# The Pauper Household Small and Simple? The Evidence from Listings of Inhabitants and Pauper Lists of Early Modern England Reassessed

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Within the literature on household and family in past time it has become accepted wisdom that the households of the poor were particularly small in size and simple in structure. There is good reason, however, to call this view in question. First, a critical reassessment of the two types of source material which have hitherto been used to substantiate this view leaves serious doubts as to their suitability for a statistical analysis of pauper households. It can be shown that listings of inhabitants do not normally indicate which households are poor while pauper lists do not record households at all. Second, there is numerical evidence to show that the households of the poor could actually be larger and more complex than those in the rest of the population. The example of the Essex village of Ardleigh in 1796 is quoted to this effect, suggesting further that the record linkage of listings of inhabitants with pauper lists is the only effective method of producing reliable comparative statistics on the size, composition and structure of the pauper household.

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#### Aims and interests of the paper

In the landscape of current social historical scholarship the issue of household and family among the poor is located at the junction of two quite different strands of recent research. One is the social history of the Old Poor Law, that is the nation-wide system of parochial poor relief which existed in early modern England until 1834. The other one is the comparative study of household and family in past time as developed by Peter Laslett and his collaborators at the Cambridge Group for the History of Population and Social Structure.

My interest in a systematic linking of these two fields of research comes about because of this blind spot in the literature. It is true that recent research into the Old Poor Law has made enormous steps forward towards a history from below which also illuminates the living conditions of the poor and their attitudes to the poor law.<sup>1</sup> Yet we still know relatively little about such determinants of their everyday life as household patterns and family forms.<sup>2</sup> The comparative study of the domestic group, on the other hand, has spread to many parts of the world in the last two decades or so, with the point of departure having been Cambridge, and the starting point for the student still being Laslett & Wall 1972. But it has mainly been concerned with the question of whether complex household forms were really so widespread in preindustrial societies as the traditional textbooks would make us believe.

As a consequence, the households of the poorest sections of society have tended to be lost sight of, for this was decidedly not the direction in which to look for the transmission of the *ganze Haus* along the generations of a patrilineal stem.

Having had learned so much about the large households in imperial Russia, the *frérèches* of southern France or the *zadrugas* in the Balkans, I simply wanted to know what the domestic groups of the labouring poor in early modern England looked like.<sup>3</sup>

In the course of my research I came across the rich treasure of census-type documents which have survived for early modern England. Despite their pitfalls and limitations these records are invaluable to the historical sociologist. If used with care, they provide 'hard' information on the size, composition and structure of the pauper household which is not obtainable elsewhere. It is the purpose of this article to discuss the main problems which arise from the work with such documents and to communicate some of the material results.

However, before I proceed to a critical reassessment of these records, one thing should be made clear. This article is based on the assumption not only that census-type documents form the most important kind of source material for the study of the pauper household, but also that the methods of their analysis as developed at Cambridge remain a most vital tool for the historical sociologist. It is indeed a further aim of this article to argue the case for a positive and constructive reconsideration of the Cambridge Group approach to the comparative study of the domestic group.

It seems to me that especially in Germanspeaking countries such a reconsideration is long overdue, given that gross misconceptions and serious misunderstandings which should never have crept in in the first place are beginning to turn into the petty currency of Ideologiekritik. For instance, Laslett was rebuked for his restricted concept of household and family, but none of his critics felt obliged to suggest an operationable alternative (Rosenbaum 1975: 216-218; Medick 1976: 254-259). Another common misunderstanding is related to Laslett's household typology (Laslett 1972a: 28-32; Hammel & Laslett 1974: 91-99). From the fact that his classification of households by structure is based on the criterion of kinship the totally misleading conclusion was drawn that he regarded kin relationships as the decisive factor in the formation of households, and that he overlooked such determinants as work patterns and economic interests (for an example see Borscheid 1980: 86; and compare Laslett 1983b).<sup>4</sup>

This is not the place to investigate the question of how and why such misunderstandings occurred.<sup>5</sup> Suffice it to say that one of the reasons was probably the unfamiliarity with the records used at Cambridge. If you have never seen a good listing of inhabitants yourself you simply cannot imagine the quantitative potential of such records.<sup>6</sup> In what follows, I have therefore tried to convey as concrete a picture of the source material as would seem to be possible within the scope of a single article.

# Methodological approaches

The comparative historical study of the household as developed by the Cambridge Group for the History of Population and Social Structure rests on the quantitative analysis of listings of inhabitants or other census-type documents in which the population of a particular community, or of a clearly defined section of it, is enumerated by households. The term 'household' refers to people who are habitually coresident, and it is to be distinguished from the (numerically often smaller) 'family', a term reserved for groups of people related to each other by marriage or descent. There is an immense variation in the quality of such listings, especially with respect to the kinds of information given for each household member, ranging from documents in which only the number of persons per household appears to documents recording the full name (and hence the sex too) of every individual together with his or her age, position in the household, employment and earnings. Accordingly, the possibilities of a quantitative analysis range from a simple count of households by size and a calculation of mean household size to the presentation of a detailed demographic and socio-economic profile of the entire community.7

Following these rules, there are three possibilities for the numerical study of pauper households, depending on which kind of source



English places mentioned in the text or in the notes, with the dates of the listings of inhabitants or pauper lists referred to. (The boundaries shown are those of the ancient counties.)

- Ar Ardleigh, Essex (1796)
- As Ashdon, Essex (1801)
- Br Braintree, Essex (1821)
- Ca Cardington, Beds. (1782)
- Ch Chelmsford, Essex (1819, 1822, 1826, 1828)
- Cw Clayworth, Notts. (1676, 1688)
- Ea Ealing, Mdlsx. (1599)

- Gs Goodnestone-next-Wingham, Kent (1676)
- Iw Ipswich, Suff. (1597)
- Nor Norwich, Norf. (1570)
- Sb Salisbury, Wilts. (1635)
- Wc Wakes Colne, Essex (1821)
- Ws Wanstead, Essex (1821)

material is available. We may base our analysis on

- (a) a listing of inhabitants covering an entire community in which certain households are labelled as 'pauper' households;
- (b) a list which is specifically designed to record pauper households;
- (c) a list of paupers in conjunction with a complete listing of the same community at the same point in time, which enables pauper households to be identified in the listing by means of a nominal record linkage of the two documents.

