

The Demographic Impact of the Old Poor Law: More Reflexions on Malthus¹

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IN a previous article it was argued provisionally that the Old Poor Law, and in particular the allowance system, did not operate to promote population increase by lessening the preventive check to marriage on the part of the labouring poor. This conclusion stood in direct contradiction to the views of T. R. Malthus and numerous of his contemporaries who viewed pre-1834 poor relief as a crucial catalyst, not only for the rapid expansion of the lower orders but also for the attendant growth of poverty itself.² Subsequent writing on this theme has been negligible. What has emerged, however, tends to support my earlier argument. G. S. L. Tucker, for example, found no significant positive correlation between fertility ratios by county in 1821 and levels of *per capita* poor expenditures over the period 1817-21.³

The purpose of the present article is to provide more conclusive evidence in refutation of a Malthusian relationship between Poor Law family-income transfers and demographic change. In addition it is intended to explore a closely related theme; namely the hypothesis, again adopted by Malthus and especially the Poor Law Commissioners of 1834, that parish allowances, in addition to facilitating population growth, also rooted the labourer to his parish of settlement thus restricting labour mobility.

I

Malthus's belief that the Old Poor Law caused population growth has already been documented.⁴ However, according to Malthus, the Old Poor Law had another important impact on population beyond causing its natural increase. The combined effect of the Settlement Laws and the availability of allowances in the parish of settlement operated to restrict labour mobility, thus impeding the free market mechanism:

Were I to propose a palliative, and palliatives are all that the nature of the case will admit, it should be, in the first place the total abolition of all the present parish laws. This would at any rate give liberty and freedom of action to the peas-

¹ I should like to thank the Canada Council for funding the research on which this article is based and especially Dr Alan Armstrong for his helpful criticism of an earlier draft. Thanks also are extended to the Cambridge Group for the History of Population and Social Structure for allowing me to use some of their data.

² See James P. Huzel, 'Malthus, the Poor Law, and Population in Early Nineteenth-Century England', *Economic History Review*, 2nd ser. xxii (1969), 430-52.

³ G. S. L. Tucker, 'The Old Poor Law Revisited', *Explorations in Economic History*, xii (1975), 239. Tucker also ran partial correlations under his "split model" where he separated his counties into Arable East and Pasture West. Again no significant results emerged.

⁴ Huzel, loc. cit. 430-3.

antry of England, which they can hardly be said to possess at present. They would then be able to settle without interruption, wherever there was a prospect of a greater plenty of work and a higher price for labour. The market of labour would then be free, and those obstacles removed which, as things are now, often for a considerable time prevent the price from rising according to the demand.¹

The 1834 *Poor Law Report*, however, was far more emphatic: "If, therefore, the Allowance System did not find a surplus population it indubitably created it, and fixed it to the spot; for on the day the labourer (single or married) accepted parish allowance, he and his became serfs and rooted to the soil."² Another section of the *Report* concluded that "the labourer, if he thinks his parish a good one, that is, one in which public or private relief is profusely distributed, is averse to endanger his existing settlement, by leaving it."³ And when T. H. Holland, sometime vestry clerk of Bermondsey, was asked why English labourers had not taken employment, he replied that "the facility of obtaining parochial relief indisposes them to exert themselves or seek about to procure employment, or to take the labour which is given to the Irish".⁴

Such views concerning labour immobility, like those dealing with the impact of parish allowances on population increase, have coloured even the more recent historiography of rural labour in England's Industrial Revolution. Styles, of course, has severely questioned the degree to which the Laws of Settlement impeded labour mobility.⁵ Arthur Redford, however, in his standard work on migration, places the emphasis squarely on generous poor relief: "On the whole, however, it seems probable that the action of the Old Poor Law in restricting immigration was not so much due to the effects of the settlement system as to the mistaken and lax administration of poor relief in the southern counties previous to the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834."⁶ T. S. Ashton, in his now classic *The Industrial Revolution, 1760-1830* (1948), stated that Speenhamland "led to an overpopulation of the agricultural village, similar to that which existed on a larger scale in Ireland, and (what is to the present purpose) reduced the pressure on the labourers to move."⁷ E. J. Hobsbawm, in *Industry and Empire* (1968), claimed that if the agricultural labourer "had sense, he would raise a large family, for a wife and children meant extra earnings, and, at certain times, an extra allowance from the Poor Law" and that Speenhamland "immobilized the labourer".⁸

¹ Malthus, *Essay on Population* (1796), p. 101. See also the 1888 edition, p. 305, where Malthus states: "The whole business of settlements even in its present amended state, is contradictory to all ideas of freedom. And the obstructions continually occasioned in the market of labour by these laws have a constant tendency to add to the difficulties of those who are struggling to support themselves without assistance." This point was first made, of course, by Adam Smith.

² P.P. 1834, xxxvii, 58-9.

³ *The Poor Law Report of 1834*, ed. S. G. and E. O. A. Checkland (1974), p. 246.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 248.

⁵ See Philip Styles, 'The Evolution of the Law of Settlement', *University of Birmingham Historical Journal*, ix (1963-4), 33-63.

⁶ Arthur Redford, *Labour Migration in England, 1800-50* (2nd edn. 1964), p. 80.

⁷ T. S. Ashton, *The Industrial Revolution, 1760-1830* (1948), p. 111.

