

“It Is Extreme Necessity That Makes Me Do This”:¹ Some “Survival Strategies” of Pauper Households in London’s West End During the Early Eighteenth Century*

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INTRODUCTION

Although research on survival strategies is still at a relatively early stage, there are clearly some areas where there is considerable difference in emphasis placed by historians on the relative importance of particular “expedients” deployed by the poor *in extremis*.² There is, for example, uncertainty regarding the amount of support given by neighbours as opposed to relatives. There is some historical contention, too, over the importance to the elderly of care by their children, as opposed to alternative sources of maintenance such as earnings, charity and especially the formal institutions of poor relief. After all, in the early modern period the principle source for a study of the survival strategies of poor people is always likely to be the records of poor

* I would like to thank Tim Hitchcock and Leonard Schwarz for their comments on earlier versions of this paper.

1. This quotation, the spelling of which has been modernized, comes from a letter “found with a Child at Mr Defountain’s door in Blew Cross Street on Wednesday night June 29 1709 between 12 & one a clock & taken up by me Robert Mason, Overseer”, Westminster Archives Centre [hereafter, WAC], F5002/fos 165a¹–165a².

2. Robert Jütte, *Poverty and Deviance in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, 1994), especially pp. 83–99. As always, much of the literature is summarized expertly, or anticipated, in Paul Slack’s seminal *Poverty and Policy in Tudor and Stuart England* (Harlow, 1988), esp. pp. 73–85. See also the contributions in the special issue of *Social History*, 18 (1993); and Marco H.D. van Leeuwen, “Logic of Charity: Poor Relief in Pre-industrial Europe”, *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 24 (1994), pp. 589–613; Catharina Lis and Hugo Soly, “Neighbourhood Social Change in West European Cities: Sixteenth to Nineteenth Centuries”, *International Review of Social History*, 38 (1993), pp. 1–30. Another particularly insightful contribution relating to the nineteenth-century city is that by Peter Mandler, “Introduction”, in Peter Mandler (ed.), *The Uses of Charity: The Poor on Relief in the Nineteenth-Century Metropolis* (Philadelphia, PA, 1990), pp. 1–37; Catharina Lis, *Social Change and the Labouring Poor: Antwerp, 1770–1860* (New Haven, CT, 1986), pp. 150–162. For another comprehensive and insightful discussion see, Peregrine Horden, “Household Care and Informal Networks: Comparison and Continuities from Antiquity to the Present”, in Peregrine Horden and Richard Smith (eds), *The Locus Of Care: Families, Communities, Institutions, and the Provision of Welfare Since Antiquity* (London, 1998), pp. 21–67. For a modern study see, Donald W. Foster, *Survival Strategies of Low-Income Households in a Colombian City* (Urbana, IL, 1975), a published Ph.D. thesis, a work of urban anthropology which uncovers a range of survival strategies very familiar to early modern historians.

relief or charitable agencies and institutions.³ The obvious danger here is that historians of poor relief consistently overestimate the importance of such relief to the poor.⁴ Both Richard Wall and Pat Thane, using evidence from nineteenth- and twentieth-century England, for example, have demonstrated that the elderly received far more support from relatives than has been realized. Professor Thane has argued that this situation is unlikely to have been new.⁵ Other historians, however, are much more sceptical over the value of intergenerational flows of wealth from children to elderly parents.⁶

This essay is avowedly experimental in character in that its main aim is to reconstruct with as much detail as possible some of the *alternative* survival strategies of the pre-industrial metropolitan poor. This is not intended, then, merely to be an essay on the running of the poor relief system or on how that system impacted on the lives of the poor, a subject which is being treated in depth elsewhere.⁷ The article must begin by assessing briefly the

3. Valuable work can also be done using exceptionally detailed household listings of the poor, although survival strategies have usually to be inferred from patterns of co-residence. See, Margaret Pelling, *The Common Lot: Sickness, Medical Occupations and the Urban Poor in Early Modern England* (Harlow, 1998), pp. 145–148, 152. Pelling prefers “expedient” to “strategy” to “reduce the connotation of deliberate (and free) choice”; Thomas Sokoll, *Household and Family Among the Poor: The Case of Two Essex Communities in the Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries* (Bochum, 1992). Sokoll published some preliminary observations in his, “The Pauper Household Small and Simple? The Evidence from Listings of Inhabitants and Pauper Lists of Early Modern England Reassessed”, *Ethnologia Europaea*, 17 (1987), pp. 25–42.

4. For similar sentiments see Tim Hitchcock, “Habits of Industry: The Eighteenth-Century English Workhouse Movement”, (unpublished typescript, 1993).

5. Pat Thane, “Old People and Their Families in the English Past”, in M. Daunton (ed.), *Charity, Self-Interest and Welfare in the English Past* (London, 1996), pp. 113–138; Pat Thane, “The Family Lives of Old People”, in Paul Johnson and Pat Thane (eds), *Old Age from Antiquity to Post-Modernity* (London, 1998), pp. 180–210, the quotations are from p. 206; Richard Wall, “Relationships Between the Generations in British Families Past and Present”, in Catherine Marsh and Sara Arber (eds), *Families and Households: Divisions and Change* (London, 1992), pp. 63–85. See also Richard Wall, “Beyond the Household: Marriage, Household Formation and the Role of Kin and Neighbours”, *International Review of Social History*, 44 (1999), pp. 55–67.

6. Richard M. Smith, “The Structured Dependence of the Elderly as a Recent Development: Some Sceptical Historical Thoughts”, *Ageing and Society*, 4 (1984), pp. 409–428. Richard Wall’s work suggests that much of the help received by the elderly in the nineteenth century was not in a financial form.

7. This paper derives from the author’s long-term reconstruction of the lives of the poor in London’s West End, based on a biographical reconstruction of all those who received pensions from the parish. This will appear as *The Making of the London Poor* (Manchester, forthcoming). For preliminary forays see, Jeremy Boulton, “Going on the Parish: The Parish Pension and its Meaning in the London Suburbs, 1640–1724”, in Tim Hitchcock, Peter King and Pamela Sharpe (eds), *Chronicling Poverty: The Voices and Strategies of the English Poor, 1640–1840* (Basingstoke, 1997), pp. 19–46; *idem*, “The Poor Among the Rich”, in Paul Griffiths and Mark Jenner (eds), *Londinopolis* (Manchester, 2000, forthcoming); *idem*, “The Most Visible Poor in England? Constructing Pauper Biographies in Early Modern Westminster”, *Westminster Historical Review*, 1 (1997), pp. 13–18.

role of institutional poor relief, but it then attempts to uncover the alternative survival strategies used by paupers in the parish.

