became obvious that it was not possible to construct an all-embracing taxonomy of strategies. It is suspected that the study of different locations and different types of women would reveal new strategies. During the course of this research two additional strategies; crime and movement, emerged from a study of the sources. Furthermore, while researching the value of teaching as an employment strategy, the application of the taxonomy to women from different classes, particularly the middle-class seemed appropriate. These three themes will be examined in the following sections.

9.3.1 Crime as a strategy against poverty

Initial research on crime as a strategy against poverty appears to highlight two types of crime. First, there was survival crime which was 'to keep body and soul together'. Petty theft probably played a large part in this type of crime; stealing to cover the basic physical needs of the woman and family. Preliminary research on survival crime from the Bullingdon area of petty sessions (Oxfordshire) show that much of the stealing was small-scale and occasional.³

The second type of crime was protest crime which was motivated by objections to a system which caused the poverty in the first place and resulted in actions showing strong declarations of disapproval.⁴ Little research has been carried out on women's involvement in crime and in particular on their participation in social and protest crime, the types of women who committed crimes and their attitudes towards their 'crimes'. Initial research using the Bullingdon District Petty Session Record Books shows two themes. First, there appears to have been a degree of family involvement in the committing of crimes and second, vulnerable women such as deserted wives and unmarried mothers, appear to have been more likely to have committed crimes than those living with a partner.⁵

It is not clear how crime fits within the strategic matrix. The section on the use of countryside resources in the chapter on household management suggests that women may have seen certain activities which were technically crimes, as part of their local customary rights, so that attempts to thwart their actions brought confusion and discontent. Penelope Lane, in her investigation of 'the borderlands' between work, poverty and crime concluded that there were no fixed boundaries between formal and informal income, that certain crimes were considered legitimate work and that '...for the poorest, there was no distinction between honest and dishonest activity, it was not one women could afford to make, or indeed, wished to'.⁶

9.3.2 Movement as a strategy against poverty

In a similar way to the committing of crimes, women moved for a variety of reasons. It seems likely that poverty and the desire to improve one's lot were significant in some cases.⁷ Two forms of movement took place; migration and emigration. The census returns for the case study area show some local migration,

particularly among domestic servants, but no detailed sources linking movement to poverty could be found.⁸

9.3.3 A comparative element: the strategies of middle-class women

This thesis has been concerned with poor women and, by implication, they are assumed to be working-class. However, whilst researching the chapters on employment and household management, issues of the poverty of some middle-class women were raised. The commonly held view of middle-class women is one of financial comfort but some household manuals suggest that not all middle-class women could make ends meet with ease.⁹

My initial research suggests that the nature of the poverty they experienced was not the same as working-class women in that their daily standard of living was better. They had for the most part the basics of food, clothing, accommodation, heating and lighting. Their 'poverty' or privation concerns the mismatch between their available resources and their need for greater resources to buttress their middle-class ideals and provide an outward show of a comfortable and respectable lifestyle. It was at this level that some middle-class women had problems making ends meet. During the mid to late nineteenth century the agricultural depression brought hardship to many families. In the case study area the diaries of John Simpson Calvertt, a well to do farmer, illustrate the need to maintain social buoyancy even in the face of financial ruin.¹⁰

9.4 The strategic approach as a way of studying women's history

In conclusion, I suggest that there is considerable scope for the researcher using the strategic approach to women's history. In this thesis it has helped to uncover three relatively neglected areas of general women's history; the history of women

living in rural areas, the ways poverty affected the lives of women and their responses to it.

Strategic studies such as this one allow the building up of pictures of the lives of women. Using this multi-faceted approach it is possible to find out how they lived and how they responded to the problems brought about by poverty, given the limitations of the available sources. Furthermore, it enables women to be seen within their community; family, extended kin and neighbourhood, so that it is not an isolationist history. It places women at the centre of their own history but without separating them from the experiences which gave meaning to their lives.

The adoption of a strategy-based methodology facilitates the contrast and comparison of different groups of women at any one point of time as well as bringing in a dynamic element which allows the assessment of whether strategies continued or changed over time. This places women firmly within a mainstream historical agenda because strategies need to be contextualised to explain change and continuity.