⁸ E. J. Hobsbawm, *Industry and Empire: An Economic History of Britain since 1750* (1968), pp. 83-4. See also E. J. Hobsbawm and George Rudé, *Captain Swing* (1969), p. 50: "Henceforth it would be madness for a labourer, sure of at least his crust at home, to venture anywhere else." For an extended discussion on the historiography of the relationship between the Old Poor Law and population increase see Huzel, loc. cit. 437-40.

The remainder of this article will examine the impact of the Old Poor Law on both population increase and labour mobility.

II

Three tests will be made to examine the Malthusian view that the Old Poor Law led directly to higher birth- and marriage-rates and in turn to population increase. The first focuses on the short-term demographic impact of the *abolition* of the allowance system in 22 parishes spanning 15 counties. The second test contrasts 11 parishes operating the allowance system with 18 non-allowance parishes within the county of Kent. The third utilizes some 49 parishes, again within the county of Kent, to compare the demographic effects of child allowances according to the order of child at which such payments commenced. It should be noted that the term "allowance system" is defined as allowance-in-aid-of-wages paid to the able-bodied on a scale geared to family size. The latter two exercises will test not only for population increase *per se* but also for migration.

Mark Blaug has recently regretted the fact that instructions were not given to the Commissioners of the 1832-4 Poor Law Commission to inquire when or why the policy of subsidizing wages in the form of family allowances was abandoned.¹ A perusal of the *Report*, however, does reveal that as far as individual parishes were concerned the Commissioners were preoccupied with the termination of such allowances and not with their inception. Almost 60 cases were discovered where the date at which the allowance system was abolished could be ascertained. Particularly interesting in this regard was Edwin Chadwick's section on "Dispauperized Parishes" which discussed the abolition of the allowance system in 15 rural parishes in Berkshire, Hertfordshire, and Buckinghamshire between 1822 and 1832.² Other cases are scattered throughout the *Poor Law Report* and many are found in the *Rural Queries*.

Of the total of 60 cases where the date of the abolition of the allowance system was specified, all cases where the reform occurred midway through the 1820s were noted, for it was in this decade that the H.O. 71 returns provided vital demographic information.³ Thirteen such rural parishes emerged and four towns of 3,000 inhabitants or more. In addition, all cases for which aggregative demographic totals were in possession of the Cambridge Group for the History of Population and Social Structure were utilized, thus adding four more rural parishes and one urban.⁴

¹ See Mark Blaug, 'The Poor Law Report Reexamined', *Journal of Economic History*, xxiv (1964), 231.

² See P.P. 1834, xxix, pt. 2, 22-85.

³ For a discussion of the H.O. 71 returns in the Public Records Office see Huzel, loc. cit. 447. These returns provided vital statistics for the 1831 Census. They contain for each parish in England and Wales yearly totals of baptisms, burials, and marriages over the period 1821-30. The burials for each year are further broken down by age at death. In addition they include comments on defective registration.

⁴ The parishes are as follows:

<i>Parish and county</i>	<i>R or U*</i>	<i>Year†</i>	<i>Source</i>
Leckhamstead (Bucks.)	R	1827	<i>Rural Queries</i> (P.P. 1834, xxxiii), Q. 39.
Downham (Camb.)	R	1824	<i>Poor Law Report</i> (P.P. 1834, xxviii), p. 594.
Stanford Rivers (Essex)	R	1825	Ibid. p. 225.
Thaxted (Essex)	R	1828	Ibid. p. 227.
Westerham (Kent)	R	1825	Ibid. p. 208.
Farthinghoe (Northants.)	R	1825	Ibid. pp. 408-11.

(continued overleaf)

The method of analysis is as follows: birth-, marriage-, death-, and infant-mortality-rates were calculated for each rural parish for two roughly equal time periods: (1) for the years when the allowance system was in effect and (2) for the years immediately following its abolition. The number of years examined on each side of the date of abolition was approximately the same for each case. The crude rates were calculated by relating the mean annual number of births, deaths, and marriages to the mean population for each of the two periods. The latter is based on the average of the annual population totals calculated for each parish by comparing the increase between the censuses (1821 and 1831) with the natural increase (the difference between births and deaths) and assuming any net migration to be evenly distributed over the ten years. No standard correction factors were applied uniformly to all parishes to take account of under-registration. The clergymen's comments in the H.O. 71 returns, however, estimating the number of births, deaths, and marriages unregistered were taken into account where possible and added to the vital events registered. Infant mortality was calculated by relating the number of deaths twelve months or under to the number of births in the allowance and post-allowance years respectively. The same procedure was repeated for the five towns. Overall mean values for the rates were then calculated separately for the group of rural and town parishes contrasting the allowance with the post-allowance period.