THE LOCAL CONTEXT: LONDON'S WEST END IN THE EARLY EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

It is necessary to begin with a brief description of the parish of St Martin's as it had developed by the early eighteenth century. By 1700 the parish had been completely developed as part of the massive growth in London's West End that occurred after the Restoration. Its population had mushroomed from about 18,000 people in 1660 to something like 45,000 by 1715, a figure which does not include those inhabitants of parishes split off from St Martin's parish in 1686. About one-quarter of the parish's population was lost in 1724 on the formation of the new parish of St George, Hanover Square. St Martin's contained the royal palaces of Whitehall and St James's, and many government offices and departments. Proximity to the courts and government offices meant that the social structure of the parish was unusual, to say the least, with a significant, if declining, number of titled residents, living in purpose-built streets and squares in the parish. Otherwise, its occupational structure was dominated by the provision of a range of services (from domestic service and carriage to medical and legal advice) to courtiers and officials, some luxury manufactures and a significant military presence. The focus on the early eighteenth century is a further complicating factor since there can be little doubt that the large-scale wars against France (1689–1714) in this period had a direct impact on the lives of the poor. What is not known at this stage is whether the damage done to pauper household economies by the recruitment of married men into the armed forces was outweighed by the greater employment opportunities, for both men and women, provided by the consequent reduction in the pool of surplus labour in the metropolitan economy.

The parish of St Martin's operated what might be called a "classic" English poor relief system from 1601, based on the collection and distribution of the proceeds of a compulsory parish rate by the overseers of the poor. Smaller sums of money were distributed by the churchwardens, who kept separate accounts. From the late seventeenth century, local justices became much more directly involved on a daily basis in the administration of this relief. Their greater involvement stemmed from the powers given to them by the English laws of settlement and from other Poor Law legislation designed to tighten up the granting of public relief.⁸ Until 1724, most of

8. For this legislation, see Paul Slack, *The English Poor Law, 1531–1782* (Basingstoke, 1990). It seems likely that the examination books were initiated by a statute of 1692, which ordered that no names were to be added to parish pension lists unless authorized by a Justice of the Peace. A list of paupers drawn up in 1707 (which omits orphans) contains a number of entries which suggest that pensioners lacking age information had entered the lists "before 1692"; WAC F4509.

the relief granted in the parish was so-called "outdoor" relief, with cash being paid to recipients in their own homes. The bulk of funds spent by the overseers was spent on regular payments to the parish pensioners and orphans, although over time increasing amounts of money were channelled to the so-called casual or "extraordinary" poor. Indoor relief was restricted to a short-lived attempt to erect a parish workhouse shortly after the Restoration and to the maintenance of around thirty parish almswomen who lived in purpose-built almshouses. All this changed in 1724 when the parish, in common with the neighbouring parish of St James and many others throughout England, took advantage of the so-called Workhouse Test Act of the previous year to try out a policy of *indoor* relief and built a large workhouse to house their poor. The erection of this parish workhouse went hand in hand with a dramatic curtailment of the payment of cash pensions to the parish poor living in their own homes.⁹

PAUPER SURVIVAL STRATEGIES: THE LIMITS OF PAROCHIAL RELIEF

Before considering the informal means deployed to survive in this urban environment, it is clearly necessary to arrive at some estimate of the degree to which paupers in need might be relieved by the parish. Too much space will not be spent on this, since the focus of this essay is intended to be on less formal sources of support. But clearly poor relief was valued. One finds, for example, paupers distorting the truth of their circumstances to the poor relief authorities in order to achieve a legal "settlement", and paupers petitioning the parish authorities for relief, deploying the expected conventions as to their personal probity, worth and reputation.¹⁰ How *necessary*, then, were alternative sources of support? Surviving listings of the parish pensioners suggest that amongst the urban poor, severe "relievable" hardship was thought to have occurred only when individuals reached their sixties and seventies. The average age of those on regular parish pensions in 1707 was sixty-eight, in 1716 it was sixty-six.¹¹ Even then, parish pensions were granted to perhaps eight per cent or so of those in their sixties in the parish,

It seems likely that the two earlier examination books have been lost, since the second surviving book is entitled "This is the fourth Book"; WAC F5002/1.

9. Slack, *English Poor Law*, pp. 40–48. The best survey of the rise of indoor relief in early eighteenth-century England is Tim Hitchcock, "Paupers and Preachers: the SPCK and the Parochial Workhouse Movement", in Lee Davison, Tim Hitchcock, Tim Keirn and Robert B. Shoemaker (eds), *Stilling the Grumbling Hive: The Response to Social and Economic Problems in England, 1689–1750* (Stroud, 1992), pp. 145–166.

10. For this strategy, see Pamela Sharpe, "The Bowels of Compaſſion: A Labouring Family and the Law, c. 1790–1834", in Hitchcock, King, and Sharpe, *Chronicling Poverty*, pp. 87–108.

11. Calculated from WAC F4509, F4539.

and to perhaps fifteen per cent of those aged seventy or over.¹² Many of the elderly, of course, would have been comfortably off in this relatively wealthy parish but such figures do demonstrate that many elderly persons must have had to fend for themselves. This would have been especially true of elderly males since there was, as was usual in this period, a large surplus of women in the pensioned population.

Even those who received parish pensions, too, would, as is commonly recognized in the literature, probably have needed supplemental sources of support.¹³ The average pension received in the early eighteenth century in this parish was between 1 shilling(s) and 6 pence(d) and 1s 8d a week, at a time when a building labourer would have earned about 2s a day or 12s in a six-day week. Unsurprisingly, therefore, we know that some pensioners were still working, even one Alice Evans, a woman said to be 107 years old, who was receiving one of the highest rates of pension, 10s a month, or 2s 6d a week, was in 1707 said to supplement that income by selling "fruit at Savoy Gate".¹⁴ She only seems to have received that pension for just over a year, presumably near the end of her long life, between 1707 and 1708.¹⁵

Further evidence that alternative strategies were deployed even when poor relief was available derives from the fact that some paupers *preferred* to maintain themselves in their own dwellings rather than endure institutionalized relief. Diana Lothlane, for example, stayed for just one month in the parish workhouse and then "went out again to try to maintain herself" in 1725. We know a lot about her situation, for Diana had come to the notice of the local justices as early as 1708:

Diana Lathlane says she knows not whether she is a Widow of Andrew Lathlane a fringe & lacemaker who was a housekeeper in Rose Street about 20 years ago in King James time [1685–1688], she says she or her husband never was housekeepers since, nor never lived out of the parish since but kept shop in Bedford Street in this parish & paid Taxes. She has no children to be provided for; she lives at

12. This has been estimated by inflating the number of pensioners in 1716 to take account of those whose ages were missing, and applying to a total population of 45,000 the age structure for eighteenth-century London estimated in John Landers, *Death and the Metropolis: Studies in the Demographic History of London, 1670–1830* (Cambridge, 1993), p. 180. The figures are minimum ones, since they take no account of any aged spouses, who were not usually listed, and the twenty-seven to thirty parish almswomen, who were also not listed.

13. Ian W. Archer, *The Pursuit of Stability: Social Relations in Elizabethan London* (Cambridge, 1991), p. 195, for example, after an exhaustive reconstruction of pauper budgets, concludes that the parish pension "was no more than an income supplement".

14. WAC F4509/9.

15. Peter Laslett's comment that "only a small proportion of persons in need, therefore, could have been completely and permanently dependent upon the community" seems amply borne out in this parish; Peter Laslett, "Family, Kinship and Collectivity as Systems of Support in Pre-industrial Europe: A Consideration of the 'Nuclear Hardship' Hypothesis", *Continuity and Change*, 3 (1988), pp. 153–175, 164.