By the end of the period studied for this thesis, despite some improvements, the poor were not always better off. The 1892-94 government report on the agricultural labourer contains a detailed section on the Thame Poor Law Union in south Oxfordshire. The report concluded:

The general condition of the agricultural labourer; judged by appearances has greatly improved. His standard of life is higher...and his wife is freer to look after the home than she was...but they give an impression of prosperity which is hardly borne out by the facts when they are carefully examined...It is only necessary to compare the weekly budgets with the weekly earnings to realise that the large majority of labourers earn but a bare subsistence and are unable to save anything for their old age, or for times when they are out of work.¹¹

Oxfordshire women continued to need to use strategies to make ends meet, although the invisible nature of much of the poverty experienced by women has tended to mask their use of strategies.

Until recently women's poverty has been largely invisible, hidden within mainstream analyses which, in general, have defined poverty in relation to financial circumstances of families or households and taken little or no account of what goes on within these units.¹²

Even in the 1990s there still seem to be certain misunderstandings about the nature and extent of poverty. A report, 'Income and Wealth', published by the Rowntree Foundation was criticised for its failure to measure poverty correctly and the way people responded to it. The report failed to reveal why some people on similar incomes managed better than others, and were therefore more likely to find what are now called 'pathways out of poverty', or what I have termed strategies.¹³

Women have continued to need to use strategies to cope. Elizabeth Roberts referred to women in the 1920s and 1930s needing to adopt strategies.¹⁴ I suggest that the strategic approach is as relevant a concept for studying poverty in the 1990s as it was in the nineteenth century. I can clearly identify with this concept in my own life.

Footnotes to Chapter 9

1. See introductory chapter. The work of Elizabeth Roberts is acknowledged as particularly relevant.
2. Pamela Horn, *Victorian...* pp.223-4.
3. *Bullington Petty Sessions Record Books*, 1849-53, 1878-81 and 1881-84.O.A., PS1 /3 /A1 3, 10, 11 for local material. See also John Stevenson, 'Rural crime and protest: an overview.' Unpublished paper presented to the University of Oxford Department for Continuing Education Day School 'Crime or custom. Rural Oxfordshire 1750-1850'; Rewley House, Oxford, 11th November 1995. For more general material see J.H. Porter, 'Crime in the countryside' in G.E. Mingay (ed). *The unquiet countryside*. Routledge, 1989,pp.9-22. For women see Lucia Zedner, *Women, crime and custody in Victorian England*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991. (Oxford Historical Monographs). For women involved in prostitution see Arthur J. Engel, 'Immoral intentions': the University of Oxford and the problem of prostitution, 1827-1914', *Victorian Studies*, vol.23, no.1, pp.79-107 for a local example.
4. See for example the Ascot martyrs: local women who went to prison for supporting their husbands' rights to join an agricultural trade union: S.G. Baker, 'The Ascott women', *Top Oxon*, no.6, Spring 1981. [no pag]. For further details see chapter 1, section 1.3.1.
5. *Bullington Petty Sessions Record Books*, 1849-53, 1878-81 and 1881-84.O.A., PS1 /3 /A1 3, 10, 11.
6. See chapter 6, section 6.2.3 on countryside resources and also Peter King, *Gleaners....* Penelope Lane, *Work...*p48 and p52. In her research into crime she only used the Leicestershire Quarter Sessions records, finding that clothing was the item most frequently stolen. Petty Sessions records, where available, are always worth consulting as well.
7. See John Saville, *Rural...*; E.J.T. Collins, 'Migrant... and Dudley Baines, *Migration in a mature economy*. Cambridge University Press, 1985. A number of primary sources on female emigration are kept in the Fawcett Library, London, such as the Female Middle-class Emigration Society correspondence 1862-82 and Annual Reports 1862-85. See also A. James Hammerton, *Emigrant gentlewomen: genteel poverty and female emigration*. Croom Helm, 1979, pp.92-123 and for an academic study of sources see Eric Richards, Richard Reid and David Fitzpatrick, *Visible immigrants. Neglected sources for the history of Australian immigration*. Canberra: Dept. of History and Centre for Immigration and Multicultural Studies, 1989.
8. For local material see the Misc McKay documents in Oxfordshire Archives, Misc McKay I/1-16, xeroxes of persons wishing to emigrate, 1845. Local periodicals may also be useful: see the series of four articles by J.S.W. Gibson in *Oxfordshire Family Historian* between 1982-83 and one by Tony Benton; full details of these are in the bibliography. For an example of another area see Martyn Brown, *Australia bound! The story of West Country connections, 1688-1888*. Bradford on Avon: Ex Libris Press, 1988.
9. See for example Mrs. Beeton's Penny Cookbook. Ward Lock, new ed., 1915; Cre-fydd, *Meals for the million*. Simpkin, Marshall and Co., 1867; Dainty dishes for slender incomes by 'Isobel' of Home Notes. Pearson, 1895. For details of governesses see M.J. Peterson, 'The Victorian governess' in Martha Vicinus (ed). *Suffer and be still. Women in the Victorian age*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1972 and Kathryn Hughes, *The Victorian governess*. Hambledon Press, 1993. Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family...*; Lee Holcombe, *Victorian ladies at work: middle-class working women in England and Wales 1850-1914*. Newton Abbott: David and Charles, 1973; Patricia Branca, *Silent...* Primary sources on middle -class women uncovered by this research and deserving further study include the papers of the Dew family held in the Bodleian Library; George Dew's female relations kept detailed records of their lives. See also in