The group of parishes examined is by no means a proper sample for any particular area or county. The cases were selected by taking *all* those parishes mentioned in the 1834 *Poor Law Report* which abolished the allowance system between 1824 and 1828 and by including all cases where information was in possession of the Cambridge Group. There is no reason to suspect any bias in the cases chosen. The fact, moreover, that the parishes examined were considered by the Poor Law Commissioners as instances where allowances had been solidly entrenched and where dramatic changes in administration had occurred renders them highly suitable for testing.¹ The year in which the allowance system was

<i>Parish and county</i>	<i>R or U*</i>	<i>Year†</i>	<i>Source</i>
Bishop's Stoke (Hants.)	R	1826	<i>Rural Queries</i> (P.P. 1834, xxxiii), Q. 39.
Livermere (Suffolk)	R	1827	Ibid.
Hartfield (Sussex)	R	1828	Ibid.
Hellingly (Sussex)	R	1826	Ibid.
Northiam (Sussex)	R	1825	Ibid.
Withyham (Sussex)	R	1828	Ibid.
Leamington Hastings (Warw.)	R	1827	Ibid.
St Werburgh (Derbys.)	U	1826	<i>Poor Law Report</i> (P.P. 1834, xxviii), pp. 384-5.
Falmouth (Cornwall)	U	1828	Ibid. p. 427.
E. Grinstead (Sussex)	U	1828	Ibid. p. 312.
Stratford upon Avon (Warw.)	U	1824	<i>Poor Law Report</i> (P.P. 1834, xxix), p. 17.
Woburn (Bedf.)‡	R	1813	<i>Rural Queries</i> (P.P. 1822, xxviii), p. 153.
Winkfield (Berks.)‡	R	1813	<i>Rural Queries</i> (P.P. 1834, xxxiii), Q. 39.
Linton (Camb.)‡	R	1832	Ibid.
Brede (Sussex)‡	R	1830	Ibid.
Ashford (Kent)‡	U	1821	<i>Poor Law Report</i> (P.P. 1834, xxviii), p. 212.

* R = Rural; U = Urban. † Year = Year of abolition of allowances.

‡ = Parishes upon which the data are from the Cambridge Group.

¹ The administrative change at Stanford Rivers in 1825, for example, was described as a "bold effort at reform" where weekly pay was "at once struck off". Total poor expenditure dropped from £1,191 in the year 1821 to £560 in the year 1825. Farthinghoe likewise reported a dramatic fall in poor expenditure

abolished was taken as the starting date of the post-allowance period. The following tables more fully illustrate the method and present the results.

The total number of years in the allowance and post-allowance periods for the rural parishes and the towns is almost equivalent—106 and 99 years in Tables 1(A) and 1(B) respectively, 30 and 35 respectively in parts A and B of Table 2. The overall mean value of birth-, death-, marriage-, and infant-mortality-rates cannot be considered as fully accurate indications of *absolute* levels. Although, as pointed out earlier, additions were made to specific parishes where clergymen indicated under-registration, in some cases their comments were inconclusive. The vicar of Leckhamstead, for example, estimated two deaths annually unentered but stated as well that he could not offer any exact estimation of the number of untabulated births. In some cases where no estimates were given on the H.O. 71 form, the resulting crude rates appear suspiciously low—for example in Table 1(A) the birth-rates for Woburn and Thaxted, the death-rate for Farthinghoe, and the marriage-rates for Westerham, Bishop's Stoke, and Livermere. In Table 1(B) the birth-rates for Woburn and Thaxted again appear low along with the death-rate for Livermere and the marriage-rates for Westerham and Stanford Rivers. Table 2 similarly exhibits a few seemingly deficient rates particularly for St Werburgh and East Grinstead. No uniform correction factors were applied to these cases under the assumption that any deficiencies in registration were constant in both allowance and post-allowance periods. This would seem likely since none of the clergymen specified changes in the quality of registration. Moreover, the majority of cases cited above for possible under-registration in the allowance period exhibit similar tendencies in the post-allowance period, again suggesting that where deficiencies did occur they were applicable to both time periods. Only in the instances of Leckhamstead, Farthinghoe, and Livermere where the death-rates fluctuate considerably from Table 1(A) to Table 1(B) do changes in registration quality appear likely.¹ It is similarly assumed for the infant-mortality-rates, where deficiencies are more likely to occur, that the quality of registration was constant. Thus for comparative purposes in contrasting the *relative* levels of rates in the periods before and after the abolition of allowances the calculations are soundly based.

Table 3 presents in summary form the results for both rural and urban areas. With respect to the 17 rural parishes the Malthusian hypothesis that the allowance system operated as a significant inducement to marriage and births is not substantiated by the evidence. The mean overall birth-rate rose 3.09 per cent in the post-allowance period and the marriage-rate revealed a greater rise of 7.37 per cent. Taking parishes on an individual basis, moreover, ten out of 17 increased their marriage- and birth-rates upon abolition of allowances. If the demographic impact of allowances had been of a Malthusian nature one would have expected birth- and marriage-rates to fall markedly upon abolition. No such trends emerge.

upon its reform in 1825 when relief was stopped to "all but extreme cases". Falmouth, reformed in 1828, refused regular outdoor relief to the poor and "able bodied men applying for relief" were "offered the house with their families." Such comments were typical of the parishes under examination. For source references to the above statements see p. 369n, above.

¹ It should be noted, however, that these are three of the smallest parishes under consideration and that, on this account, greater fluctuations might be expected.