In all previous research, including that undertaken at the Cambridge Group, only the first two of these methods have been employed. I shall argue that both these methods are inappropriate for the numerical study of the pauper household and bound to yield results which have to be rejected as completely unreliable. More specifically, I contend that there is no reason to uphold the common message of the studies based on these two methods, that is to say that the typical pauper household was particularly small in size and simple in structure, compared to the ordinary household in early modern England. I shall substantiate this claim by a critical reassessment of the evidence from listings of inhabitants and pauper lists.

## Listings of inhabitants

Let us first consider the method which is based on listings of entire communities, the main source hitherto used in the research at Cambridge. As early as 1965, in his first general discussion of the household in early modern England, Laslett presented a breakdown by social status of the households of Goodnestonenext-Wingham in 1676, which showed a clear positive relationship between high social status and a large mean household size. The households of the gentry averaged 9.3 persons, those of yeomen 5.8, tradesmen 3.9, labourers 3.2 and 'poor men' 2.1 (Laslett 1965: 64). He concluded that 'the higher the status of the household or family, the larger it was, and the humbler people were, the smaller were the households they lived in' (Laslett 1983: 46).<sup>8</sup> This view, it seems, soon became widely accepted, as may be judged from the fact that the Goodnestone-next-Wingham table has often been reprinted by other scholars (Hausen 1977: 70; Flandrin 1979: 56; Hinrichs 1980: 36).

True, this was only one single case, but soon afterwards the results of a pooled analysis of 100 listings dating from 1574 to 1821 proved a powerful confirmation of Laslett's thesis (Laslett 1969; revised in Laslett 1972b). A breakdown of various household characteristics by social status showed that paupers had the lowest values for mean household size (3.98), mean size of groups of children (2.34) and mean proportion of households with kin (7.7 per cent) (Laslett 1972b: 152–154 especially tables 4.15 and 4.16).<sup>9</sup>

The last of these measures suggested that pauper households were not only smaller than others, but also less complex in structure. However, it was not until about a decade later that this claim was made explicitly. Revising the estimates for household composition and household structure on the basis of a new sample of the 14 most reliable listings for early modern England, Richard Wall presented data for the proportions of complex households by social status. Again, paupers belonged to the groups at the bottom, with the proportion of complex households amounting to 11.2 per cent for the period 1750-1821 (mean of 14 communities) as compared to 12.9 per cent for the population at large (Wall 1983: 509, table 16.5).

However, what made me a little uneasy about Wall's conclusion here was the extremely low absolute number of pauper households on which these data were based. There is no doubt that he had used the most reliable documents as yet known to exist for England, and I do not quarrel with his findings for the population at large. But obviously pauper households are wildly underrepresented in these listings. His sample comprised 1,320 households, but only 1.3 per cent of them were labelled as pauper households in those 14 listings, a mere 18 households in all.

A reexamination of Laslett's findings re-

vealed that his material too was deficient in this respect. He did not give the absolute numbers of pauper households on which his figures for the various household characteristics were based, but only the numbers of listings used in which pauper households were actually labelled as such. For the calculation of mean household size, the figure for paupers was based on only 16 of the 100 listings in his sample, and for that of the proportion of households with kin it was even lower: a mere 6 listings (Laslett 1972b: 154, tables 4.15 and 4.16).<sup>10</sup>

There is clear evidence, however, to show that even in these 6 listings most pauper households went unrecorded. One of them is the exceptionally detailed village census of Ardleigh in Essex in 1976, one of the finest documents of its kind. For each of the 201 households enumerated, the social status or the occupation of the head is recorded. Only one household head is labelled as 'pauper'. However, the account books of the overseers of the poor in Ardleigh reveal a completely different picture, with 82 households, that is more than 40 per cent of all households, receiving regular poor relief in 1796.<sup>11</sup>

How are we to account for this enormous difference? Obviously we are facing two different kinds of source material which involve two different meanings of the term 'pauper'. As far as the accounts of the overseers of the poor are concerned, the matter is fairly straightforward. From the point of view of parochial poor law administration, a 'pauper' was a person receiving poor relief, either regularly or occasionally. Hence the labels 'weekly paupers', 'weekly poor', or 'regular paupers', and on the other hand 'occasional paupers', 'extraordinary poor' and so on found in these records. Such documents have survived for thousands of English parishes as well as for Ardleigh. Regardless of whether we are to follow the narrower or the wider definition of poverty thus entailed, the point is that these records allow a relatively clear identification of the socially acknowledged extent of poverty in the community.

With listings of inhabitants, on the other hand, the matter is more complicated. The close 'reading' of more than 70 listings revealed that it was highly exceptional for all households whose inhabitants were on poor relief to be labelled as 'pauper' households.<sup>12</sup> Rather, these are the exceptions to prove a rule which may be stated as follows. If a listing of inhabitants provides information on the socio-economic position of each household (and this is only very rarely the case), then this information appears in the form of certain labels attached to the household heads. These labels are either specific occupational designations (butcher, miller, agricultural labourer, etc.) or categories of social status which are themselves related to broader economic functions (gentleman, yeoman, husbandman, etc.), (see Laslett 1966; and also 1983a: chap. 2 for the issue of the contemporary images of the social structure of early modern England in general). Within this context, the label 'pauper' seems to have been employed only in such cases where no other category of social status or no occupational designation was applicable, which usually meant that the person in question was either too old or otherwise unfit for work. However, if somebody had a calling, he or she would be given the appropriate occupational label, even if poor or out of work at the time. Thus, an unemployed bricklayer on poor relief would be called 'bricklayer' and not 'pauper'. In other words, in listings of inhabitants the term 'pauper' appears as a residual category for people who could not otherwise be located on the hierarchy of socio-occupational labels.<sup>13</sup>

