

The Response to Poverty in Three English Towns, 1560-1640: A Comparative Approach

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This article compares poverty and poor relief in the Kentish towns of New Romney, Faversham and Sandwich. Each adopted quite distinct approaches and attitudes to the problems of urban indigence. In order to determine why these responses differed so markedly, three main variables are examined: economies and civic finances, religious inclinations and internal politics. Political variables, it is concluded, had the greatest impact on social welfare policies. Good relations between corporate authorities and those they ruled were essential to effective social relief.

Cet article compare la pauvreté et l'assistance aux pauvres dans les trois villes du Kent, de New Romney, Faversham et Sandwich, chacune d'elles ayant adopté des attitudes et des approches très différentes face aux problèmes de l'indigence en milieu urbain. Afin de préciser les raisons pour lesquelles les réponses différaient si nettement, trois variables principales ont été examinées au niveau urbain: l'économie et les finances, les tendances religieuses et les politiques internes. Il en résulte que les variables de nature politique ont eu le plus d'impact sur les politiques d'assistance sociale. En effet, de bonnes relations entre les autorités municipales et ceux qu'elles gouvernaient étaient essentielles à la mise sur pied d'un système d'assistance sociale efficace. On peut espérer que ces conclusions sont largement applicables à d'autres communautés anglaises.

While the growth of urban studies over the past few decades has cast considerable light on poverty and relief in several English centres, essential comparative analyses have yet to emerge. We have articles and monographs on migration in selected towns in Kent and East Anglia, on relief in parts of London and on vagrancy as well as poverty and politics in seventeenth-century Salisbury. We have brief analyses of specific censuses and poor relief data from Ipswich in 1596, Norwich in the 1570s and Salisbury in the next century, along with edited collections of documents and studies in philanthropy. And representing the sum of our knowledge of poverty in other towns such as Worcester, Exeter, York, Lincoln and Coventry are chapters and scattered references in particular local studies and the syntheses contained in a handful of general works on English social and urban history.¹

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1. Peter CLARK, "The Migrant in Kentish Towns, 1580-1640", in *Crisis and Order in English Towns 1500-1700*, eds. Peter CLARK and Paul SLACK (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972), pp. 117-63; John PATTEN, *Rural-Urban Migration in Pre-Industrial England* (Oxford: School of Geography research paper no. 6, University of Oxford, 1973); *idem*, "Patterns of Migration of Labour to three East Anglian Towns", *Journal of Historical Geography*, II (1976): 111-30; Valerie PEARL, "Puritans and Poor Relief. The London Workhouse, 1649-1660", in *Puritans and Revolutionaries: Essays presented to Christopher Hill*, ed. D. PENNINGTON and Keith THOMAS (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), pp. 206-32; R. W. HERLAN, "Poor Relief in London during the English Revolution", *Journal of British Studies*, XVIII (1979): 30-51; Paul SLACK, "Vagrants and Vagrancy in England, 1598-1664", *Economic History Review*, 2d ser., XXVII (1974): 360-74; *idem*, "Poverty and Politics in Salisbury, 1597-1666", in *Crisis and Order in English Towns*, pp. 164-203; John WEBB, *Poor Relief in*

Although important strides have been made, especially in the areas of vagrancy and migration, the lack of a comparative perspective means that no larger framework for the study of indigence and social welfare in towns has emerged from these works. Without comparison it is impossible to identify different types of urban responses to poverty. We know that these responses varied significantly from one community to another, but not why. How can we account for differences in local relief patterns and attitudes towards poverty? What influences, local and national, governed the formation of social policies towards the poor in individual towns? Such questions can be addressed only through comparison.

Accordingly, this article will examine and compare for the late Tudor and early Stuart period the attitudes towards and treatment of the poor in three towns — New Romney, Faversham and Sandwich — each of which adopted quite distinct approaches to the problems of poverty. Part one of this article summarizes the sort of problems poverty created for urban authorities in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Part two surveys the differing responses and relief patterns of these three small Kentish communities between about 1560 and 1640.² The final section analyses these differences according to three main variables:

- 1) their economies and civic finances — the interrelationship between the health of the local economy, the state of civic finances and the quality of aid dispensed to the indigent;
- 2) their religious inclinations — the role of Puritanism in the formation of social attitudes;
- 3) their internal political relations — the effects of civic unrest on social welfare policies.