Burdett's in Feather Ally, her husband went away about 7 year ago to the East Indias. He has been 10 year in the East Indias at the Fort of St George & is a merchant. She was married at Marylebone to Andrew Lothlain above 30 year ago. She has a Daughter Charlotte Lathlane – about 20 year old.¹⁶

Diana, then, claimed to have been married to a respectable housekeeper, paying taxes and keeping a shop. Her circumstances clearly declined after her husband left for the East Indies. From occupying a shop on a thoroughfare, Bedford Street, she was now lodging in Feather Ally. At the time of her examination she would have been in her very late fifties. Diana began receiving a pension from St Martin's ten years before her admittance into the workhouse. Her pension began at 1s 1d a week in 1714 and had risen to 2s before her admittance into the workhouse in 1725 at the advanced age of seventy-six.¹⁷ Her case is valuable, since it demonstrates explicitly that there must have been a range of alternative survival strategies even to an aged pauperized widow, who had been receiving a regular parish pension. Diana must have perceived sources of income and support outside the parochial relief system with relatives, friends and/or from local employment opportunities. That this was commonplace can be deduced from the fact that many pensioners chose to give up their pensions and attempted an independent existence rather than enter workhouses following a move to indoor relief in early eighteenth-century England.¹⁸

Even entering a parish workhouse, of course, did not mean permanent and utter dependence. Workhouses like that of St Martin's were usually "revolving doors": only about one-third of those admitted in St Martin's seem to have died in the institution. It is clear that this workhouse, like others in early modern Europe, played a part in local household survival strategies, being used as a temporary source of childcare and shelter by the local pauper population.¹⁹ Most who left either departed voluntarily or were

16. WAC F5001/44.

17. WAC F4002/11 and the following overseers accounts: WAC F444/154, F445/148, F446/140, F447/153, F449/167, F451/180, F452/167, F454/159, F459a/220. Diana was listed in 1716 as a sixty-seven-year-old pensioner, F4539/43.

18. Tim Hitchcock has described how "at St. Margaret's, Westminster, 108 people were listed as receiving collection from the parish in 1726, all of whom were offered the house when it opened. Only forty-one people eventually entered, the rest giving up their weekly doles. At Tavistock in Devon, thirty-one people were listed on the poor books in 1747. When the parish opened a workhouse, seventeen of these refused to enter and lost their pensions", Hitchcock, "Habits of Industry".

19. For the notion that workhouses might play a central role in paupers' survival strategies, see Catharina Lis and Hugo Soly, "Total Institutions' and the Survival Strategies of the Labouring Poor in Antwerp, 1770–1860", in Mandler, *Uses of Charity*, pp. 38–91. For an Italian example, see Giovanni Gozzini, "The Poor and the Life-Cycle in Nineteenth-Century Florence, 1813–59", *Social History*, 18 (1993), pp. 300–316. His Pia Casa took in "above all those expelled temporarily or definitively from their original nuclear families which were no longer able or willing to provide for their support"; *ibid.*, p. 313.

"taken out" by a surviving parent after a relatively short stay, which in a few cases was the same day, an indicator that some found the calculation between sentimental attachment and material hardship a desperately difficult one to resolve. It is noticeable that only six residents, out of 270 whose departure was described, were taken out by "friends". These might have been neighbours, although contemporary use of the word "friends" might include a degree of kinship.²⁰ Residence in an institution does *not*, of course, anyway preclude regular contact, help and support from the nearby family of those incarcerated, as is sometimes implied by the literature.²¹ A century earlier, in Southwark, for example, the son-in-law and daughter of a deceased almshouse resident, Roger Cotton, petitioned the parish authorities for his effects, claiming that they had "been at great charges and expenses with him, by reason of providing things necessary for him, in time of his sickness and likewise for burying of him, which he desired might be by her mother in the church yard".²² Just as kinship does "not stop at the front door", so kin ties are not shut out by the workhouse gate.²³

Few households headed by young and middle-aged married couples, too, could expect *regular* relief from the parish. Single parents, usually single mothers, might be given childcare. When a child lost one or both of its parents, it might qualify for an orphan's pension, the money being paid to the orphan's carer. Orphans supported by the parish, however, formed a minuscule proportion of children in the appropriate age groups in the parish, in 1716, no more than one to two per cent of those aged ten and below. As Table 1 makes reasonably clear, most parish orphans in the early eighteenth century seem to have been cared for by family members, most often by the surviving mother or father. Only one-third of the parish orphans (which included surviving foundlings dropped in the parish) seem to have been cared for by professional parish nurses. Some orphans cared for by such nurses were probably returned to parents, or occasionally relatives, in the same way that children left in the workhouse were. Evidence that this latter practice was widespread in London comes from the "Returns from the Register of Parish Infant Poor" in 1778. The returns provide convincing confirmation that one widespread survival strategy amongst the poor was to jettison children, for a temporary period. Nearly half of all children

20. See, Diana O'Hara, "Ruled by My Friends': Aspects of Marriage in the Diocese of Canterbury, c.1540–1570", *Continuity and Change*, 6 (1991), pp. 9–41; *idem*, *Courtship and Constraint: Rethinking the Making of Marriage in Tudor England* (Manchester, 2000), pp. 30–56.

21. Laslett, "Family, Kinship and Collectivity", p. 166. This assumption surely informs the famous English example cited in Peter Laslett, *Family Life and Illicit Love in Earlier Generations* (Cambridge, 1977), p. 60.

22. Jeremy Boulton, *Neighbourhood and Society: A London Suburb in the Seventeenth Century*, (Cambridge, 1987), p. 260.

23. The quotation is from Michael Anderson, *Family Structure in Nineteenth-Century Lancashire*, (Cambridge, 1971), p. 56.

Table 1. *Specified carers of parish orphans 1716*

Relationship to orphan	Number	Percentage
Sister	1	1.1
Grandmother	2	2.2
Uncle	3	3.3
Father and mother	4	4.3
Father	17	18.5
Nurse	31	33.7
Mother	34	37.0
Total	92	100.1

Source: WAC Pensioner listing, F4539

left on the parish aged six years and under, were ultimately returned to their parents.²⁴ The extent to which the parish paid for the maintenance of orphans cared for by the surviving parent marks the extent to which significant resources were directed at the early stages of married life.²⁵ It is noticeable that orphans' pensions were paid to only a handful of married couples (perhaps following a remarriage).

A proportion of parish orphans were foundlings, abandoned in the parish when parents were desperate. These were not necessarily illegitimate. Dorothy Shephard, widow, who claimed that her late husband had sired *nineteen* children, for example, admitted that "being in great necessity soon after her said husbands death was forced to leave one of the said George Shephard's Children upon the said [London] parish who received the same".²⁶ Nor is it necessarily the case that children were abandoned shortly after their birth. Ann Clark, recounted how she had borne a bastard child and,

[...] that she kept the Child about 2 year *as long as she could* [my italics] & she being a Lodger against Cross Lane in Long Acre now the Sign of the Star & from thence [she was] carried to the prison, she left the said child at her lodging & so the same came to the parish".²⁷

Many of those parents who abandoned young children on the parish intended to recover them, when their circumstances improved. As one mother wrote, "if ever God makes me able I will repair the charge & redeem

24. M. Dorothy George, *London Life in the Eighteenth Century* (Harmondsworth, 1966), p. 405.

25. This is a typical finding for the period before 1750. A large family was the smallest percentage "cause" of poverty in Norwich in 1570, and Salisbury in 1635; Slack, *Poverty and Policy*, p. 79.