Table 1(A). Demographic Comparison of 17 Rural Parishes where Allowance System Abolished: Allowance Period

Parish and county	Years under allowances*	Mean annual no. for period of			Base population for period	Crude rates per 1,000			Infant-mortality rates per 1,000 births†
		Births	Deaths	Marriages		Births	Deaths	Marriages	
Woburn (Bedf.)	1811-21	37.2	31.9	10.3	1,581	25.53	20.18	6.51	—
Winkfield (Berks.)	1801-12	44.5	28.3	10.6	1,452	30.65	19.49	7.30	—
Leckhamstead (Bucks.)	1821-6	15.0	7.2	4.0	523	28.68	13.77	7.05	144.4
Downham (Camb.)	1821-3	45.3	23.7	15.7	1,382	32.78	17.15	11.36	125.0
Linton (Camb.)	1826-31	59.8	27.5	11.5	1,678	35.64	16.39	6.35	—
Stanford Rivers (Essex)	1821-4	29.3	14.0	5.5	811	36.13	17.26	6.78	102.6
Thaxted (Essex)	1821-7	42.8	29.14	15.0	2,123	20.16	13.70	7.06	80.0
Westerham (Kent)	1821-4	53.5	32.8	6.8	1,776	30.12	18.47	3.83	158.9
Farthinghoe (Northants.)	1821-4	15.5	4.8	2.8	481	32.22	9.98	5.82	48.4
Bishop's Stoke (Hants.)	1821-5	27.4	14.0	4.4	1,004	27.29	13.94	4.38	80.3
Livermere (Suffolk)	1821-6	10.3	5.5	1.3	273	37.73	20.15	4.76	112.9
Brede (Sussex)	1821-9	36.5	17.2	10.0	974	37.47	17.66	10.27	—
Hartfield (Sussex)	1821-7	42.7	9.7	23.7	1,484	28.77	15.97	6.54	117.1
Hellingly (Sussex)	1821-5	60.6	22.4	8.2	1,357	44.66	16.51	6.04	59.4
Northiam (Sussex)	1821-4	44.8	29.8	7.0	1,352	33.14	22.04	5.18	72.6
Withyham (Sussex)	1821-7	38.4	21.9	12.9	1,444	26.59	15.17	8.93	96.7
Leamington Hastings (Warw.)	1821-6	12.3	10.2	2.7	449	27.39	22.72	6.01	121.6
Overall Mean						31.35	17.09	6.78	101.53

Sources: P.R.O. H.O. 71 and aggregative totals in possession of Cambridge Group for the History of Population and Social Structure.

* Total years assessed = 106. † Infant mortality data not available for Cambridge information.

Table I(B). Demographic Comparison of 17 Rural Parishes where Allowance System Abolished: Post-allowance Period

Parish and county	Years under allowances*	Mean annual no. for period of			Base population for period	Crude rates per 1,000			Infant-mortality-rates per 1,000 births†
		Births	Deaths	Marriages		Births	Deaths	Marriages	
Woburn (Bedf.)	1822-32	44.0	31.9	10.5	1,742	25.26	18.31	6.03	—
Winkfield (Berks.)	1813-24	53.2	28.6	8.0	1,558	34.14	18.36	5.13	—
Leckhamstead (Bucks.)	1827-30	13.5	14.3	6.5	525	25.71	27.24	12.38	148.1
Downham (Camb.)	1824-30	49.6	35.1	12.0	1,649	30.08	21.29	7.28	129.7
Linton (Camb.)	1832-7	72.1	35.1	12.3	1,678	42.97	20.92	7.33	—
Stanford Rivers (Essex)	1825-30	27.7	14.5	4.2	863	32.10	16.80	4.87	72.2
Thaxted (Essex)	1818-30	45.3	34.3	20.0	2,255	20.08	15.21	8.87	88.2
Westerham (Kent)	1825-30	59.8	33.7	6.2	1,896	31.54	17.77	3.27	117.0
Farthinghoe (Northants.)	1825-30	15.0	10.5	2.8	475	31.58	22.11	5.89	122.2
Bishop's Stoke (Hants.)	1826-30	30.2	18.4	7.2	1,028	29.38	17.90	7.00	106.0
Livermere (Suffolk)	1827-30	10.8	3.5	2.5	396	27.28	8.84	6.31	116.3
Brede (Sussex)	1830-7	42.8	19.3	11.8	1,099	38.94	17.56	10.74	—
Hartfield (Sussex)	1828-30	42.7	23.0	9.3	1,530	27.91	15.03	6.08	70.3
Hellingly (Sussex)	1826-30	58.0	21.6	8.4	1,456	39.84	14.84	5.77	55.2
Northiam (Sussex)	1825-30	64.9	31.7	11.8	1,397	46.47	22.69	8.47	54.0
Withyham (Sussex)	1828-30	52.3	22.3	18.3	1,551	33.72	14.38	11.80	101.9
Learnington Hastings (Warw.)	1827-30	14.8	9.5	3.0	454	32.60	20.93	6.61	84.7
Overall Mean						32.32	18.25	7.28	97.37

Sources: Same as Table I(A).

* Total years assessed = 99.
 † Infant mortality data not available for Cambridge information.