As an example, let us again have a look at the listing of Ardleigh in 1796. I have already mentioned that there is only 1 pauper household recorded as such. This is the household of Edmund Sharman, who also appears as 'old Lud' in the account books of the overseers of the poor. When the listing was taken he was 70 years old, and was living with his wife Alice – she was 67 - and his 27-year-old stepdaughter Jane Dowdhill. Presumably Jane was running the household, as the two elderly people were not well. But even for this young woman this seems to have been quite an exhausting job. The overseers' accounts tell us that now and then the woman from next door, a certain Ann Pentoney, had to step in to provide particular services paid for by the parish. Thus, we hear that on 27 August 1796 the overseer 'paid dame Pentoney for cleaning Lud Sharman 1s' – a reasonable sum that is, given that an agricultural labourer would earn some 10s a week at that time. Six weeks later Lud Sharman's wife Alice died. Dame Pentoney, herself on regular poor relief for her family of eight people, received 3s for washing and laying out the corpse, and the burial at 5s was also paid by the parish. Lud Sharman himself died two years later, and all trace of his stepdaughter Jane disappears in the records.<sup>14</sup>

However, tempting as it may be to follow the life courses of ordinary people through the records of the Old Poor Law, this is not the place for more examples. Let us therefore return to our point of departure, the question of whether listings of inhabitants make an appropriate source for the quantitative analysis of the pauper household.

It should be clear by now that the answer can only be an unqualified 'no'. Listings of inhabitants are an inappropriate source for the numerical study of the pauper household, because the logic of recording goes against it. Occupational or social status labels are recorded in these documents, and within this hierarchy there is no proper place for a 'pauper', this term being reserved for the residual cases which do not otherwise fit. The frequency with which the term 'pauper' appears in a listing (if it appears at all) has therefore no connection whatsoever with the actual extent of poverty in the community, and this is why most pauper households go unrecorded in such documents.

In so far as previous research into the size, composition and structure of the pauper household has been based on the analysis of listings of inhabitants, its results have to be rejected as unrepresentative and numerically unreliable. This also applies to Laslett's thesis that the general message of his study of the household in pre-industrial England is *especially* true for pauper households: that is to say that the households of the poor were always particularly small and simple.

### Pauper 'censuses'

Let us now consider the second method for the

numerical study of the pauper household, which is based on the quantitative analysis of lists drawn up to include paupers and no one else. These studies seem to provide an independent confirmation of Laslett's thesis about the pauper household being small and simple.

Laslett had established a mean household size of 4.75 as a standard for early modern English communities (Laslett 1972b: 129-134).<sup>15</sup> The analysis of the pauper censuses of Norwich in 1570, Ipswich in 1597 and Salisbury in 1635 yielded values much lower than that: 2.99, 3.21 and 2.33 (quoted or calculated from Pound 1971: 101; Webb 1966: 122-140; Slack 1975: 75-78). The result of the only study as yet undertaken for a German community, based on the 1523 visitation of the poor at Straßburg, was of the same order. Here the mean size of the groups of persons named amounted to 2.54 (calculated from the data provided in Fischer 1979: 134). In none of these pauper censuses was there any considerable proportion of complex kin groupings. Some 95 per cent of the recorded units consisted of nuclear families or solitaries, whereas these types account for about 80 per cent of the family units in early modern English communities, according to Laslett's investigations (in Hammel, Wachter & Laslett 1978: 70-74; see also Laslett 1977a: 22-23; 1983a: 97-98). Peter Clark, one of the leading historians in the field of poverty in early modern England, went so far as to conclude that 'average household size is a useful index of relative poverty, the poorest people, the impotent, having on average the smallest households' (1977: 240).

Again, I contend that this conclusion can be challenged. The poorest people may have had the smallest families – but this does not mean that they lived in the smallest households. As in the case of listings of inhabitants, a close reading of hundreds of documents raised serious doubts as to their suitability for the numerical study of the pauper household. My thesis is that these so-called 'pauper censuses' are not proper censuses at all. They are not 'listings' in the Cambridge Group sense, because the recorded people are – at best – listed by families, but in no case I know of by households.

What made me most suspicious concerning the more than 700 of these pauper lists (as I would prefer to term such documents) which have survived for the county of Essex, was the extremely high proportion of elderly people, especially widows who were recorded as solitaries. From all I knew about the provision for mothers and mothers-in-law in the households of their children among the working classes in late-nineteenth-century and twentieth-century England (Anderson 1971: chap. 10; 1972: 229-232; Young & Willmott 1962: chaps. 3 and 4; Willmott & Young 1967: chap. 6), I simply would not believe that one or two hundred years earlier all those poor elderly widows should have lived in their own independent solitary households.

Apart from this, children appeared again and again in these pauper lists, both as individuals and in groups. But it is clear that under no circumstances could these children have formed independent households, even though they too were recorded as if they did.<sup>16</sup>

In some cases it has proved possible to compare a pauper list with a proper listing of the entire population of the same community for the same point in time. In all these cases (Ardleigh in 1796, Ashdon in 1801, Braintree and Wanstead in 1821) it appeared that the paupers lived in households completely different from those recorded on the pauper list (for further details, see Sokoll 1987: ch. 2).

The best example is again Ardleigh in 1796, where the listing of inhabitants can be compared to several pauper lists. These lists fall into two categories.

The first category is that of the list of 'weekly paupers', that is people who received a weekly pension of 2 s on average.<sup>17</sup> For instance, the weekly list dated 12 February 1796 comprises 18 persons, including 12 widows and 1 young male. The entry on the list itself indicates that this last pauper was not living in a household of his own: a certain Sadler is said to have been paid 'for the silly boy'. Indeed the listing shows this boy as living in the household of his father, the agricultural labourer Henry Sadler. 'Silly' means mentally handicapped here, and presumably Henry Sadler received some special assistance towards the care of this boy, in addition to the parochial family allowance he was given on account of his other eight children.