the Bodleian the papers of David Thomas, Rector of Garsington, 1839-c.1911. Female members of his family kept detailed household records. MSS. Top Oxon.

10. Celia Miller, *Rain...* Compare entries 31st December 1892, 13th November 1890 and the 28th December 1890.

11. RC, 1893-94, vol.xxxv, Thame Poor Law Union, p44 and p46.

12. Caroline Glendinning and Jane Millar, *Women and poverty in the 1990s*. Hemel Hempstead: Harvester/ Wheatsheaf, 1992 , pp.3-4. See also Will Hutton, *The state we're in*. Vintage, rev. ed., 1996. He referred to the 30/30/40 society where one third of the population is still in poverty and Hilda Scott, *Working your way up to the bottom: the feminisation of poverty*. Pandora, 1984.

13. Paul Goodman, 'Are the poor really worse off?', *The Sunday Telegraph*, 12th February 1995, p21. The Stokes family, provided as a case study, illustrate late twentieth century strategies- hire purchase, no car, no holidays, no drinking or smoking, rarely going out for entertainment and help from the extended family in terms of money and groceries. See also chapter 1, section 1.2.

14. Elizabeth A. M. Roberts, *Women 's...* p243.

Postscript

Notes on the life of an industrious and successful labouring man [and woman] as a result of 'a patient, plodding life of industry and carefulness' or the lifelong value of a strategic approach to poverty.

J.F. of Oxon, born 1836, son of an agricultural labourer, 1 of 13, all educated at the village school. At 7 sent to work on a farm 18d a week. When 17 had saved 1/- a week and was able to buy a pig. By 23 had saved more money and wages 10/- a week. Married at 23 an excellent match '...having the good fortune to marry a very worthy and industrious woman.' 5s and 5d a week sons contributed to the family purse. Gradually the father's earnings rose to 16/-. Had ground and an allotment at moderate rent. Had to support his father for some time until he died in 1876. 1888 began to farm on own account. By 1891 40 acres.

Source: RC, 1893-94, vol. xxxv, Thame Poor Law Union, Appendix B, p58.

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(i) Bicester Poor Law Union Records

PLU2/G/K5(3) Correspondence item 159, 19th December 1865

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PLU2/G/1C5(3) Diet sheet for Aged and Infirm, Bicester Workhouse

PLU2/G/1A19 Diet sheet for Pauper Children, 1857

PLU2/G/1C5(3) Correspondence concerning individual cases of poor relief, apprenticeship and lunacy, including orders of admittance to the workhouse.