Table 2. Demographic Comparison of Five Towns where Allowance System Abolished

Parish and county	Years under allowances*	(A) Allowance Period				Base population for period	Crude rates per 1,000			Infant-mortality-rates per 1,000 births†
		Births	Mean annual no. for period of Deaths	Marriages	Deaths		Births	Deaths	Marriages	
St Werburgh‡ (Derbys.)	1821-5	136.8	104.6	58.6	5,525	24.76	18.93	10.61	175.4	
Falmouth (Cornwall)	1821-7	222.9	146.3	60.7	6,685	33.34	21.88	9.08	92.3	
E. Grinstead (Sussex)	1821-7	97.9	55.3	15.9	3,259	30.04	16.97	4.88	93.6	
Stratford upon Avon (Warw.)	1821-3	120.0	58.3	32.7	3,276	36.63	17.80	9.98	94.4	
Ashford (Kent)	1813-20	80.0	43.0	17.9	2,653	30.15	16.21	6.75	—	
Overall Mean						30.98	18.35	8.26	113.9	
St Werburgh‡ (Derbys.)	1826-30	152.4	124.8	63.0	6,038	25.16	20.60	10.40	161.4	
Falmouth (Cornwall)	1828-30	230.0	160.0	78.7	7,104	32.38	22.52	11.07	119.9	
E. Grinstead (Sussex)	1828-37	112.8	56.6	15.2	3,475	32.46	16.29	4.37	62.1	
Stratford upon Avon (Warw.)	1824-30	145.9	89.0	34.9	3,476	41.97	25.60	10.04	116.2	
Ashford (Kent)	1821-30	81.1	54.2	13.1	2,791	29.06	19.42	4.69	—	
Overall Mean						32.21	20.87	8.11	113.9	

Sources: Same as Table 1 (A).

* Total years assessed: under allowances = 30; post-allowances = 35. † Infant mortality data not available for Cambridge information.

‡ Within the Borough of Derby.

The changes in the levels of mean infant-mortality-rates, again referring to Table 3, also cast doubt on the hypothesis suggested by Blaug that the allowance system operated to save infant lives.¹ If this had been the case, one would have expected a marked rise in infant mortality upon cessation of the allowance system. The fall of 4·10 per cent in the post-allowance period certainly does not confirm any such relationship. The fact, however, that the overall death-rate rose in the post-allowance period (6·79 per cent) does leave open the possibility that the allowance system had some effect in keeping overall mortality down. It must be pointed out, however, that excluding the parishes of Leckhamstead, Farthinghoe, and Livermere, where a change in death-registration completeness was suspected, the overall mean death-rate rises from 17·62 in the allowance period to only 18·0 in the post-allowance period, or only 2·16 per cent. It would appear, then, that the change of administration had little effect on mortality.

Table 3. *Summary of Demographic Changes in Rural and Urban Parishes*

Crude rate	17 rural parishes		% change	5 towns		% change
	(A)*	(B)†		(A)	(B)	
Births per 1,000	31·35	32·32	+3·09	30·98	32·21	+3·97
Deaths per 1,000	17·09	18·25	+6·79	18·35	20·87	+1·37
Marriages per 1,000	6·78	7·28	+7·37	8·26	8·11	-1·81
Infant mortality per 1,000 births	101·53	97·37	-4·10	113·9	113·9	0

*A = Allowance period.

†B = Post-allowance period.

The town parishes exhibit roughly similar trends. The marriage-rate experiences a slight fall (1·81 per cent) indicative of relative stability. The rise in the birth-rate and the completely unchanged level of infant mortality also support the conclusions made with respect to the rural parishes. The overall general death-rate likewise reveals minimal change.

The above evidence renders highly dubious the Malthusian argument that the allowance system provided a crucial incentive to marriages and births. It likewise reveals no relationship between allowances and infant mortality of the type suggested by Blaug.

III

Computerization of parish data for the county of Kent allows for a second test of the Malthusian Poor Law population hypothesis, including the possible impact of the allowance system on migration. Questions No. 24 and No. 25 of the *Rural Queries*, circulated to Kent parishes in 1832, provide information concerning the payment of child allowances and/or allowances-in-aid-of-wages to the able-bodied.² The 49 replies to these questions allow for a fourfold classification of parishes regarding Poor Law administration: those which paid allowances-in-aid-of-wages to the able-bodied and child allowances on a scale geared to family size (11 parishes); those which paid allowances-in-aid-of-wages but not according to any scale relating to the number of children (2 parishes); those which paid no

¹ Mark Blaug, 'The Myth of the Old Poor Law and the Making of the New', *Jnl. Econ. Hist.* xxiii (1963), 174.

² See *Poor Law Report: Answers to Rural Queries* (P.P. 1834, xxx-xxxiv).

supplements to wages of the able-bodied but did pay child allowances by scale (18 parishes); and last, those which paid neither allowances-in-the-aid-of-wages nor child allowances by scale (18 parishes).¹ For a second test of the Malthusian hypothesis it was decided to select the first and last of the above categories for demographic comparison i.e. parishes paying allowance-in-aid-of-wages geared to family size and those paying no allowances whatsoever. A contrast between parishes practising the type of allowance system so castigated by Malthus and the Poor Law Commissioners and parishes completely devoid of these methods should provide a sufficient test. If the allowance system was as dominant a factor in demographic change as the Malthusian hypothesis suggests, the allowance parishes should reveal not only higher rates of population increase but also higher birth- and particularly marriage-rates. They should also exhibit lower rates of out-migration and, if Blaug's suggestion is valid, lower rates of infant mortality.