Among the other 17 paupers on the weekly list, there are 7 actually shown by the listing as heading households, but the total number of persons living in these households is 36, that is just over 5 per household. Another 5 paupers appear in the households of other people. For instance, there is a widow Appleby who resided in the household of her son-in-law Samuel Pratt. Of the remaining 5 paupers on the weekly list 2 cannot be linked with people on the listing in an unambiguous way, due to several people sharing the same name, while of the last 3 there is no trace at all in the listing. Maybe they were simply overlooked when the listing was taken. A more likely possibility, however, is that they lived elsewhere, if still receiving their poor relief from Ardleigh as the place of their legal settlement.<sup>18</sup>

Second, we have lists of poor families. The years 1795 and 1796 witnessed a severe grain crisis, with the price of wheat increasing twofold within the first half of 1795 and reaching its highest level throughout the entire eighteenth century. It was against this background that the parish officers at Ardleigh authorized weekly payments of at first 6d and then 1s per child to the poorer families in the community.<sup>19</sup> Comparing the lists of these families, which were drawn up in the winter 1795 to 1796, with the listing of inhabitants (completed in September 1796), it appears that with respect to the number of children there are only slight discrepancies. But apart from the number of children only the surname of the head of the family is recorded on these pauper lists, so that with respect to all other household members there are gross omissions. Even if we assume that in all cases where that head was male (the father) there was another female adult in the same family (the mother), the problem remains that no evidence is provided on any possible coresiding relatives or lodgers.

A simple count of the persons on both pauper lists, that is the weekly list and the list of poor families, yielded a total number of 380 poor relief recipients. By contrast, if the households to which these persons belonged, are counted with all their members as recorded in the listing we arrive at a total of 467. In other words, even in this case of relatively well documented pauper lists (and on the assumption that all families had two parents unless a woman was indicated as the head in the lists of pauper families) the actual size of the pauper households is underestimated by about 25 per cent.

The conclusion must be that pauper lists (or 'pauper censuses', as they are sometimes called, which is rather misleading) are as inappropriate a source for the numerical study of the pauper household as listings of inhabitants, and we can again say that this is so because the logic of recording goes against it. Pauper lists record people with respect to the 'status' qualifying them for relief. For instance, under the Old Poor Law a widow without resources would be regarded as eligible for assistance by virtue of her widowhood. On a pauper list she would therefore normally be recorded in her own right, regardless of whether she had her own household or lived with somebody else. Similarly, the number of children would appear on a pauper list provided that the status 'family overburdened with children' was a qualification for relief, but otherwise not. At any rate, nothing can reasonably be inferred from such lists as to the structure of the households of the poor. There is simply no link between the entries on a pauper list and the households recorded on a listing of inhabitants. For instance, it may well be the case that a widow who appears on a list of weekly paupers resided in the household of her married son who himself received relief for his children and is thus recorded on a list of poor families.

# Listings of inhabitants and pauper lists combined

There is only one way out of the dilemma brought about because listings of inhabitants do not normally indicate which households are poor while pauper lists do not normally record households: both types of document have to be taken together. The principle is very simple indeed. A good listing of inhabitants is linked with a pauper list of the same community and drawn up at the same time; the aim is to identify all persons from the pauper list in the listing of inhabitants and thus to find the households where they belong. Once the households of the poor have thus been singled out, it is then possible to analyse them quantitatively, and to produce 'hard' data on the size, composition and structure of the pauper household.

Another advantage of this method is that the same data sets may be obtained for the remaining population, which in turn may possibly be broken down into further sub-sections (occupational groups, wealth categories and so on), depending on the kinds of further information available. In this way it is possible to compare pauper households with the households of others.

However, before we proceed to the examination of one examplary data set of this kind, a word of warning is necessary. The principle itself is simple, but its practical application is extremely time-consuming and likely to generate enormous frustrations. First, the sources are very rarely available in the desired combination. Second, even if we do find both a good listing of inhabitants and a reliable pauper list for the same community and point in time, the linking of the two records is likely to prove complicated and to leave a number of ambiguous cases unresolved. For example, if you have, say, five household heads and two poor relief recipients by the name of John Taylor, you may not be able to identify the two Taylor households which were poor, especially in a case where all possible spellings of 'Taylor' are muddled up in the records. (It has to be remembered that for a semi-literate parish officer in early modern England there are more spellings than the late-twentieth-century researcher imagines.) It may well be that only at the end of the whole procedure you come to realize that your records are not good enough.<sup>20</sup>

As an illustration of the dimensions being talked about here, the results of assembling all the material known to me to have survived for the county of Essex may be cited. Some 60 local censuses (mainly enumeration schedules relating to the first four national censuses 1801 to 1831, most of which are no proper listings) and more than 700 parochial pauper lists were recovered, covering 69 out of about 400 ancient parishes in Essex. In only two instances did a

Household	Poor relief	recipients	Others		
size	Households	Persons	Households	Persons	
1	-	-	2.5	0.5	
2	1.2	0.4	14.3	5.4	
3	9.8	5.1	14.3	8.1	
4	18.3	12.8	10.9	8.3	
5	18.3	16.1	15.1	14.3	
6	26.8	28.3	10.1	11.4	
7	11.0	13.5	16.0	21.1	
8	4.9	6.8	5.0	7.6	
9	3.7	5.8	6.7	11.5	
10	3.7	6.4	0.8	1.6	
11	2.4	4.7	1.7	3.5	
12	÷	-	0.8	1.9	
13 +	-	-	1.7	4.8	
Total (%)	100.1	99.9	99.9	100.0	
N	82	467	119	629	

Table 1: Distribution of households by size, Ardleigh 1796.

Excluded: 1 poorhouse with 21 inmates, the poorhouse keeper and his wife.

Chi-square test, data grouped as follows: small households (= sizes 1-3)

middle-sized households (= sizes 4-7) large households (= sizes 8 and above)

Households:  $chi^2 = 12.67$ ; df = 2; p<0.01. Persons:  $chi^2 = 33.51$ ; df = 2; p<0.001.

record linkage of a listing of inhabitants and pauper lists turn out to be successful: in the agricultural village of Ardleigh for the year 1796, and in the market town of Braintree for the year 1821.