26. To "leave a child on the parish" means to abandon a child as a foundling. This is not to be confused with applying for, or being granted, an orphan's pension. Parish orphans usually stayed with the surviving parent, if any. All foundlings, but only a minority of orphans, were cared for by professional parish nurses. In the accounts, foundlings and orphans are lumped together as the "parish orphans". Some foundlings can be identified from their surnames, which were often the names of the streets in which they were abandoned.

27. WAC F5001/35, 51, F5002/125.

the child with thanks to you for the Care".²⁸ Many of the children left with the London Foundling Hospital (founded 1739) carried identifying items to facilitate their later collection. Some of these foundlings, like those left on the parish, were not unwanted bastard children, but were legitimate "surplus" children left by destitute parents.²⁹ The point of all this is that the abandonment on a temporary or permanent basis of children by pauper households was the strategy, but the parish was, of course, by no means the only possible destination for such children.³⁰

Couples, as opposed to single parents, "overburdened with young children", although a traditionally recognized object of charity and frequently listed as a separate category of pauper by writers on the subject, were *not* considered as deserving of regular pensions in this part of early eighteenth-century London.³¹ There are a number of reasons why this may have been so. One is that relatively few pauper households in early eighteenth-century London would have contained large numbers of young children, given the lethal rates of infant and childhood mortality then prevailing. Another possibility may be that many couples, like many single parents, placed small children on relatives as a survival strategy.³² We must clearly now look, as most paupers may have done, to sources of support outside the usual poor relief agencies.

SURVIVAL STRATEGIES: THE INFORMAL SECTORS

Individual examples of a range of household survival strategy cases can be found in St Martin's. A few paupers were recorded as getting a living as

28. WAC F5002/fo. 165a'. These letters left with foundlings in St Martin's are discussed, and reproduced in full, in the useful survey by Valerie Fildes, "Maternal Feelings Reassessed: Child Abandonment and Neglect in London and Westminster, 1550-1800", in Valerie Fildes (ed.), *Women as Mothers in Pre-industrial England: Essays in Memory of Dorothy McLaren* (London, 1990), pp. 139-178, (letters on pp. 153-155).

29. Between 1768 and 1772, some 15.5 per cent of successful petitioners to the London Foundling Hospital were married or widowed women; R.B. Outhwaite, "Objects of Charity': Petitions to the London Foundling Hospital, 1768-72", *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 32 (1999), pp. 497-510, 505.

30. For the hospital, see the important article by Adrian Wilson, "Illegitimacy and Its Implications in Mid-Eighteenth-Century London: The Evidence of the Foundling Hospital", *Continuity and Change*, 4 (1989), pp. 103-164. Wilson argues that "neither marital poverty nor orphaning led parents to take their children to the Foundling Hospital" (p. 135) and that most foundlings were illegitimate. Valerie Fildes has argued, conversely, that many foundlings of London and Westminster were "legitimate children whose parent(s) could not afford to feed another mouth"; Fildes, "Child Abandonment and Neglect", p. 157.

31. Smith, "Structured Dependence", p. 426, argued that this category, together with the elderly, "overwhelmingly dominate the bulk of recipients of relief in the Poor Law account books and censuses of the poor which survive from the sixteenth century".

32. Adrian Wilson suggests that in the event of a woman losing her partner whilst pregnant, or shortly after the birth, either the woman remarried or "a parent's own family rallied in support"; Wilson, "Illegitimacy and Its Implications", p. 136.

prostitutes or in “bawdry”.³³ The poor can be found begging in the streets, crowding around the church for handouts from the collection money, accosting coaches, or pleading on the doorsteps of parish officials and other local worthies.³⁴ Many pauper household economies were clearly joint efforts, since women as well as men clearly worked, and worked in the range of occupations mostly familiar to early modern historians.³⁵ Poor women in St Martin’s in the early eighteenth century are recorded selling newspapers, hawking fruit, eggs and oysters, teaching school, nursing children and the sick, keeping shops and drinking establishments, singing, washing gloves, lining clogs, sewing, making gloves (at which she was said to “work for her living”), cooking, cleaning chimneys and carrying water.³⁶ It is also clear that paupers might sacrifice living space to make ends meet. Some poor people took in lodgers, an important income supplement in the early modern city.³⁷ Others made considerable savings in rent by moving frequently to cheaper accommodation. A particularly common response to hard times was to leave a “house” where one might be an accredited respectable “housekeeper”, liable to rates and probably with a lease, paying a sum of money to a nonresident landlord, by the year or at least by the quarter, and move in to cheaper “lodgings” with little or no security of tenure, which might be no more than a single room or even a cellar. As I argued some time ago, the high rates of residential mobility found in the early modern city are partly due to this further “survival strategy” of poor households.³⁸ It is rare to find this strategy articulated, but Francis Place, the “radical tailor of Charing Cross” did record, during the 1790s, the reasons for his local residential mobility within the area. In particular, he recalled taking “an unfurnished back room up two pairs of stairs at a chandlers shop in Wych Street”. He remembered that “we paid four shillings a week for the room we quitted and two shillings for that we removed to. This was a savings of some importance to us”.³⁹

What happened when this economy of “makeshift and mend” failed? How useful were relatives and neighbours in the survival strategies of the poor? Can we uncover any evidence about the range of kin that paupers might draw on when destitution threatened? We can assume that the population of this West End suburb consisted mostly of first-generation migrants

33. WAC F5002/47.

34. Boulton, “Going on the Parish”, pp. 26–33; *idem*, “The Poor Among the Rich”.

35. Peter Earle, “The Female Labour Market in London in the Late Seventeenth and Early Eighteenth Centuries”, *Economic History Review*, 42 (1989), pp. 328–353.

36. For the occupations listed here, see WAC F5001/38, 92, 100, 103, 115, 123, 131, 151, 160; F5002/28, 37, 42, 43, 59, 60, 74, 95, 101, 153.

37. Outhwaite, “Objects of Charity”, p. 506.

38. Boulton, *Neighbourhood and Society*, p. 221. For the mobility of Londoners see also Wall, “Beyond the Household”, pp. 62–64.

39. Mary Thale (ed.), *The Autobiography of Francis Place 1771–1854* (Cambridge, 1972), p. III.

and contained a large shifting population of servants and lodgers. The circumstances of migration, we can further assume, must have distanced households and individuals from families of origin and produced lower levels of kin density than might be found in rural areas. Such kin networks as did exist, moreover, would be relatively transient.⁴⁰ Some aged paupers had no surviving children anyway.⁴¹ None of this means that kin were not important sources of help and aid for the urban migrant. In the early seventeenth century approximately thirty-seven per cent of migrant women had kin present in London and just over one-fifth co-resided with them.⁴² Studies of English kinship argue that *in extremis*, effective kin recognition might be extended beyond the "nuclear core", and succour might be provided and assistance sought within a system of "situational flexibility".⁴³

In order to make some investigation of this difficult topic, the sources of help mentioned by paupers in two examination books of St Martins were analysed. This source cannot, unfortunately, give any sort of guide as to the *volume* of help received by paupers, because information on pauper support was mentioned only in passing and was not always relevant to one's settlement or request for poor relief. It is probable, too, that references to kin in the books were driven partly by the famous clause in the 1601 Poor Law statute which placed a clear obligation on parents, grandparents and children to maintain each other, if they were of "sufficient ability".⁴⁴ That such help was valued can be deduced from those comments made by paupers who explicitly said that they lacked support or relatives or "friends". Abigail Rumbold for example, left a letter for the grandmother of her abandoned one-year-old son, asking her to provide for him (Abigail had kept his older sister):

I am not able to support myself, having neither money, any calling, or friends, much less am I able to support them, and I cannot see them starve, and I thank God that He has given me his grace to overcome the temptation I lay under to make away with them.