The following table compares the allowance and non-allowance groups of parishes across 11 demographic variables mostly applicable to the 1820s. Employing demographic indices for the 1820s assumes, of course, that the classification of parishes based on the year 1832 (when the *Rural Queries* were circulated) is applicable to the previous decade. That this assumption is generally valid is revealed in the replies to question No. 39 of the *Rural Queries* which asked for "the particulars of any attempt which has been made in your neighbourhood to discontinue the system (after it has once prevailed) of giving Parish Allowances to able-bodied Labourers in the employ of individuals (on their own account or on that of their families)?" All replies from the allowance parishes (nine out of 11 answered the question) indicated that no such attempts had been made.² Typical of such replies were "I know of no attempt" (Bapchild) and "We have made no attempt in this parish, nor do we know any that have" (Egerton). In addition, three parishes (Lenham, Sundridge, and Speldhurst) indicated that the allowance system began in the early 1820s. These replies imply a continuity of the system for the 1820s at least. Of the non-allowance parishes (nine out of 18 replied) seven indicated that the system had never prevailed in their parishes: "Never had prevailed" (St Michael Harbledown), "Has not prevailed in this Parish at all in any manner whatever" (St Peter Thanet). Two parishes said that it had prevailed once—no dates were specified—but had been entirely discontinued (Gillingham and Thornham). This evidence certainly would suggest that those parishes not practising the allowance system in 1832 were immune from the practice in the 1820s as well.

¹ The Kent parishes falling into these categories were: (A) *Parishes paying both allowances-in-aid-of-wages and child allowances by scale.* (11) Lenham, Wrotham, Bapchild, Edenbridge, Brenchley, Egerton, Goudhurst, Marden, Speldhurst, Sundridge, Westwell. (B) *Parishes paying allowances-in-aid-of-wages but not according to any scale relating to the number of children.* (2) Preston-next-Faversham, West Wickham. (C) *Parishes not paying allowances-in-aid-of-wages but paying child allowance by scale.* (18) Hawkhurst, Higham, Nonington, Eastry, Ash-next-Sandwich, Ashhurst, Bexley, Bidborough, Chalk, Chiddingstone, Farningham, High Halden, Horsmonden, Leigh, Pembury, Rolvenden, Wilmington, Boughton Monchelsea. (D) *Parishes paying neither allowances-in-aid-of-wages nor child allowance by scale.* (18) Chilham, Chislehurst, St Lawrence-in-Thamet, Chislet, Cobham, Barham, Chevening, St Michael Harbledown, Gillingham, Lamberhurst, Harrietsham, Hartlip, Milstead, Northfleet, Murston, St Peter-in-Thamet, Rodmersham, Thornham.

² The parishes replying were Lenham, Wrotham, Bapchild, Egerton, Goudhurst, Marden, Speldhurst, Sundridge, Westwell. For the specific replies see *Rural Queries* (P.P. 1834, xxxiii), Q. 39, under the respective parishes.

Table 4 below reveals the results of the comparison. Most rates are expressed as values per 1,000 per annum, except percentage population change which is expressed as a straight percentage increase from census to census.¹ All unregistered vital events where specified in the H.O. 71 returns were added to the totals registered. The "Total all parishes" column contains the sums of the various rates for all parishes in the allowance and non-allowance groupings. The mean values are obtained by dividing these sums by the total number of parishes in each grouping (i.e. by 11 and 18 respectively).

Table 4. *Demographic Comparison of Allowance and Non-allowance Parishes in Rural Kent*

<i>Demographic indices</i>	<i>Allowance parishes (11)</i>		<i>Non-allowance parishes (18)</i>	
	<i>Total all parishes</i>	<i>Mean value</i>	<i>Total all parishes</i>	<i>Mean value</i>
% Population change, 1801-11	156.75	14.25	163.34	9.13
% Population change, 1811-21	205.59	18.69	297.90	16.55
% Population change, 1821-31	90.86	8.26	235.80	13.10
Death-rate/1,000, 1813-20	191.62	17.42	366.66	20.37
Death-rate/1,000, 1821-30	204.16	18.56	324.36	18.02
Birth-rate/1,000, 1821-30	381.59	34.69	648.00	36.00
Marriage-rate/1,000, 1821-30	65.78	5.98	134.86	7.49
Infant-mortality-rate, 1821-30	1,573.22	143.02	314.82	89.98
Migration-rate/1,000, 1821-30, per annum	-90.09	-8.19	-40.50	-2.25
Natural-change-rate/1,000, 1821-30, per annum	+177.32	+16.12	+323.64	+17.98

Sources: Census, 1801, 1811, 1821, 1831; P.R.O. H.O. 71, Rural Queries.

A glance at the comparative mean values in Table 4 once again indicates no connexion of a Malthusian type between allowances and population. The allowance parishes reveal a lower percentage population increase in the decade 1821 to 1831. Their marriage- and birth-rates are lower than the non-allowance parishes and hardly support the view that allowances operated as a crucial incentive to more marriages and births. The hypothesis that allowances may have operated by lowering infant mortality is likewise not substantiated, allowance parishes possessing a higher overall rate than their non-allowance counterparts. The overall death-rate is roughly similar in both groups, the allowance group revealing a slight increase in the 1820s over its level in the 1810s. Comparing rates of natural change per 1,000 per annum in the 1820s, allowance parishes again reveal a lower mean value.