We shall note the relative insignificance of economic and financial explanations and conclude that trends in urban relief were primarily a function of local political experiences.

Elizabethan Ipswich (Ipswich: Suffolk Records Society, 1966); John POUND, *The Norwich Census of the Poor, 1570* (Norwich: Norfolk Record Society, 1971); Paul SLACK, *Poverty in Early Stuart Salisbury* (Devizes: Wiltshire Record Society, 1975); Elizabeth MELLING, ed., *The Poor* (Maidstone: Kent County Council, 1964); A.D. DYER, *The City of Worcester in the Sixteenth Century* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1973); W.B. STEPHENS, *Seventeenth-Century Exeter* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1958); D.M. PALLISER, *Tudor York* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979); J.W.F. HILL, *Tudor and Stuart Lincoln* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956); Charles PHYTHIAN-ADAMS, *Desolation of a City* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979); Peter CLARK and Paul SLACK, eds., *English Towns in Transition 1500-1700* (London: Longmans, 1976); E.M. LEONARD, *Early History of English Poor Relief* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1900).

2. From a conservative estimate of 1,800 at the end of the fourteenth century, New Romney's population had, by 1596, plummeted to about 475 (calculated from various tax assessments) and, by the late seventeenth century, to less than 400; E.B. WALKER, "The Town and Port of New Romney", *Archaeologia Cantiana*, XIII (1880): 206; Kent Archives Office (hereafter KAO), NR/ZPa 4/5, fols. 1-3; RTh 5; C.W. CHALKLIN, "The Compton Census of 1676", *Kent Records*, XVII (1960): 168. The population of Faversham can be estimated from two censuses, in 1594 and 1599, which list the total adult male population by household and street. The latter lists 392 men representing a population of roughly 1,400; KAO, Fa/ZB 62/1-2. As a result of epidemics, economic fluctuations and mass migrations to and from Sandwich, the town's population oscillated widely but probably ranged from 2,000 to 3,000 in the period under discussion; KAO, Sa/ZB 5; ZB 3/24; Peter CLARK, *English Provincial Society from the Reformation to the Revolution* (Hassocks: Harvester Press, 1977), p. 67; William BOYS, *Collections for a History of Sandwich...* (Canterbury, 1792), pp. 732-33.

I

Despite sporadic signs of distress over vagrancy, settlement and the mobility of labour even before 1500, there is little indication that poverty was a significant problem in these communities prior to the last half of the sixteenth century.³ Organized relief was evident in Faversham in 1559 and was in full swing by the 1570s, but in New Romney's accounts the poor are scarcely mentioned until 1567 and only appear regularly two decades later. Similarly, the early records of Sandwich show concern for vagrancy but give little hint of indigenous poverty.⁴ By the 1570s, however, population growth and economic dislocation, the consequences of an expanding but wildly fluctuating internal economy, had increased the numbers, though not necessarily the proportion, of the poor in Elizabethan society.⁵ The natural attraction of urban centres for the rural labourer needing employment, the discharged servant and runaway apprentice seeking advancement or anonymity, and the destitute in search of simple relief added a host of new problems to that of growing indigenous poverty and forced local governments to respond.⁶ As early as 1568, Sandwich was complaining that "sundrie vagrant and stout vagabonds do now very much resort to this town"; and in the hard years from 1592 to 1595 perhaps as many as 200 such newcomers entered Faversham. Even tiny, isolated New Romney expressed a fear of becoming overrun with poor by the end of the sixteenth century. Many such persons, it was generally feared, would eventually become "chargeable by reason of their povertie unto the parishes and people of the ... towne" and therefore had to be discouraged from settling by harsh housing and labour restrictions or prosecuted as vagrants and quickly expelled.⁷