Abigail had made an unfortunate marriage. Her fascinating letter (dated May 1709) veers from plaintive appeals to thinly veiled threats, including an accusation that the grandmother had embezzled money from her first husband's estate. It ends with the comment that,

40. Boulton, *Neighbourhood and Society*, pp. 247–261.

41. Pamela Sharpe, "Survival Strategies and Stories: Poor Widows and Widowers in Early Industrial England", in Sandra Cavallo and Lyndan Warner (eds), *Widowhood in Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Harlow, 1999), pp. 220–239, 225–226.

42. Vivien Brodsky Elliott, "Single Women in the London Marriage Market: Age, Status and Mobility, 1598–1619", in R.B. Outhwaite (ed.), *Marriage and Society: Studies in the Social History of Marriage* (London, 1981), pp. 81–100, 93.

43. David Cressy, "Kinship and Kin Interaction in Early Modern England", *Past and Present*, 113 (1986), pp. 38–69.

44. Thane, "Old People and their Families", p. 117.

I think it is but highly reasonable that you should either keep your grandson (this present child Charles Rumbold) or some way or other provide for him; and if it be consistent with your natural affection (which you ought to have) and your present manner of living to send him to the parish you are the best judge of that.

There is no trace of any Charles Rumbold amongst the parish orphans, so perhaps the grandmother took in her grandson as requested.⁴⁵

Justices also sometimes recorded those unfortunates who lacked such means of assistance. The unfortunate "Margaret Holemaid says she is the wife of John Holemaid a Taylor who was pressed into the foot service in my Lord Orkney's Regiment, she does not know any of his relations or kindred & never heard where any of them lived".⁴⁶ Joan Groom, a sixty-year-old widow had "3 children, but not in capacity to keep her", although a daughter was providing her with lodgings.⁴⁷ A poor crippled twenty-year-old woman, Ann Mann, "has no relations".⁴⁸ The seventy-year-old widow, Mary Inger, was granted a parish pension after testifying that "She has no Child nor friend, her husband Richard Inger was a Groom to King Charles".⁴⁹ There was sometimes an air of disapproval when local relatives were neglecting their responsibility to care for elderly parents, such as when Jane Heap a widow deposed that "she lodges near John Owen's in Moors yard – she has a son a musician who lives plentifully, Anthony Heap at the Red Lyon in Princes Street".⁵⁰ A few of the elderly, too, were unsure even about the whereabouts or even continued existence of their own children.⁵¹

Tables 2–4 represent an attempt to explore pauper sources of support beyond that of the parish. It should be stressed that the figures must be read as the absolute minimum level of support, given that one cannot assume that failure to mention support from family or friends means that

45. WAC F5002/169. One Charles Rumbold married an Abigail Gouch at St James's Duke Place, once a notorious centre of clandestine marriage, in 1706. Charles, their son, was baptized in St Andrew's Holborn on 30 April 1708.

46. WAC F5001/161. Margaret (earlier known as Meade, Holemead might have been a scurrilous nickname) gave a somewhat different account of her circumstances in an earlier examination; WAC F5001/149.

47. WAC F5001/4. Following her examination Joan was granted a pension by the parish, which began at 1s 6d per week in 1708 rising to 2s a week in the last recorded year of her pension in 1721; WAC F438/183, F440/229, F441/155, F442/167, F444/151, F445/146, F446/138, F447/150, F449/164, F451/177, F452/163, F454/156.

48. WAC F5001/101.

49. WAC F5002/24. Her pension started at 1s 6d a week and rose to 2s by the year of her last recorded payment in 1719. WAC F440/231, F441/156, F442/168, F444/152, F445/147, F446/139, F447/152, F449/166, F451/179.

50. WAC F5001/14. A neighbour later stood security for 40s (£2) to enable her to go back to Ireland, WAC F5001/15.

51. Frances Taton, a seventy-year-old widow, for example, "believes she has one Child in the Army", WAC F5001/21. She was granted a pension of 1s 3d a week in 1708 and continued receiving it until 1715, by which time it was worth 2s; WAC F438/191, F440/239, F441/161, F442/175, F444/158, F445/152.

Table 2. *Types of support mentioned in examination books, 1708–1709*

Help provided	Count
Childcare	35
Lodging	33
Unspecified help	9
Employment	8
Maintenance	6
Healthcare	4
Security for loan	1
Education of child	1
Total	97

Source: WAC Examination books, F5001–F5002

such help was not being received. In addition to the ninety-seven cases where a pauper narrative mentioned some type of support, there were a further thirty-seven or so where relatives of some sort were reported as being available, most of them locally or scattered across London. Some of these kin were clearly not involved directly in the care of relatives, which had devolved thereby on to the parish. Thus, for example, two aunts reported that their orphaned two-year-old niece, was “now at the Widow Battin’s in Hedge Lane”.⁵² It must further be noted that what is being analysed here is *any* period of support mentioned as being given at any time during the period of the narrative. It is hoped that this method is sufficiently robust to give, firstly, some sort of notion of the type of help provided, and, secondly, some idea of the relative importance of particular family members in providing it. It would have been sensible to break down such information by age, but at present there is insufficient data to make this a useful exercise.

Table 2 suggests that childcare, as expected, and lodgings were the most common type of help mentioned by the poor. We do not know, of course, the extent to which, if at all, relatives and friends were paid for providing this help. The direction in which help flowed, too, could also clearly be misleading. As Margaret Pelling has pointed out, there were possible reciprocal benefits which might accrue from the elderly keeping a poor child. Again, widows living with married children might provide childcare or domestic labour in return for such shelter. To begin with, only six paupers referred explicitly or implicitly to some form of maintenance, transfer payments that are usually unrecoverable in the early modern historical record. Thus “Margaret Blanford in Mercers Street says she has been a widow [near] 20 years, and her Daughter Catharine Crookchank has maintained her”, or take William Naylor and his wife Alice, of whom it was noted, “William Naylor their son is a painter, & he did support them”.⁵³

52. WAC F5001/139.

53. WAC F5001/8, 155.

Table 3 lists the categories of relatives and unrelated who were mentioned as providing any type of support and Table 4 (on p. 62) provides an analysis of this in terms of the direction in which such support apparently flowed. It should be noted that Table 3 quantifies the relationship between carer and the person assisted. A grandparent caring for a grandchild, however, might be doing so to help her widowed (or deserted) daughter or widowed son. Take, for example,