A most important feature of Table 4 concerns the comparison of migration rates per 1,000 per annum in the two groups of parishes. These offer little evidence of allowances rooting the labourer to his parish. There was, contrary to the assertions of Malthus and numerous Poor Law Commissioners, greater out-migration in parishes where the allowance system prevailed. More persons per 1,000 per

¹ Birth-, marriage-, death-, migration-, and natural-change-rates are calculated on base populations for each parish arrived at by taking the mean of the population in 1821 and in 1831. The natural-change-rate per 1,000 per annum represents the total births for the period 1821-31 minus the total number of deaths. This was further divided by 10 to arrive at a per annum figure and then expressed per 1,000 of the base population. The migration-rate is similarly calculated, only initially the natural change was subtracted from the population difference between the 1821 and 1831 Census.

annum were, in fact, leaving these parishes than were marrying in them. Taking rural parishes in Kent as a whole, moreover, there emerges a similar relationship between poverty levels in general and the degree of out-migration.

Table 5 below divides 344 rural Kent parishes into five categories strictly in terms of mean *per capita* poor expenditure levels for the decade 1821-30,¹ and compares the rates of migration in each category over the same decade. It should be noted that parishes in rural Kent as a whole were net losers of population. Within this broad trend a clear pattern emerges revealing greater out-migration the higher the *per capita* poor expenditure range, parishes in the 35s. plus, and 30s.-34s. ranges possessing above average rates of loss. High poverty levels certainly do not appear to have restricted labour migration but, on the contrary, probably encouraged it. In short, rural labour would more likely migrate from poverty-stricken parishes even where allowances were paid than from parishes less subject to such difficulties.²

Table 5. *Migration Rates and per capita Poverty Levels in Kent Rural Parishes, 1821-30*

<i>Per capita poor expenditure range</i> 1821-30	<i>No. of parishes*</i>	<i>Migration rate/1,000 per annum, 1821-30</i>	
		<i>Total all parishes</i>	<i>Mean value</i>
35s. +	49	-842.80	-17.20
30-34s.	83	-860.71	-10.37
20-29s.	77	-426.58	-5.54
15-19s.	68	-398.48	-5.80
0-14s.	67	-115.24	-1.72
Total	344	-2,641.92	-7.68

Sources: *Census*, 1821, 1831; P.R.O. H.O. 71, *Poor returns*.

* I.e. parishes for which H.O. 71 material was available.

The above evidence with respect to Kent, as in the previous inter-county analysis of allowance parishes, casts severe doubt on the interaction between the allowance system and population posited by Malthus and his contemporaries, and also must qualify Blaug's recent hypothesis concerning the infant-mortality mechanism. Indeed, a further glance at Table 4 above would suggest that, far from causing greater rates of population increase, the allowance system was perhaps, in part, a reaction to previous demographic change. Although vital rates are not available for the 1810s and 1820s, intercensal rates of population increase seem to indicate this. Percentage population change in the 1800s and 1810s was higher in allowance than non-allowance parishes. Just as Blaug has argued that the allowance system was more a reaction to low wages than a cause, so it might likewise be suggested that this system was a response rather than a stimulus to population increase.

¹ *Per capita* poor expenditure for each parish was calculated for the period 1821-31 by taking the total of poor expenditure for each year from 1821 to 1830, dividing by 10 to obtain an annual average, and relating this to the base population for the decade. The latter was obtained by summing the population in 1821 and 1831 and dividing by 2. The calculations and division into categories were performed by computer.

² For the further argument that labour demand, particularly in the area of London, was crucial to labour mobility see James P. Huzel, 'Aspects of the Old Poor Law, Population, and Agrarian Protest in Early Nineteenth-Century England with Particular Reference to the County of Kent' (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Kent, 1975), pp. 192-4, and pp. 250-2.

IV

Malthus and the Poor Law Commissioners, in their condemnation of the allowance system, tended in most cases to lump together the payment of child allowances and allowances-in-aid-of-wages. Although the two types of relief often were closely associated, it is nevertheless the case that in early nineteenth-century England (Kent being no exception) child allowances were often paid without recourse to allowances-in-aid-of-wages. It could be argued, from a demographic point of view, that the former method of relief especially where paid upon the birth of the first child would be most likely to produce Malthusian results. As a third test of the Poor Law-population hypothesis it was therefore decided to focus on the payment of child allowances whether combined with allowances-in-aid-of-wages or not.

Utilizing, once again, the 49 replies to questions no. 24 and 25 of the *Rural Queries*, it was possible to divide these parishes into five categories in regard to the payment of child allowances. The five categories were: (1) parishes paying allowances on the birth of the first child (6 parishes); (2) parishes paying allowances commencing with the third child (6 parishes); (3) parishes paying allowances only on the birth of the fourth child (17 parishes); (4) parishes paying allowances to "large" families but not by any set scale (12 parishes); and (5) parishes paying no child allowances whatsoever (8 parishes).¹ Within this five-fold classification one would expect the most dramatic Malthusian effects to reveal themselves in parishes which paid child allowances commencing with the first child.

Table 6 below compares these groups of parishes across the same 10 demographic variables utilized in the previous test. (See Table 4.) For tabular convenience, only mean values for the demographic variables are provided for each group.