### The pauper households in Ardleigh in 1796 as compared to the other households in the community

Let us now look at some of the results obtained in one of these cases, that of Ardleigh.<sup>21</sup> The evidence is spelt out in tables 1 to 5. There is a lot more to be gained from the 1796 listing and from the pauper lists mentioned above. Further tables have been produced, for the social structure of the community for instance, or detailed pictures of the age structure of poor relief recipients and the rest of the population.

h As in all tables, there are separate columns for poor relief recipients and for the remaining population.<sup>22</sup> In all, there were 201 households in Ardleigh in 1796, with 1096 inhabitants. It

composition and its structure.

may be noted in passing that both the size of the population and mean household size (1096/201 = 5.45) are quite large for a rural community in late eighteenth-century England. It should also be borne in mind that residents in institutions are excluded from all household tables. In the present case, the poorhouse with 23 inhabitants is numerically almost irrelevant, but such omissions should al-

This material could not be included here. For

the purpose of this article it was felt more ap-

propriate to concentrate on just three issues,

that is, the size of the pauper household, its

Table 1 presents a detailed breakdown of the households by size, together with the distribution of the population across these households.

		Poor relief recipients	Others
(a)	Household size		
	Mean	5.70	5.29
	Standard deviation	1.93	2.74
	Median	5.11	4.56
	First quartile	3.78	2.59
	Third quartile	6.14	6.47
(b)	Experienced household	size	
	Mean	6.35	6.70
	Standard deviation	2.05	3.00
	Median	5.55	6.10
	First quartile	4.52	4.19
	Third quartile	6.92	7.78

Table 2: Summary measures of household size, Ardleigh 1796.

Confidence limits of means (one-tailed test)

Household size (at $p < 0.20$ ):	
Others (upper limit)	= 5.50
Poor relief recipients (lower limit)	= 5.52
Experienced household size (at p<0.025):	
Poor relief recipients (upper limit)	= 6.54
Others (lower limit)	= 6.57

ways be indicated at the foot of our first table.<sup>23</sup> From the data in table 1 we can also calculate the exact extent of socially acknowledged poverty: 41 per cent of all households were pauper households, with 43 per cent of the population residing in them.

In Ardleigh in 1976 the households of the poor were larger than those of the rest of the population. Three quarters of the pauper households had between 4 and 7 persons, as opposed to just over half of the households in the remaining population. It is true that none of the very large households (with 12 or more persons) were to be found among the poor, but then most of the smaller households (with up to 3 persons) were not poor either. Perhaps the most interesting finding is that among the more than 40 per cent paupers in the community there was not a single person who lived in a household all alone. This flatly contradicts the widespread belief, supported by the misleading evidence from 'pauper censuses', that

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solitary households were particularly prominent among the poorer classes in early modern English society.

The distributions displayed in table 1 are summarized in table 2, in the form of statistical measures of central tendency and the appropriate measures of dispersion. Panel (a) relates to the distribution of households, panel (b) to the distribution of the population among these households. Both mean and median household size are higher for paupers, with the lower values for both standard deviation and interguartile range indicating a much more 'normal' distribution. On the other hand, both mean and median experienced household size were higher for non-paupers, due to the fact that this measure gives much greater weight to the largest households. The variation, however, remained high, and was in fact much higher than among the poor.<sup>24</sup>

Information on household composition, our second issue, is presented in table 3, which gives the mean number of persons present according to their relationship to the household head. It shows at a glance that pauper households were larger than others because they contained more children. Otherwise there ap-

Table 3: Household composition. Ardleigh 1796.

Relationship to household head	Poor relief recipients	Others
Household head	1.00	1.00
Spouse	0.89	0.77
Child	3.41	2.10
Kin	0.21	0.26
Servant	0.05	0.91
Lodger	0.13	0.24
Total		
(= mean household size)	5.69	5.28

Note: Household heads were excluded from the calculation of chi<sup>2</sup>. If they had been included in the test, the expected frequencies for household heads would not have been equal to 1.00, due to the difference in mean household size between the two samples. However, by definition the mean number of household heads per household is exactly 1.00.

 $Chi^2 = 97.08; df = 4; p < 0.001.$ 

Table 4: Incidence of household members other than head and spouse, Ardleigh 1796.

Relationship to household head		Poor relief recipients	Others	
	(a)	Household members as percentage of the population		
Children		60.0	39.7	
Kin		3.6	4.9	
Servants		0.9	17.2	
Lodgers		2.4	4.6	
	(b)	Percentage of households with respective household members		
Children		92.3	70.6	
Kin		14.6	13.4	
Servants		2.4	34.5	
Lodgers		12.2	14.3	
	(c)	c) Mean number of respect household members per household where they are present		
Children		3.68	2.98	
Kin		1.42	1.94	
Servants		2.00	2.63	
Lodgers		1.10	1.71	

Chi-square test, individual groups in panels (a) and (b) as follows:

Children	(a) $chi^2 = 43.84;$ (b) $chi^2 = 14.60;$	df = 1; p < 0.001. df = 1; p < 0.001.
Kin	(a) $chi^2 = 1.06;$ (b) $chi^2 = 0.06;$	
Servants	(a) $chi^2 = 77.74;$ (b) $chi^2 = 29.59;$	df = 1; p<0.001. df = 1; p<0.001.
Lodgers	(a) $chi^2 = 3.88;$ (b) $chi^2 = 0.18;$	

pear to have been very few differences between pauper and non-pauper households, apart from the fact that servants were virtually missing from pauper households, as you would expect.<sup>25</sup>

However, table 3 only shows the mean number of, say, children per pauper and per nonpauper household, thus lumping all children and all households within each group together. But we also want to know how these children were distributed among the households. Was the higher number of children per pauper household due to the fact that a higher proportion of pauper households contained children, while the mean number of children per household with children was the same as in the rest of the population? Or did both groups have the same proportion of households with children, but with more children in such households among the poor? It is table 4 which provides the answer to such questions, showing that children were found in both a higher proportion of pauper households and in higher numbers in these households (panels b and c). Otherwise, however, there is again little difference between the households of the poor and those of others, except of course with respect to servants.

On the other hand, finding no other differences than in children and servants is a real surprise. As panel (b) of table 4 shows, the proportions of the households with kin and with lodgers were more or less the same, that of households with kin was even slightly higher among the poor. This again flatly contradicts the common assumption that pauper households contained no other members than man, wife and children.