Parker Taylor lodging at the Castle alehouse by Great Moor Gate, St Stephen Coleman Street, kept house in Russell Court [in St Martin's] about a year & half ago at £28 per annum, & never kept house since, has 3 Children: Elizabeth 9 year old, Sarah a year *dead*, Thomas 15 months *with his Grandmother*: his wife Mary sold old Clothes, he does some Toys or Turners work.⁵⁴

Here then is a pauper family in dire straits. They were lodgers, having once been substantial housekeepers. The youngest child had been farmed out with his grandmother, presumably to reduce the financial burden of care. Both husband and wife (the implication is that she was no longer employed) worked in unrelated occupations. Following his examination Taylor was, relatively unusually, given short-term relief at 1s 6d per week as one of the "extraordinary" or casual poor. He never seems to have received a parish pension from St Martin's. This is another example, too, of how survival strategies could be mixed, and how help from relatives might be only a temporary solution. It is possible, too, that relatives might care for the children of previous partners. Given the frequency of remarriage in early modern London, some female paupers had children by previous husbands. It seems at least possible that relatives might take care of these, rather than a new partner, perhaps, we may surmise, to facilitate remarriage. Thus one Hester Sorycole, reported that she was the widow of one George Sorycole, a soldier and "out pensioner" but had a son, John Allen, by a previous husband, a deceased guardsman. She also admitted that she "has one more [daughter] Elizabeth Allen 8 years old now with her Grandmother Elianor Morgan at Marlborough".⁵⁵

As the previous example demonstrates, the help given to local paupers by relatives was by no means bounded by the parish. Anne Lane, a widow living in Hyde Park Road, had one child living with her mother in Shrewsbury.⁵⁶ Sarah Parrett, another single parent, lodging in Hungerford Market, deposed that her father, living in Kingston, Surrey, "keeps one of her Children Sarah about 4 year old – but he is a very poor man".⁵⁷ Such ties as existed, then, were often, perhaps surprisingly, maintained over considerable distances. A number of paupers were intent on travelling long distances to

54. WAC F5002/28.

55. WAC F5002/134. Hester falsely claimed to be married to another soldier as well.

56. WAC F5002/53.

57. WAC F5002/38.

Table 3. *Stated relationships between the poor and their helpers, 1708–1709*

Nature and direction of relationship	Number
Aunt helps nephew	3
Aunt helps niece	2
Aunt helps step-nephew	1
Brother helps brother	2
Brother helps sister	11
Brother-in-law helps sister-in-law	2
Brothers help sister	1
Cousin helps cousin	1
Daughter helps mother	9
Father helps daughter	2
Father helps son	1
Father-in-law helps daughter-in-law	2
Grandfather helps granddaughter	1
Grandfather helps grandson	2
Grandmother helps granddaughter	3
Grandmother helps grandchild	4
Grandmother helps grandson	1
Grandparents help granddaughter	1
Great-aunt helps grandniece	1
Great-grandmother helps great-grandchild	1
Mother helps daughter	7
Mother helps son	2
Mother-in-law helps daughter-in-law	1
Neighbour helps bastard child	1
Neighbour helps child	2
Neighbour helps lunatic	1
Neighbour helps widow	1
Neighbour helps couple	1
Neighbours help child	1
Niece helps aunt	1
Parents help daughter	3
Patron helps child	1
Relation helps orphan child	1
Relation helps relation	1
Relations help child	3
Relations help children	1
Relations help kin	1
Sister helps brother	1
Sister helps sister	4
Son helps mother	1
Son helps parents	1
Stepfather helps stepson	1
Stepmother helps stepchildren	1
Uncle helps bastard niece	1
Uncle helps nephew	3
Uncle helps nephew-in-law	1
Uncle helps niece	3
Total	97

Source: WAC F5001–F5002

Table 4. *Direction of help given by kin*

Category	Number
Unknown direction	2
No relation	8
Vertical-up	12
Horizontal	22
Vertical-down	53
Total	97

Source: Table 3

be cared for by relatives, or like Anne Lane, sent their children out of London to be looked after by their kin. One Scottish women, for example, Catherine Steward, wife of an army sergeant lodging at the Hole-in-the-Wall, Panton Street, “desires to have something to carry her & her Children to Scotland, her relations there will keep her”.⁵⁸ Mary, the widow of Daniel Ellis, was given 50s (£2 10s) after security was found “to carry her to her brother Somerton a Blacksmith at Shipton-upon-Bower beyond Oxford”.⁵⁹ Occasionally even physically remote relatives seem to have taken the initiative in providing assistance at times of difficulty. Elizabeth Baker, for example, the wife of one Morgan Baker, a glover, agreed with an informant who told the authorities that Elizabeth Morgan the mother of the said “Elizabeth Baker lives at Usk in Monmouthshire & is a very able woman & has sent for her said Daughter & 3 children”.⁶⁰

It is also apparent from Table 4 that those grandparents or parents, like Margaret Blanford or William Naylor, who received maintenance or other forms of assistance from their children were relatively unusual. Most assistance mentioned by paupers in their examinations seems to have flowed *down* or across family relationships rather than *upwards*, within a fairly narrow circle of close kin. Of the twelve relationships that can be categorized as being vertical, and in which the help apparently flowed upwards, nine were daughters helping their mothers, usually by providing lodging (which might have been reciprocated with domestic help or childcare). Parents seem to have been more likely to be providing assistance to grandchildren or their children than to be in receipt of such help. The range of kin that provided help were very similar to those providing lodgings to single women in London a century earlier. Brodsky Elliott likewise found that it was the

58. WAC F5002/124. The passage to Scotland cost 20s (£1), on security from a Mr Lindsey, who “promises to return it if she does not go”.

59. WAC F5001/9. Another relative, one Edward Somerton, was amongst those standing surety for this money.

60. WAC F5002/89. It was noted that the daughter “had something to carry them thither”. Morgan (and his family) seems to have been lodging in the Strand, after being a housekeeper at two previous addresses in the parish.

immediate family, grandparents, parents, together with uncles, aunts, sisters and brothers who provided the bulk of this help.⁶¹ Cousins seems to have provided little help in either period. It is significant, nonetheless, that this range of kin providing help to paupers was significantly wider than envisaged in the original 1601 Act. Of the eighty-nine relatives recorded as helping paupers, about half of them, forty-five, lay outside the narrow range of grandparent, parent and children specified in that statute.

One has the impression, too, that as one would expect, paupers lacking such kin were seen as particularly deserving of help from the parish, and this was presumably why the presence or absence of relatives was sometimes noted. It is also possible to show that help and support given by relatives was, as in later periods, not unlimited and that it did not necessarily preclude seeking help from the parish. Arguably, the very reason that paupers were examined at all as "likely to become chargeable", a burden on the parish and its ratepayers, was because other means of support were proving inadequate. Particularly revealing is the case of Anne Wherrett, a nineteen-year-old servant, who after being discharged from service "went to Westminster [ie. St Margaret's, Westminster] where she had some Relations, vizt Mr England a Brewer her mother's brother & others". Sadly for Anne, she fell sick, and turned to the parish (rather than these relations) perhaps to facilitate a hospital admission, which promptly sent her back to St Martin's, her parish of settlement. In her words,

[...] going to the Overseers there for relief they and the Churchwardens Mr Eales a Goldsmith ordered Caudle a Beadle to put her in a Coach and set her at Mr Pashly's door one of the Overseers of St Martins, but he not being at home, the Coachman set her at Mr William's door in Hedge Lane.⁶²

Again, Ann Howes, a pensioner of St James, a neighbouring West End parish, seems to have been keeping her grandchild for her son, whilst he was at sea. Following her examination, however, the grandchild was placed on the orphan's book, "until her father comes home".⁶³ Kin then, in this urban environment, were only part of a larger "package" of survival strategies. Such expedients only come to the historian's attention when they fail, and provoke an application for poor relief or detection by local officials as "likely" to fall on the parish.