A glance at the demographic indices for "first child" parishes reveals little evidence of Malthusian mechanisms operating with respect to child allowances. The birth-rate in these parishes is below that revealed for "no-allowance", "no-scale", and "fourth-child" parishes. The level of the marriage-rate in "first-child"

Table 6. *Demographic Comparison of Child-Allowance Parishes in Rural Kent*

Demographic indices	Classification re child allowances				
	First child (6)	Third child (6)	Fourth child (17)	No scale (12)	No allowance (8)
% Population change, 1801-11	11.30	17.42	15.98	15.75	13.64
% Population change, 1811-21	24.95	26.36	19.05	16.17	12.22
% Population change, 1821-31	10.38	2.32	11.58	17.99	13.48
Death-rate/1,000, 1813-20	18.48	19.32	18.00	22.12	20.11
Death-rate/1,000, 1821-30	21.45	22.33	20.45	19.93	22.37
Birth-rate/1,000, 1821-30	31.05	30.34	33.65	31.19	32.20
Marriage-rate/1,000, 1821-30	6.21	5.81	8.85	11.55	9.18
Infant-mortality-rate/1,000, 1821-30	130.83	105.56	104.21	123.21	125.95
Migration-rate/1,000, 1821-30	-2.64	-17.43	-5.01	+4.20	+4.99
Natural-change-rate/1,000, 1821-30	+9.60	+8.01	+13.20	+11.26	+9.83

Sources: *Census*, 1801, 1811, 1831; P.R.O. H.O. 71; *Rural Queries*.

¹ For Kent parishes falling into these categories see Huzel, thesis, p. 433.

parishes is likewise lower than in all other groups except "third-child" parishes. If the Malthusian hypothesis was valid one would have expected almost the opposite.

Blaug's suggestion that allowances may have operated via mortality is likewise not supported. Although "third-child" and "fourth-child" parishes reveal low infant-mortality rates, the level in "first-child" parishes is the highest of any group. It would appear, as well, that no marked trend emerges with respect to "first-child" parishes regarding the overall death-rate for the 1820s. Levels in this decade, moreover, are higher for all scale parishes compared to the previous decade.

In terms of rates of natural change and overall population increase "first-child" parishes rank low compared to other groups. Child allowances even where paid to the first child, then, did not produce greater overall population increase in the 1820s as would have been expected under Malthusian assumptions.

A comparative glance at migration rates again casts doubt on the view of Malthus and contemporary propagandists against the Old Poor Law that allowances severely inhibited labour mobility. Although less people were leaving "first-child" as opposed to "third-" or "fourth-child" parishes, nevertheless all scale parishes reveal net losses through migration in the 1820s. Parishes either paying allowances by no scale or not utilizing any form of allowances reveal net migration gains in the same decade.

A further perusal of Table 6 suggests that child allowances, far from activating mechanisms resulting in rapid population growth, were possibly a result of such growth. Rates of population increase in those parishes resorting to child allowances by scale in the 1820s and early 1830s were, on the whole, higher in the 1810s than in parishes never resorting to scales or allowances. Rates of increase were particularly high between 1811 and 1821 in parishes later providing allowances commencing at the first or third child. The pattern here is quite similar to that evinced in the earlier comparison of allowance and non-allowance parishes.

V

These findings are of considerable significance. First, they lead one to conclude that the allowance system under the Old Poor Law must be ruled out as a causal factor in population increase during the Industrial Revolution, whether through the mechanism of encouraging marriage or through reducing infant mortality. The evidence suggests that the Malthusian proposition should, if anything, be turned on its head. It is much more plausible to contend that the allowance system, far from acting as a crucial catalyst to population increase, was a response to it. The rapid growth in numbers in the first two decades of the nineteenth century combined with a depressed agriculture in the post-Napoleonic war period produced severe surplus labour problems. For many magistrates and overseers the only realistic solution within the context of a society governed (albeit with diminishing force) by moral notions of the right of the poor to subsistence was to supplement wages or provide relief in accordance with family size.

Secondly, one may assert that far from being content to rely on the dole and procreate in response to its largesse, the rural underemployed moved in search of

work. To be sure, the aggregative migration rates do not tell us exactly who moved. For couples already burdened with young children migration was no doubt a hazardous risk, and the likelihood of staying put—whether allowances prevailed or not—would be strong. Even if one concedes that it was mainly single and young males who left, this is a far cry from the Malthusian assertion that such persons, lusting after the dole, married early, and remained in their parishes. Such lines of reasoning would suggest that far more heed be paid to J. D. Marshall's warning that "the stereotype of a highly mobile midlands and north-west, and a stagnating south, must now be questioned".¹

Thirdly, the examination of the Malthusian Poor Law—population hypothesis constitutes a historical case-study within the wider demographic literature concerning the impact of government policy on fertility. Considerable attention has been devoted to the impact of twentieth-century family allowance schemes on the birth-rate in countries such as France, Belgium, and Canada.² Much current demographic research, of course, is being directed towards the effects of family-planning programmes on family size in developing nations. Although the allowance system under the Old Poor Law was a much more *ad hoc* affair than the centrally planned programmes of the twentieth century, its negligible demographic impact serves as a basic reminder that fertility is a complex phenomenon deeply rooted in the social, economic, and cultural structures of societies and therefore not easily influenced by administrative measures.

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¹ See J. D. Marshall, *The Old Poor Law, 1795-1834* (1968), pp. 42-3.

² For reference to these studies see Huzel, 'Malthus, The Poor Law', 451, n. 2.