This leads us to our third issue, the structure of the household. Here we are to consult table 5, which has another big surprise. The proportion of complex households, that is extended family households and multiple family households, was slightly higher for poor relief recipients than for the remaining population. The proportion of upwardly extended family households (category 4a) was almost as much as twice as high among the poor: 9.8 against 5.0 per cent. It is in these households that we find those poor elderly widows whom the pauper lists would expect us to have lived as solitaries. Yet in fact they did not live in small households of their own, but in the households of their married children.<sup>26</sup>

Let me sum up. The village of Ardleigh in 1796 is a clear case against commonly held beliefs about the pauper household being small and simple. The households of the poor of Ardleigh were larger than those of other people, because they contained more children. At the same time they showed a higher degree of household complexity. This was mainly due to the presence of elderly widows in the house-

Household category					Poor relief recipients		Others	
1.	Solitaries	(a) (b)	Widowed Single, or of unknown marital status	1.2	1.2	$1.7 \\ 4.2$	5.9	
2.	No family	(a) (b) (c)	Coresident siblings Coresident relatives of other kinds Persons not evidently related			0.8 0.8 -	1.7	
3.	Simple family households	(a) (b) (c) (d)	Married couples alone Married couples with child(ren) Widowers with child(ren) Widows with child(ren)	$1.2 \\ 74.4 \\ 2.4 \\ 6.1$	84.1	$19.3 \\ 51.3 \\ 5.0 \\ 5.0 \\ 5.0$	80.7	
4.	Extended family households	(a) (b) (c) (d)	Extended upwards Extended downwards Extended laterally Combinations of (a)–(c)	9.8 3.7 1.2	14.6	5.0 5.0 0.8	10.9	
5.	Multiple family households	(a) (b) (c) (d) (e)	Secondary units up Secondary units down Secondary units lateral <i>Frérèches</i> Other multiple family households (including types (a)–(d) with extensions)	1111	-	0.8	0.8	
6.	Incompletely classifiable households			-		-	-	
To N	otal (%)				99.9 82		100.0 119	

Table 5: Distribution of households by structure, Ardleigh 1796.

Chi-square test, data grouped as follows: Nuclear family households (= 3)

Complex households (= 4+5)Other households (= 1+2)

 $Chi^2 = 4.31; df = 2; 0.12 > p > 0.10.$ 

holds of their married children, and even if the numbers involved are too small to allow any firm conclusions to be drawn the possibility is suggested that the poorer inhabitants of that village tended to provide for elderly relatives by taking them into their households. In any case it seems to have been unusual to leave such people in isolated solitary households.

### In the way of a conclusion: some interpretative questions and suggestions for future research

How are we to explain the findings from Ardleigh? The high number of children in pauper households is of course related to the social definition of poverty within the community, or more specifically to the image of the poor held by the 'better sort' of the parishioners, the dozen or so prosperous tenant farmers in whose hands the administration of the poor law lay. According to their fairly generous relief policy, families with children were among the chief recipients of parochial assistance, and in this respect it is not surprising that pauper households should have contained so many children. It is true that our data for the year of 1796 catch the situation at the tail-end of a severe grain crisis, but it must not be concluded that the picture we have drawn can only claim validity for this very specific situation. For the labouring poor of late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century England dearth was a recurrent experience. There were bad harvests not only in 1794 and 1795, but also in 1799, 1800, 1804, and in each year from 1807 to 1812 for instance, which were all accompanied by steep increases in the prices of grain (Chambers & Mingay 1966: 112-117). Thus, the paupers and their households we have encountered at Ardleigh in 1796 were those people who even in 'good' years were likely to live just above the margins of mere subsistence.

This is not of course to say that the poor farm labourers of Ardleigh in 1796 are representative of all the labouring poor of rural England in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. But there can be no doubt that their situation can be regarded as exemplary of countless other rural communities under similar conditions. It must not be forgotten that increasing proletarianisation went hand in hand with massive pauperisation and that family allowances of the type we have found in Ardleigh in 1796 were indeed the major form of poor relief in the rural parishes of the England of the day.<sup>27</sup>

Apart from such economic factors, these conditions were also influenced by demographic developments. In England, fertility stood at its highest level between the 1790s and 1820s (with the peak in the 1810s), a level never before and never again attained throughout the long period of her population history that is now known to us (Wrigley & Schofield 1981: 229–234). In this respect, then, there is again no reason to think of the pauper households at Ardleigh in 1796, with their large numbers of coresident children, as anything exceptional.

What seems to be more difficult is to interpret the evidence from Ardleigh in the light of any of the models which have been developed to account for the economic functions of households undergoing proletarianisation and pauperisation. It is clear that the high number of children in the households of the poor cannot be attributed to the calculative logic of a family economy system (Medick 1976; Medick's chapters in Kriedte, Medick & Schlumbohm 1981; Levine 1976 and 1977), since the household did not form a productive unit for the farm labourers at Ardleigh and their families. But even Louise Tilly's model of a family wage economy, which may well be applied to the case of a landless rural proletariat, would not quite fit here (Tilly & Scott 1978; Tilly 1979). The fact that the children of the poor stayed on in the parental household longer than the children in other households is more likely to be indicative of an over-supply of agricultural labour in the local economy than of the possibility that these children might have been retained to provide additional contributions to the family wage pool. Most of them were probably underemployed, or perhaps even unemployed (except at harvest time), and there were no employment opportunities outside agriculture, such as proto-industrial by-employments, in the locality.

Another important matter suggested by the material from Ardleigh is that of the role of the elderly poor in the households of their married children.<sup>28</sup> This phenomenon, it must be remembered, is of central significance for the appreciation of the logic of a household system based on the structural principles of nuclearity and neolocalism, a household system that is which seems to have been one of the characteristic features of western European society at least since the closing days of the Middle Ages.

One of the test questions the historical sociologist has to put here is this: what happens, under such a household regime, with cases of 'nuclear hardship', that is when familial *nuclei* which form the basic constituents of the systems, break up or fall apart? Widowhood is one example of such a dissolution of a nuclear unit, and one which often goes hand in hand with poverty. If nuclearity and neolocalism were

strict behavioral norms, then such remnants of former nuclear family households would have to be carried on as solitary households, which in turn would imply a shift of the responsibility for the support of the elderly from the kinship system to wider financial institutions of the collectivity. For the taking-in of, say, a widowed mother into the household of her son and his wife and children would transform that household into a complex one and thus break the nuclearity rule. This is why under normative conditions of strict nuclearity and neolocalism the maintenance of the household system requires welfare agencies beyond the family and kinship networks to deal with cases of nuclear hardship.