The evidence from St Martin's is suggestive about household strategies, although hardly definitive. Its poor represent a sample of the population whose survival strategies, or expedients, were proving inadequate. Those adults in need, who had not yet reached sixty years of age, the age at which

61. Brodsky Elliott, "Single Women", p. 93 (column showing kin providing lodgings).

62. WAC F5001/66. See also, 77, 80 for the same case. A William Naylor received a pension for four months in 1712, WAC F442/171.

63. WAC F5002/135. In the event Ann was on the orphans' book at a pension of is a week until she was bound apprentice in 1712, F440/211, F441/170, F442/154.

their chances of a parish pension were better, must have had even greater recourse to more family and social networks to survive. The poor were using a range of kin to help them survive in the city, more widely defined than the very immediate family. The findings here suggest, however, that few paupers received direct help from their children, the one exception was that daughters might, if able, provide help to mothers. Elderly men seem usually to have done without the support of their children, perhaps by seeking a "remarriage of mutual convenience".

Assistance from neighbours has left few traces in the records analysed here. This is probably because there was a hidden hierarchy of the types of care that kin and neighbours might provide.⁶⁴ Few of the poor, for example, seem to have expected their neighbours to provide childcare. The few occasions when that was specified, there often seems to have been money changing hands. So that the private care of a bastard child was recorded in the testimony of Jane Henry:

Jane Henry wife of Thomas Henry lodging at the lower end of Hartshorne Lane says that Mary (Ann Catherine) Hill aged about 18 months was born on Catharine Wetherell & is a bastard: & was born (at a Leathercutter's in Dyet Street) in St Giles parish & she says she was paid 2s a week for about 5 months last past for keeping the child by the father's brother.⁶⁵

When such a significant need occurred, the poor seem to have looked to their family of origin, or to other reasonably close relatives, or to the parish, rather than seek to burden neighbours. It is highly unlikely, especially in an urban area experiencing a lucrative demand for housing, that lodgings would be provided free to those in need. True, it is sometimes possible to find genuine examples of friendship between apparently unrelated individuals, usually based on periods of relatively long acquaintance, which are associated with the provision of shelter. Thus one Anne Ludlow was providing lodgings for her long time friend Robert Finly and his wife, but she may have been merely a friendly landlady, not an altruistic neighbour.⁶⁶ Neighbours may well have provided less onerous or short-term financial help, particularly credit.⁶⁷ Outhwaite's recent study of foundling petitions

64. Wall, "Beyond the Household", pp. 64–66, notes the qualitative differences revealed between support from neighbours and kin in his sensitive analysis of Flora Thompson's *Lark Rise to Candleford*. Of neighbours he notes that "relationships were not always harmonious, and that the nature of the contacts although frequent avoided the creation of burdensome and expensive ties of obligation in that meals were never provided nor would neighbours undertake the personal care of the ill and elderly", *ibid.*, p. 66.

65. WAC F5001/95. For the case of a female newspaper-seller, Ann Crook, the examining justice recorded that she "did lodge in at Mrs Wyatt's in Shugg Lane, who nursed her Child & her Child is there now & she says she pays 2s 6d per week for keeping her Child"; WAC F5002/37.

66. WAC F5002/106. Anne stated that "she has known him 18 years".

67. Craig Muldrew, *The Economy of Obligation: The Culture of Credit and Social Relations in Early Modern England* (Basingstoke, 1998), p. 82, points out the immense financial value to the poor of the extent of debt forgiveness. The amount of unpaid debts was "in fact many times larger than

found that "there are numerous examples [...] of humane actions performed by employers, neighbours, and kin", and his examples reveal much interim support for the parents of foundlings, particularly from ex-employers. Such support, however, was often supplemental to earnings and only helped delay rather than prevent a slide into helpless destitution. Paupers were aware that there were very real limits to the generosity of neighbours and friends. One widow hoping that the Foundling Hospital would take her youngest child claimed that,

I am left in the greatest trouble that tongue can express, having to [two] helpless infants and no way of providing for them at present, but through the goodness of few friends who kept me and mine from starving for some time. But I cannot rely on there favours for ever, as I have been burthensome to them for so long.⁶⁸

Perhaps we should not assume that, in the relatively harsh environment of a pre-industrial city, neighbours were always anxious to help the less fortunate. For every example of generosity, there might be indifference or suspicion. Historians are well aware that neighbours were perfectly capable of expressing considerable hostility to poor immigrants, expressed via informing parish officers of the arrival of paupers in the parish, or heartlessly evicting them. Evictions were experienced not only by single women, such as Margaret Hughes, an Irish migrant evicted from her lodgings whilst actually in labour, but were also directed at poor women such as one Susannah Wilcox, a seaman's widow, who "was turned out of [her] lodgings in a little Alley turning into the 2 Brewhouses in Tyburn Road, & for a month last she lay in a cellar under the Playhouse".⁶⁹ The current literature may sometimes paint too rosy a picture of the supporting networks of neighbours enjoyed by the poor. The pressure on pauper household economies and the consequent desire to curry favour with those in authority responsible for awarding pensions and doles could, for example, have produced a culture of suspicion and informing amongst the poor, rather than neighbourly reciprocal aid. Jane Price, a soldier's wife, living in Hartshorne Lane, for example, was examined by the justices in 1708. At the end of her examination the clerk recorded that Jane Price had volunteered the information that "Margaret Crurley [*Crutchley?*] in Hartshorne Lane over against the two Brewers with one Child has 12s a month on the Pension & [from the] Extraordinary". Since Jane was probably hoping for childcare support from the parish, her information may have been a tactic designed to pressurize the parish to grant her a greater sum, since she had four rather than one

charitable bequests and poor rates", and was an important income supplement which would have raised the income of "poor labourers'" families to a much higher level than that indicated by wage rates.

68. Outhwaite, "Objects of Charity", p. 508.

69. WAC F5002/91, 155.

child to provide for.⁷⁰ The effect of Jane's information, however, may well have been to get Margaret's regular pension stopped.⁷¹

CONCLUSION: THE SIGNIFICANCE OF "HOUSEHOLD SURVIVAL STRATEGIES"

It could be argued from some of the foregoing that the very phrase "household survival strategies" is something of a misnomer. Many pauper households, actually, did not really survive at all. What strikes one is the relative lack of family sentiment. *In extremis*, poor households deliberately fragmented.⁷² The desertion of wives and children by hard-pressed husbands could even be said to be an extreme example of rational and calculating behaviour on the part of poor families which is revealed time and time again. Single mothers, poor widows and hard-pressed married couples were perfectly capable of sending their children to live with relatives, sometimes many miles away, as well as leaving them on the parish. Reduced levels of family sentiment was, in itself, a survival strategy.