The problems of the local poor, however, demanded different solutions. In a few special cases they lacked the essentials of life — food, proper shelter and clothing. In 1612 Annis Thurbarne of Romney was found in a nearby town "baginge from dore to dore and lyeng in the streets daye and night most lamentable almost this two monthes." And Ann Willison had to beg for her food, complaining "that her husband was a very bad husband and did put her to more then she could doe and [she] was fayne to lyve with bread made of chisell and brann."⁸

Others, unable to find work, turned to theft or illegal trades to supplement their incomes. Thomas Molland of Sandwich charged two pence "and a pott of beere" for the making of a false passport, and a fellow poor Sandwichman was publicly humiliated and banished from the town for a year for cutting off the tails and manes of several horses.⁹

3. See, for example, KAO, NR/CPw 6, 7, 12; FAc 4, fol. 229v; Fa/AC 1, fol. 3v.

4. See, for example, KAO, Fa/Z 33; AC 1, fol. 194; AC 3, fol. 2v; NR/FAc 6, fol. 170; FAc 33; ZPa 4/1-5; Sa/AC 5, fols. 6, 6v, 18v, 24v, 42, 220; AC 6, fols. 49, 246.

5. For a growing economy, see D.M. PALLISER, *The Age of Elizabeth* (London: Longmans, 1983), chaps. 5, 6, 8, 9; C.W. CHALKLIN, *Seventeenth-Century Kent* (London: Longmans, 1965).

6. For vagrancy and rural-urban migration, see John Howe's late sixteenth-century work, "A Famyliar and Frendly Discourse...", in *Tudor Economic Documents*, eds. R.H. TAWNEY and Eileen POWER (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1963), p. 438, as well as sources cited above. For the local problem, see KAO, Sa/ZB 5; C 4; ZB 2/56-57; AC 5, fols. 6, 8v, 222; AC 7, fols. 353-53v, 30-30v; Fa/JV 44; Aa 1; NR/JQf 1/2/20; AC 1, fols. 102-3.

7. KAO, Fa/JV 44; CLARK, "Migrant", p. 150; KAO, NR/JQf 1/2/20; Sa/AC 6, fol. 240v; AC 7, fol. 10.

8. KAO, NR/AZ 34 (1612); JQf 1/2/56.

9. KAO, Sa/AC 6, fol. 181v; AC 5, fol. 104v. See also NR/AZ 18; Sa/AC 6, fol. 282v. For Faversham cases, see Fa/JQe 6, 8, 11. Banishment was a punishment peculiar to Sandwich among the towns of this study. It was often used in cases of prostitution. By this means many persons were forced to become vagrants; Sa/AC 5, fols. 29, 250.

In 1597 five poor men and women of Faversham were caught with one and a half bushels of stolen wheat, “thressing the same out of the sheves”, while in 1613 four poor women of Sandwich operated in collusion with shady grain dealers to stifle competition in the market. After having consulted with “such persons as doe bring all manner of graine and come to the market to be sold”, the four, it was reported,

doe ordinarily use to goe from person to person that bring the said wheate to sell, and doe let them understand [undoubtedly for a fee] the prices of wheate how it goes on the said Market, whereby the price is kept up, to the great hinderance of the inhabitants of this town, but especially the poorer sort.¹⁰

In Romney, Thomas and Mary Gedes were charged in 1594 for stealing and eating two geese. Other poor folk of the same town were accused of pilfering wood and breaking down fences for fuel in the winter-time. The poor man’s crimes of petty theft, selling ale without a licence and forestalling are common in the judicial records of all three communities and underscore the basic need for employment and relief.¹¹