The Old Poor Law of early modern England was perhaps the most advanced and probably the most comprehensive system of public support in any country before the coming of the modern welfare state in the late nineteenth century. Future research in this field should therefore look into the question of whether the very early institutionalisation of public poor relief in England on a national scale (even though up to 1834 the parish remained the administrative unit of this system) can really be shown to be indicative of the long tradition of the nuclear household system in England in the way in which it has been suggested here.

But I have already gone too far. These are entirely hypothetical suggestions, based on tiny scraps of evidence. The village of Ardleigh is one case, and it seems certain that there are other cases where contrary results may be found. Let me therefore finish this article with a plea for more evidence of this kind, from many other places, collected by many researchers in many countries. It is only on the basis of much more such material that we will eventually be able to discuss the more interesting questions concerning household and family among the poor. These questions go far beyond the interpretative potential of mere quantitative data, but they are, nevertheless, questions the discussion of which requires the theoretical territory within which we shall then proceed to have been first properly enclosed within firmly anchored statistical boundary posts.

### Notes

An earlier and somewhat different German version of this paper was read at the Seminar für Volkskunde of the University of Münster in November 1986 and to my friends and colleagues in the History Department of the Fernuniversität Hagen in January 1987. I should like to express my gratitude to the participants of these seminars for their critical response. Special thanks are due to Professor Wiegelmann for encouraging its quick publication, and to Frieder Stede for his generous hospitality at Grünhof 2 where it was written up. My greatest debts, however, I owe to Peter Laslett and Richard Wall, who have both been an unfailing source of help and stimulation throughout my research. They also read the first draft of this paper and gave valuable editorial advice.

- See especially the recent studies by Snell (1985), Wales (1984) and Newman Brown (1984). Ashby 1912 and Hampson 1934 are two outstanding older works. For a good general account of the Old Poor Law, and a valuable guide to the extensive corpus of local and regional case studies in this field, see Oxley 1974.
- 2. Notable exceptions are Snell, Wales and Newman Brown (see previous note), and the two studies on the demographic implications of the Old Poor Law by Huzel (1969; 1980). Nevertheless all these studies are concerned with various aspects of the family life of the poor, but hardly deal with the household as a domestic as opposed to a demographic unit. It is characteristic that there is still no work on poverty in early modern England which makes use of listings of inhabitants.
- For the tremendous range of case studies in recent years, see the various collective volumes edited by Conze (1976); Forster & Ranum (1976); Goody, Thirsk & Thompson (1976); Lee (1977); Bulst, Goy & Hook (1981); Mitterauer & Sieder (1982); Wall; Robin & Laslett (1983). For useful summaries, see Anderson 1980: chs. 2 and 4; Mitterauer 1981; Rosenbaum 1982; Mitterauer & Sieder 1984.
- 4. This stands Laslett's argument on the head. As a matter of fact, he never questioned the view that among the wealthier classes in agriculture and in the trades the household was an integrated unit of production before the coming of modern industry. On the contrary, right at the beginning of his first book covering this issue he himself gave an illuminating account of the household as a work group, using the example of the London bakers in the early seventeenth century (Laslett 1965: 1-2; retained in Laslett 1983a). What he did oppose, was the common practice of inferring a complex family structure merely from this economic function of the house-

hold, that is with no factual evidence to prove it. It was in order to be able to test the hypothesis that complex households were widespread in pre-industrial society that it became necessary to classify households by their kin structure: how else would it have been possible to distinguish complex households from nuclear ones?

- 5. There is now an interesting discussion of such matters by Laslett himself (1986); see especially the appendix to that paper which deals with the digestion of the original outline of the Cambridge Group approach (as given in Laslett 1972a).
- 6. Only a few listings of inhabitants have as yet been published in full. Two particularly noteworthy editions are those by Allison (1963) and Baker (1971). The former gives the listing of Ealing in 1599, the first English listing with ages recorded for each individual, the second that of Cardington in 1782, with supplementary information from other parish records and an excellent introduction.
- 7. For a full exposition of the Cambridge Group approach, see Laslett 1972a and Hammel & Laslett 1974. Laslett 1966 is still worth consulting, because it gives a clearer impression of the records. See also Laslett 1977b (a revised version of a paper published as early as 1963), for an instructive example of the analysis of individual listings (especially those of Clayworth in 1676 and 1688).
- 8. In the first edition (Laslett 1965: 46) it still says 'families' instead of 'households' in the last part of this sentence. There is also a slight discrepancy in the mean size of the gentry households at Goodnestone-next-Wingham between the two editions. The corrected figure is 9.0 (Laslett 1983a: 64).
- 9. The respective values for the population at large were 4.77, 2.76, and 11.7 per cent (Laslett 1972b: 146, 148 and 149, Tables 4.8, 4.10 and 4.12). Note that I have quoted Laslett's 'overall' figures from these tables, except for the mean proportions of households with kin where only the mean proportion but not the overall proportion is given.
- 10. It should be noted, though, that these were then the only available listings specifying kin.
- The original of the 1796 listing of Ardleigh is to be found in the Essex Record Office at Chelmsford (henceforth: E.R.O.), [cat. mark] D/P 263/1/5, Ardleigh baptisms and burials, 1790– 1812 (in the middle of the volume, after the entries of baptisms); the material of the overseers under D/P 263/12/1, Ardleigh overseers' accounts, 1794–1798.

There is a xerox copy of the 1796 listing in the listings file at the Cambridge Group, and a full printed transcript in Erith 1978: 36–107. Unfortunately, the printed edition contains some mistakes and omits the boundaries between the households, so that for an analysis of household size and structure the original document has to be consulted as well. Apart from that, however, Erith's little book is an extremely valuable source of information, recording references to most of the inhabitants of Ardleigh in 1796 in the remaining parish records. I should like to express my gratitude to Felix Erith for his generous help. It is with great pleasure that I remember our conversations in his house on Vinces Farm in Ardleigh where he has lived for fifty years.