Part of 3 bundles, 1836-1870. Items 150 and 164 , 9th January 1869

PLU2//G/1C 1-2 Letter Books, July 1857-November 1863 .

PLU2/W/A2/1-4 Visiting Committee Report Books, 1840-1855. 4 vols

(ii) Bullingdon Petty Sessions Records

PS1/3/A1 3 Record Books

-April 1849-September 1853

4 -September 1853-November 1857

10- June 1878-August 1881

11 -September 1881-May 1884

(iii) Dillon Collection-The Records of Lord Dillon and Miss Dillon, Ditchley Estate

DIL1/e/2a-e Account Books 1856-1873

2a Model Farm

2b-e Four account books for farms on Ditchley Estate: 2b

August 1861-July 1862, 2c March 1863-March 1864,
2d&e May 1871-June 1873

DIL 1/i 34,6-25, Ditchley Agent Account Books for Estate Business,
1813-1925

DIL 1/i/94-97 4 rentals for Ditchley Estate, 1857-1910

95 Lees Rest Smallholding Allotment Rental Book, 1857-65.

96 Cottage Rental Book, April 1858 Michaelmas 1865

97 Farm Rent Book, December 1896-December 1908

DIL 1/O/14-18 5 Account Books for wages of house servants in Ditchley
House, 1886-1922

Box 74B(i) Account Books

14- October 1886-June 1910

15- March 1993-December 1909

DIL 1/q/8a-n 1874-1879. 14 Account Books for Day Labour during the year
on Ditchley Estate

8a-c July 1874-June 1877

8d July 1878-1879

DIL 1/q/9a-c. 3 Account Books, 1876-1879 Day labour at:

Lodge Farm December 1876-December 1878

Lodge Farm January 1879-November 1879

Fulwell Farm October 1876-December 1876

DIL 1/q/10 Account Book 1888-1914

DIL XX/b/74 Account Book and Receipts of the Honourable Miss Dillon
1888-1892

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(v) Bladon Parish Council Records

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(vi) Parish Records

Parish records are being recatalogued. All records with the prefix Ms. d.d.

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MSS. DD Par. Kidlington d20-24. Parish magazines 1889-1922

MSS. DD par. Kidlington c9, item g. Parish papers including Kidlington Friendly Society Reports, 1846-49 and Kidlington College Garden rules, 1831

MSS. DD Par. Kingham b7. Churchwarden's accounts 1759-1884

MSS. DD Par. Kingham b7 Miscellaneous book containing (c) volume of statements and accounts of Dowdeswell, Harvey Laskey and Trenchard charities 1686-1909

(vii) School records

T/SM9 Milton under Wychwood School Minute Book. 1874-1888, 1888-1899

T/SM4 Charlbury School Board Minute Book. 1888-1896, 1896-1901

SO71/1/A1/1 Combe School Log Book. 1872-1900

T/SL26 Finstock and Fawler National School Log Book. 1886-1896, 1896-1906

T/SL48 Spelsbury School Log Book. 1884-1902

MS. Oxf. dioc. papers e.51/1 Report of the Schools in the Deanery of Woodstock, Oxfordshire. Inspected 1854.

(viii) Stonesfield Friendly Society Records

Ston 1/i/a/1 1850-1894 Accounts

Ston 1/ii/a/1 1803-1860 Accounts

Ston 11/i/1 15th July 1823 Rules and Regulations

(xi) Miscellaneous Papers

Misc McKay 1/1-16. Xeroxes of lists of persons wishing to emigrate. 1845
(Originals in Public Record Office)

2. Bodleian Library

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3. Oxfordshire Museum Store

Yarnton Parish Box. Kept on display in reception area.

4. Unpublished Theses and Papers

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See also Oxford Chronicle and Oxford Journal

(iii) Map

Ordnance Survey 1:63360 (1"- 1mile) Sheet 61, Banbury c.1870

O.R.O. Charlbury Tithe Award map

O.R.O Oxfordshire Enclosure map

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