Perhaps the greatest fear of authorities was that a jobless and hungry local population might be provoked into open rebellion. Though probably exaggerated, their fears were not entirely without foundation. In despair a Romney migrant, during the crisis of the 1590s, vowed to “make the highest the lowest” and to “cause all Kent to be plucked out by the ears.” And in Sandwich, in 1586, the impoverished threatened “to hang up the rich farmers which had corn at their doors.” “Suddaine disorders and tumults” struck Faversham in 1595 and 1606 and, in 1631, “several persons” had reportedly “assembled in mutinous and disorderly manner” near the town, “and have not onely taken away Come by force, when it was intended for the good of the poor, but have used threatening speeches.”¹² The focus of this potential unrest was usually the alehouse where, amidst drunken revelry, unlawful games, prostitution and fights, were hatched what William Vaughan termed “conspiracies, combinations, common conjurations, detractions, defamations.”¹³ Each evening Romney’s drinking houses, for example, disgorged their patrons for a night of merry-making and vandalism; they were accused of “stealing of powltry, wood and other provision aboute mens houses, and doe also throwe downe mens gates, windowes and (like beastes as they bee) most filthely beraye mens doors and beate down their porches.” And in 1587 Sandwich authorities complained:

the poorer sorte ... do usually every daye haunt the Comon alehouse and tippinge howses of this towne confirminge bothe their tyme and their money very lewdly and vainly and unprofitably and many of their wyves and children wantinge sufficient foode and susteinaunce at home.¹⁴

10. KAO, Fa/JQe 11; Sa/AC 7, fol. 30.

11. KAO, NR/ZPa 4/5, fol. 3; 5/5, fol. 9; AC 1, fol. 112v; JQf 1/1; JQf 1/2/9, 10, 11, 21, 26, 29, 32, 76, 101, 115, 120, 128. See also chap. IV of my thesis, “Poverty in Three English Towns, 1560-1640: A Comparative Approach” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Toronto, 1983).

12. NR/JQf 1/2/15; Sa/AC 6, fol. 77v. See also Sa/AC 6, fol. 115v; J.R. DASENT et al., *Acts of the Privy Council of England* (hereafter *APC*), 71 vol. (London: H.M.S.O., 1890-1964), XV (1587-88): 110, 123, 154; LXXI (1630-31): no. 956; KAO, Fa/JQs 24. See also Peter CLARK, “Popular Protest and Disturbance in Kent, 1558-1640”, *Economic History Review*, 2d ser., XXIX (1976): 369-76.

13. KAO, Sa/AC 6, fol. 220v; NR/JQf 1/1; JQf 1/2/9, 11; Fa/JQr 2/29. William VAUGHAN, *The Spirit of Detraction* (1611), as quoted in Peter CLARK, “The Alehouse and the Alternate Society”, in *Puritans and Revolutionaries*, p. 47. See also Peter CLARK, *The English Alehouse: A Social History 1200-1830* (New York: Longmans, 1983).

14. KAO, NR/JQf 1/2/78-79; AC 1, fols. 102-3; Sa/AC 6, fols. 72v-73; Fa/JQr 1/4; JQr 2/29; JQs 10; AC 3, fol. 159v. See also Sa/AC 5, fols. 220, 222; AC 6, fol. 245; NR/Fac 8, fols. 147v, 177v.

Disciplining the poor through prohibitions, curfews and a host of restrictions was, like the provision of relief, a task early modern corporations found hard to ignore.¹⁵

The financial and administrative burden of relieving and regulating the poor grew in proportion to their numbers. About 20 to 30 percent of the settled populations of Romney and Faversham were recognized as "poor" in three late Elizabethan censuses. Overseers' accounts and corporate records show that normally only 4 to 5 percent of the townspeople were in need of regular aid and a further 15 percent required it periodically. But as much as one-sixth of the populations, primarily labourers with families, were described as marginally poor, meaning that when an epidemic or sudden economic downturn occurred, the demand for relief could quickly double or triple. Since after 1550 both private and ecclesiastical charity seemed unable to handle the varied problems of growing poverty, local governments were compelled to respond.¹⁶

II

As small- to medium-sized corporate boroughs with similar administrative structures, frequent contact at the highest political and economic levels and interwoven destinies — each had long been a member of the Cinque Ports federation — we might expect of Romney, Faversham and Sandwich congruent approaches to social problems affecting them all.¹⁷ We might, for example, expect the development of parallel attitudes towards the poor and a more or less homogeneous approach towards relief. Yet the responses of these communities differed perceptibly from each other in both nature and timing.