I am not able to subsist any Longer by reason of my Husband being Dead & the times is so very hard & having had much sickness this half year, that I cannot keep the Child any Longer by reason of Infirmities of Body & Limbs, being Lame & Cannot go without help, so [...] your Speedy care is desired herein, either to find a Careful nurse to your own liking or [...] to find a Good nurse for the Child [...].⁷³

Such strategies, however, were probably mostly short-term. Evidence from the St Martin's pauper biographies,⁷⁴ as well as the observed tendency to stay for a relatively short time in the parish workhouse, demonstrate that periods of hardship were often relatively short-term. When circumstances improved, families or households might be reconstructed.

The strategy of abandoning children, usually the youngest, on the parish or at the door of an institution, or sending them to live with relatives, was, moreover, a strategy far from being unique to England. It is well known throughout early modern Europe that many illegitimate children were abandoned by their mothers shortly after their births.⁷⁵ What is less well known

70. WAC F5001/63. Jane had one bastard child, a stepson, and two children from her current marriage. One child was placed on the orphans' book.

71. WAC F4509/5. A Margaret Crutchley living in Hartshorn Lane, receiving, however, just 4s a month from her pension, was crossed out of a list of pensioners made the year before this examination.

72. For this see also, D.A. Kent, "Gone for a Soldier': Family Breakdown and the Demography of Desertion in a London Parish, 1750–91", *Local Population Studies*, 45 (1990), pp. 27–42.

73. WAC F5002/167. From a letter attached to a foundling dropped in Durham Yard, 1709.

74. Boulton, "Poor Among the Rich".

75. For foundlings in Europe see, for example, Isabel Dos Guimarães Sá, "Child Abandonment in Portugal: Legislation and Institutional Care", *Continuity and Change*, 9 (1994), pp. 69–89;

is that a significant proportion of foundlings were deposited by poor families, often headed by widows, but sometimes by married couples.⁷⁶ That this was a genuine problem was recognized, for example, in Paris by the founding in 1788 of the Society for Maternal Charity, explicitly designed to care for the “legitimate infants of the poor”. Those running the charity concentrated their efforts on the two most vulnerable groups of poor families, namely those where pregnant women had lost their husbands or where their spouse was sick; and those families where pregnant mothers already had large numbers of young children. In 1788 it was estimated that between eleven and fifteen per cent of the foundlings left at the Paris Hôpital Général, the largest foundling hospital in Europe, were legitimate.⁷⁷ How many other poor families in Europe sent children to relatives, rather than the (frequently lethal) available institutions when times were hard? To what extent did the poor rely on kin, rather than charitable handouts and institutional relief for support?

This essay has attempted to reinforce the obvious point that there is always an, albeit largely invisible, balance between informal support networks and the all too visible activities of Poor Law administrators.⁷⁸ Historians have noted that the poor might seek help from family and relatives, but they have been slower to appreciate the fundamental importance of such strategies to our understanding of the structure and nature of poverty in the past. McIntosh, in her fine survey of poverty in fifteenth and sixteenth-century England, noted that economic and demographic patterns impacted not merely on vulnerable families, but also on the “ability of other lesser members of the community – relatives and neighbours of similar status – to give informal assistance”.⁷⁹ Speculation this may be, but this notion goes some way to undermine those histories of poverty which assume a simplistic equation between, say, larger numbers of poor relieved and macro-economic changes such as industrialization, falls in living standards and so on. Historians who seek to measure the extent of destitution by comparing the proportion of formally relieved with the total population are

David I. Kertzer and Michael J. White, “Cheating the Angel-Makers: Surviving Infant Abandonment in Nineteenth-Century Italy”, *Continuity and Change*, 9 (1994), pp. 451–480.

76. See above, note 30.

77. Stuart Woolf, “The Societé de Charité Maternelle, 1788–1815”, in Jonathan Barry and Colin Jones (eds), *Medicine and Charity before the Welfare State* (London, 1991), pp. 99–103. The estimate was of some 800 legitimates, out of between 5,500 and 7,500 total foundlings. The proportion of legitimate foundling children is remarkably similar to the estimate for London at the same period; see above note 29.

78. For this point see also Steve King, “Reconstructing Lives: The Poor, the Poor Law and Welfare in Calverley, 1650–1820”, *Social History*, 22 (1997), pp. 318–338. One can only agree with one of Dr King’s concluding comments that “there is scope for a renewed focus on the role of kinship in the welfare patchwork deployed by individuals and families”, *ibid.*, p. 338.

79. Marjorie K. McIntosh, “Local Responses to the Poor in Late Medieval and Tudor England”, *Continuity and Change*, 3 (1988), pp. 209–245, 219–220.

certain to be underestimating levels of need, since those poor who were maintained or relieved by their kin rather than the parish will be omitted. Again, changes in the proportions of the population applying to public relief might also partly reflect the changing ability and inclination of relatives and friends to support needy relatives rather than an absolute increase in the numbers of the destitute. At the very least, historians of European poverty, as the work of Thane and Wall surely implies, need to pay still more attention to the alternatives to institutional poor relief and charitable institutions, in the struggle for survival of the poor.

APPENDIX: SOURCES TO RECONSTRUCT PAUPER "SURVIVAL STRATEGIES"

The parish of St Martin's has a rich set of poor relief records which, unusually, can shed valuable light on less formal survival strategies. Firstly, most of the overseers and churchwardens accounts have survived for the entire period, and these form the basis of the "pauper biographies" constructed as part of the ongoing larger study. For the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, these are supplemented by a number of detailed listings of the parish pensioners, including two listings which supply age information and residence. The first workhouse admissions book survives, and contains details on the age, duration and condition of many of those paupers admitted between 1725 and 1726.⁸⁰ The most useful and voluminous of the records, however, are a nearly complete set of "examination books" recording the activities of local justices. These examination books record short settlement examinations, notes and comments on individual cases, records of decisions as to the granting of pensions, the care of parish orphans, foundlings, illegitimate children and the sick. The bulk of the material relates to attempts to establish a given person's settlement, although some of it records decisions on granting pensions or putting parish orphans out to apprenticeship.⁸¹ The detail they give varies enormously in quality and quantity, ranging from a few words or a couple of lines to a full page of testimony. The books appear to have been written on the spot, contain many corrections, further information gathered from local informants and occasional marginal comments on the veracity or otherwise of pauper testimony. Because of the size of the parish and the regular inflow of pauper immigrants "likely to become chargeable" the number of persons examined by the justices was considerable. The first two surviving books, which cover

80. WAC F4002. The exact period covered by this first admissions book is a seven-month period from 29 July 1725 to 26 February 1726.

81. The examinations are very far from the more familiar, relatively formulaic and formally written-up settlement examinations. For a splendid example and a guide to the English law of settlement, see Tim Hitchcock and John Black (eds), *Chelsea Settlement and Bastardy Examinations 1733–1766*, London Record Society 33, (London, 1999).

only a couple of years, contain records relating to over 600 cases, and name many thousands of persons therein. This essay represents a preliminary attempt to mine these books, more properly “notebooks”, for the minutiae of pauper lives and to uncover some of the survival strategies buried within them.