- 12. The sample comprised selected documents in the listings file at the Cambridge Group, and all pre-1850 census-type documents from Essex held at the E.R.O. For further details, see Sokoll 1987: ch. 2.
- 13. In his revision of the contemporary social tables for early-modern England by King, Massie and others, Lindert came to the same conclusion (Lindert 1980: 691–692). His analysis is based on the recordings of occupations and social status categories in 41 English listings and in a large sample of burial registers.
- E.R.O., D/P 263/12/1, entries dated 27 Aug, 10 Sep, 14 Oct, 15 Oct, 22 Oct and 5 Nov 1796; see also Erith 1978: 20 and 80–81.
- 15. It has subsequently transpired that this figure was perhaps a little high. For instance, the mean of the MHS values of the 30 listings included in Laslett's 1978 English Main Sample was 4.64 (with a standard deviation of 0.78), and that for the 34 listings in the English Reserve Sample 4.55 (standard deviation 0.76); calculated after Wachter, Hammel & Laslett 1978: 70–73, Exhibits 5.1 and 5.2.
- See, for instance, the pauper lists of the parishes of St Edmund and St Thomas in Salisbury, 1635 (Slack 1975: 75–80). For Essex examples, E.R.O., D/P 263/12/7, Ardleigh overseers' accounts, entries of 6 Oct and 3 Nov 1823: 'Weekly List of Widows and large Familys, withe Number of Their Children, and Their Pay p' Week'; D/P 94/18/53, D/P 94/18/55, D/P 264/18/31 and D/P 36/28/3: yearly pauper lists of the parish of Chelmsford for the years 1819–20, 1822–3, 1826–7, and 1828–9.
- 17. E.R.O., D/P 263/12/1. This 'List of the weekly [paupers] now paid' is here recorded for the first time, and there are eight further lists, with only minor changes, up to 1800. But payments according to a 'weekly list' start as early as September 1794 (before that time there are no overseers' accounts) and can be followed up, week by week, until January 1803 (D/P 263/12/1-3).
- 18. Under the Old Poor Law each parish was responsible for its 'own' paupers, that is people who were legally settled there. If somebody moved to another place without gaining a new settlement, he remained chargeable to his old 'home' parish. This is why on parochial pauper

lists prior to 1834 (when the poor law was amended) there are often people who do not live in the place where the list was made. It is difficult to say how large the proportion of such outdwellers was on average. I would estimate that it was of the order of 10 per cent, but there are cases where it was much higher. In the parish of Wakes Colne in 1821, for instance, a third of all paupers on the list lived elsewhere (E.R.O., D/P 88/18/5).

- 19. E.R.O., D/P 263/12/1, entries of 4 Jan, 27 Jan and 24 Feb 1796. These are the only three lists of poor families which have survived although the payments were made from October 1795 until 1796, and then again from the autumn of 1799 until the autumn of 1801. It is characteristic that during both these grain crises relief payments to poor families show a strong correlation with the course of wheat prices. For a fuller analysis, see Sokoll 1987: ch. 5.
- 20. As noted earlier, even in the listing of Ardleigh, which is one of the most reliable documents of its kind, three people recorded on the list of weekly paupers could not be traced.
- 21. For a comprehensive analysis of the Braintree case, see Sokoll 1987: chs. 7–9. An article summarising the most important results is in preparation.
- 22. The results of a statistical test, indicating the probability of the observed differences between the two groups compared to have arisen merely by chance, are reported at the bottom of each table. A description of these tests may be found in any of the standard text books on statistics, such as Blalock 1979 or Siegel 1956. In tables 3 and 4 (as well as in all other tables) the tests were, of course, applied to the raw data underlying the means and percentages spelt out.
- 23. Mainly children (presumably orphans) and old people were living in the poorhouse, cared for by the keeper and his wife at a set rate per head to be paid by the overseers. During times of crisis as in the winter 1795-6, the parish paid all additional costs (for flour, coal, etc.). All in all, you have the impression of a poorhouse typical of late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth-century English parishes. I mention this because much nonsense is still being written about early modern English poorhouses and workhouses (on the parish level, both terms were often used interchangeably by contemporaries) in the connection with the 'labour discipline' under protestantism and early capitalism (see, for instance, the otherwise excellent book by Lis & Soly 1982: 116-129). This view is no more than an extrapolation of the wild 'discipline and punish' fantasies broadcast by contemporary pamphletists (and some of their modern followers), whereas in fact most places had only tiny poorhouses whose residents were duly cared for and rarely set on work (see Taylor 1972).

- 24. While mean household and median household size relate to the distribution of households by size, mean and median experienced household size relate to the distribution of persons by the size of the household they lived in. For mean experienced household size, see also Laslett 1972a: 40.
- 25. Note that here as well as in all other tables lodgers have been included in the household, whereas according to the rules adopted at Cambridge they should be placed outside the *household* and counted as part of the *houseful*. This is the only technical point where I find myself in disagreement with Cambridge Group practice.
- 26. The one solitary pauper household in table 5 (category 1a) is *not* a solitary household in the sense that it contains only one person. This household consisted of Abigail Johnson (a 67-year-old widow), and two other people, Martha Loft (26, recorded as 'lodger') and her daughter Charlotte (1). (Both women were on poor relief.) According to Laslett's household classification, this household has to be classed as 'solitary + lodger' (category 1a + L). Category 2c does not apply here because two persons *are* related to each other.

To find this solitary pauper household in table 5 does not therefore conflict with there being no household of size 1 among the poor in table 1. (The problem is that the English word 'solitary' covers both meanings. In German this difficulty can be avoided by distinguishing between *Alleinstehendenhaushalt* und *Einpersonenhaushalt*.)

- 27. There is an extensive literature on these types of poor relief, which are also known under the contemporary expressions 'Speenhamland system' and 'allowance system'. For important modern contributions, from which references to the older literature are readily obtained, see Blaug 1963; Neumann 1972; Baugh 1975; Boyer 1982 and 1985.
- 28. The following suggestions draw heavily on considerations by Peter Laslett on the 'nuclear hardship hypothesis'. See Laslett 1979 and 1983c; and for the wider implications Laslett 1977a; 1977c; Laslett 1983d: 354–358; Hajnal 1983; Smith 1984; Thomson 1986.

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