The reactions of boroughs to the problems of poverty are best divided into two overlapping stages: the corporate response, which marked the initial reaction of local

15. For example, in 1585, authorities in Romney ordered innholders who allowed any of six men, "being very poore and [some of them] charged with wife and children", to "spend to the value of one pott of bere in any his or their howse", to forfeit one shilling for each offence; KAO, NR/AC 1, fols. 25, 113-13v; *Report of Commissioners ... to inquire concerning Charities and Education of the Poor, Kent* (London: H.M.S.O., 1839), XV: appendix, 210-12.

16. KAO, NR/ZPa 4/5, fol. 3; ZPa 5/5, fol. 9; Fa/FAc 25; FAc 24-26; NR/FAc 7-8; Sa/AC 7, fols. 317-22v; Fa/FAc 35; P 146/12/2, fols. 2, 2v, 5; P 146/12/1. Therefore, 60-75 percent of late Elizabethan Romney and Faversham had incomes sufficient to their needs. I have argued elsewhere that the extent of poverty and the problems it created in England at this time have generally been overestimated; "The Problem of Poverty in Tudor and Stuart England", *The Register*, IV (1983): 39-51; "Dispelling the Gloom. The Extent of Poverty in Tudor and Early Stuart Towns: Some Kentish Evidence", *Canadian Journal of History*, XX (1985): 1-21. For the lack of ecclesiastical charity, see W.R.D. JONES, *The Tudor Commonwealth 1529-1559* (London: Athlone Press, 1970), pp. 110-14; for private charity, see W.G. BITTLE and R.T. LANE, "Inflation and Philanthropy in England: A Re-assessment of W.K. Jordan's Data", *Economic History Review*, 2d ser., XXIX (1976): 203-10; and for local charity in the three towns, see W.K. JORDAN, "Social Institutions in Kent, 1480-1660", *Archaeologia Cantiana*, LXXV (1961): *passim*; Sandwich Local Historical Society, *Sandwich Almshouses, 1190-1975* (Sandwich: Sandwich Local Historical Society, Occasional Papers No. 2, 1975); TRONRUD, "Poverty in Three English Towns", pp. 161-65.

17. Though small, each town was an important link in a loosely-structured but viable regional trading network, primarily in agricultural produce, with commercial ties throughout the southern counties and even overseas. See KAO, NR/FAc 4-6; Sa/FAc 9, 30, 34; AC 6-7. Valuable sources for the local economies are A.F. BUTCHER, "The Origins of Romney Freeman, 1433-1523", *Economic History Review*, 2d ser., XXVII (1974): 16-20, 22; CHALKLIN, *Seventeenth-Century Kent*, pp. 99, 125, 173-79, 185; WALKER, "Town and Port", pp. 210-24; J.H. ANDREWS, "The Trade of the Port of Faversham, 1650-1750", *Archaeologia Cantiana*, LXIX (1955): 125-31; Dorothy GARDINER, *Historic Haven: The Story of Sandwich* (Derby: Pilgrim Press, 1954), pp. 124, 127, 233.

governors to a worsening situation; and the statutory response, or the institution and application of parliamentary poor law legislation by town councils through specifically designated officials.

The assumption of responsibility for the relief and overseeing of the poor by borough governments in the late sixteenth century is neither aberrant nor surprising. Corporations had for centuries exercised extensive command over matters affecting the lives of their poorer citizens. As virtually autonomous local magistrates, mayors and jurats, or aldermen, possessed a vast range of economic controls and far-reaching legal jurisdiction. Given the apparent ineffectiveness of both private and ecclesiastical charity and the obvious existence of distress and unemployment, many corporations naturally assumed the responsibility of dispensing relief; for, as Henry Smith preached in 1592, "every common-wealth that letteth anie member in it to perish for hunger is unnatural."¹⁸ Of the three communities, New Romney's early attempts to alleviate distress best illustrate this corporate response.

When the problem of indigenous poverty first became noticeable in Romney, the corporation reacted with typical paternalistic concern. The mayor and his colleagues approached each case individually, dispensing relief in money or in kind. Payments were usually made out-of-pocket, the giver later being reimbursed by the town chamberlain out of general revenue, or "at the appointment of Mr Maior."¹⁹ The first indication of a more systematic approach comes in 1567 when four ells of lockram were purchased "for Elizabeth Whytes childes which the towne keepethe." Shortly thereafter it is clear that the town had assumed full responsibility for the early care of poor, illegitimate and orphaned children and was paying either regular pensions or lump sums to individuals so as to "discharge the town" of that liability.²⁰ That some of the town's most prominent men were paid for "keeping" pauper children betrays the early novelty of this procedure; later only poor adults could be persuaded to assume such tasks.²¹

As the number of needy children grew, the demands they placed upon the town for such things as clothing, nursing, food, shelter, education and apprenticeship expanded; and, by the 1580s, adults too began to make demands upon the town's finances. With little organization and no long-term strategy on poverty, more and more of the corporation's time was consumed in specific poor relief matters: the cost of a "russet gowne" for a poor maid, the task of "teaching ... poor mens children", "the making of a peticoate and wastcoate for Groves bastarde", or whether goodman Bristowe should be given land "to sett a house upon."²² For poor adults, casual work was provided; Leonard Manning, for example, was made "Dogge whipper" at four shillings per year. Rents were subsidized and, occasionally, personal loans were granted to prevent poverty. The annual provision of grain and fuel sold to the needy at below cost and the maintenance of the local almshouse were major preoccupations of the town council by the 1580s.²³ One corporate initiative

18. Henry SMITH, *The Poore Mans Teares. A Sermon* (London, 1592), pp. 18, 11. See also W.K. JORDAN, *Philanthropy in England, 1480-1660* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1959), pp. 173-74.

19. KAO, NR/FAc 6-8, passim; FAc 34.

20. KAO, NR/FAc 7, fol. 170; FAc 8, 33-34; AC 1, fol. 3, 14v-15, 52.

21. KAO, NR/FAc 7, fols. 183v-84v. Frequently orphans were rotated among the town's poor folk. One invalid had at least three guardians before he was six years old and was still under care at the age of twenty while the corporation paid another poor man to beg for him; NR/FAc 8, fol. 123; ZPa 5/5, 6, 8, 14; FAc 8, fols. 85-123, passim.

22. KAO, NR/FAc 8, fols. 7, 17; FAc 34, fol. 9; AC 1, fols. 15, 34; FAc 7, fol. 262.

23. KAO, NR/FAc 8, fol. 87v; ZPa 5/5; FAc 8, fol. 121; AC 1, fols. 3, 8v, 15, 24v, 30, 98v-99, 146, 152, 171; FAc 7, fol. 274v. Evidence from seven transactions in Romney between 1595 and 1631 suggests that the costs of shipping, storage and administrative details in the purchase of corn for the poor, plus a modest loss

of great importance to the poor of New Romney was the free provision of medical assistance. References to sore hands and legs and various other ailments are common in the town's records. Thirty shillings were paid in 1597 "to the Shirurgion that cut off Jeremy Adams legge"; a decade earlier two jurats were appointed to "bargaine and pruyse in monie" with the local doctor "for the curing of [a] child's sores"; and later Griffen Tilley was reimbursed "for the Curing of poore childrens heddes." The sick poor were housed, healed and, if necessary, buried at the town's expense.²⁴

The corporate response, therefore, was characterized by local initiatives in the provision of employment, the regulation of the supply and price of grain, the relief of the young and impotent and the payment of money pensions, all accomplished without reference to overseers, without poor rates and without appeals to statutes. The unsystematic, *ad hoc* dispensation of alms typified the corporate response. It was done by town officials without special accreditation to persons classified as "poor" according to no precise criteria and from funds not specifically collected for that purpose. Although all the forms of relief that were later furnished by overseers operating in accordance with poor law statutes were available through Romney's corporation by 1590, the system lacked the personnel and organization to handle the growing problem of large-scale unemployment that had accompanied the harvest failures of 1586-87 and the 1590s. The town faced a choice: a more systematic approach to the problem would accommodate greater numbers of poor; alternatively, a stricter regulation of local poor and a more rigorous application of the settlement laws would ensure that the problem never became unmanageable. As we shall see, the adoption of relief over repression was by no means inevitable.

Romney's main response to the end-of-the-century crisis was sympathetic. By the early 1590s, collectors and overseers of the poor were appointed and compulsory rates assessed. In 1596, the poor were counted and carefully classified with appropriate relief apportioned out to each individual according to established criteria.²⁵ Detailed accounts were kept of receipts and disbursements. Early in the seventeenth century, comprehensive employment schemes involving the manufacture of cloth were devised in accordance with the demands of the 1601 Act that towns set to work "all such persons married or unmarried havinge no meanes to maintaine them[selves]." Although it was recognized that these "will bee more chargeable and troublesome then anywaye profitable", one scheme employed a number of local poor for at least four years.²⁶ Little by little a "system" of relief based upon statute replaced the *ad hoc* dispensation of alms that typified the corporate response. There always remained a close liaison between corporate and poor law officials in Romney, but the direct involvement of the mayor and jurats in relief diminished with each passing

of product in transit, amounted to 15 to 20 percent of the total charge. The price discount offered to the poor buyer varied but was usually about 20 to 25 percent. The town, therefore, normally recovered about 60 to 65 percent of its original investment in purchasing grain for the poor; NR/AC 1, fols. 80, 104v; AC 2, pp. 132, 135; FAc 8, fols. 163-66v, 182, 206v-13; ZPa 5/1, 9.

24. KAO, NR/FAc 8, fols. 79-82; AC 1, fol. 31v; FAc 8, fol. 200v. See also NR/ZPa 4/5, fol. 2; 5/13, 14; FAc 8, fols. 5, 85v-90, 96, 99v-100v, 115; AC 1, fols. 167v-68. The cost of a "cure" was generally high. Three payments totalling £9 were made to the physician to heal Goody Springat's leg in 1613-15; NR/FAc 8, fol. 166; AC 1, fols. 208v, 220. NR/FAc 8, fols. 9, 92, 93, 205v (a); AZ 37/2; ZPa 5/6, 11, 14; AC 1, fol. 41.

25. Romney officials took two censuses of the poor, in 1596 and in 1602. These, combined with overseers' accounts and corporate chamberlains' records, suggest that one-fifth to one-third of the community was considered poor; KAO, NR/ZPa 4/5, fol. 3; 5/5, fol. 9; ZPa 4-5; FAc 8.

26. KAO, NR/ZPa 4/1-5, *passim*; 5/5, fol. 9; 5/8; AC 1, fols. 92, 115, 153v; FAc 8, fols. 108v, 109-9v, 120-21, *et passim*; JQf 1/15/1; 43 Eliz., c. 2.

year. New Romney's corporate response gradually gave way to a comprehensive and more efficient system of statutory relief.²⁷

Sandwich adopted a very different approach, showing little inclination to exercise any sort of collective responsibility for its poor. There were some early signs of a corporate response. Funds were set aside in 1570 for both grain and "wood and cole" for the poor; and shortly thereafter a committee examined ways to "pull downe the greate pryce" of wheate and grayne in the market" for the benefit of the needy. However, on the whole, there was scant corporate concern for the relief of poverty in Sandwich. While Romney's chamberlains' accounts and assembly minutes are fairly overrun with relief expenditures, in those of Sandwich we find none. The corporation stoutly resisted committing any of its own resources to relief. Even the annual provision of grain, so common elsewhere, was in Sandwich restricted to extreme crises.²⁸ Instead of relief it tolerated a degree of begging and relied upon private charity and the three local hospitals to care for the destitute. Only one of the hospitals accepted poor inmates. Even then successive mayors and jurats grossly abused both the hospitals and charities placed under their administration by managing them for personal gain rather than for public benefit.²⁹ Such was the unwillingness of the council to become involved in relief that there is no record of a mayor and jurats ever having appointed poor law officials or having approved assessments for the town's parishes. If the poor law was instituted at all in the community during the sixteenth century, it was a purely parochial matter.

What stands out most clearly in Sandwich, however, is not the failure of its government to take action, but the deliberately repressive nature of the actions it did adopt. From the very beginning the control of vagrancy and the suppression of idleness were the twin pillars of Sandwich's social policy. By the end of the sixteenth century, it had created special officers, later called "Beadles of Rogues and Vagabonds", and around-the-clock watches "for the keepinge out of vagrant persons and masterless men out of this towne." A host of harsh municipal regulations concerning housing, settlement and removal were passed and more consistently applied in Sandwich than elsewhere.³⁰ Punishments greeted many a poor soul who happened to wander into Sandwich. They ranged from the standard use of stocks, cages and whips to an officially-sanctioned form of charivari in which unfortunate victims were paraded through the market, often in humiliating guise, with "papers on their hedds" describing their crimes. After being whipped and publicly humiliated, more dangerous rogues had "their heyres bored with a hott yron" and were given a none-too-courteous escort to the boundary of the next jurisdiction.³¹ In neither New Romney nor

27. The corporation frequently lent money to the overseers or reimbursed them for unanticipated expenses; KAO, NR/FAc 8, fols. 120v, 121, 146, 161, 171, 185; AC 1, fols. 161-61v, 215, 233v, 252v; AC 2, p. 19.

28. KAO, Sa/AC 5, fol. 42v. After 1576, there is no further mention of the "stock for the poor". In 1631, the Lord Warden of the Cinque Ports admonished the town for not having one; Sa/ZB 4/15, 16; ZB 2/83. Sa/AC 5, fols. 113v-14. Sa/ZB 4/15-16. Sa/AC 5, fols. 8v, 59v; AC 6, fols. 217, 357, 374v; AC 7, fols. 104v (1622), 188, 194v-95v (1630-31), 353-53v; ZB 2/80-84; ZB 3/8-13 (1608); ZB 14; Sa/QEm 3.

29. KAO, Sa/AC 6, fol. 355; GARDINER, *Historic Haven*, p. 219; KAO, Sa/AC 6, fols. 207v, 239v. Notably, Sandwich's citizens probably gave much less to the poor in private charity than either Romney's or Faversham's: JORDAN, "Social Institutions", pp. 160-61. KAO, Ch 10B P 3/1-112, Sandwich Local Historical Society, *Sandwich Almshouses*, pp. 5-8, 14; *Report of the Commissioners ... concerning Charities*, pp. 210-12, 569-73; KAO, Sa/AC 6, fols. 207v, 310-10v; AC 7, fols. 30, 47, 78, 128, 182v, 332-32v, 400v; AC 5, fols. 132, 203; ZB 3/7; QEm 3.

30. KAO, Sa/AC 6, fol. 245v; AC 7, fol. 12v; FAt 38, fol. 94v. Sa/AC 5, fols. 220, 222; AC 6, fols. 207v, 224, 240; AC 7, fols. 30-30v, 43, 57v, 85, 220; FAt 38, fol. 264v.

31. KAO, Sa/AC 5, fols. 6, 131.

Faversham, which like most towns showed great concern for the problems of vagrancy and settlement, was the government's reaction so harsh or persistent.³² Only in Sandwich, where poverty seems to have been considered an evil and relief an encouragement to idleness, were the local poor treated and punished almost like vagrants.³³

Thus the early stirrings of a genuine sympathetic corporate response to the plight of the poor in Sandwich were quickly stamped out by the corporation's headlong rush to suppress vagrancy. Thereafter the town government refused to consider relief as a viable alternative to repression. The crisis of the late sixteenth century did not encourage the adoption of statutory relief as in Romney, but rather the intensification of repressive measures.

Faversham's approach to the problems of poverty was much more comprehensive than that of either Romney or Sandwich. As early as the 1550s, the corporation had imposed compulsory rates on its citizens. A council order of 9 January 1560 reads: "the alms for the por shall contynue gathering in the churche during the [time?] provided for the same and every man and woman to pay as they be assessed upon the payne of prissonmant and the money as gathered to be distributed by the discession of the seide collectors with thassent of the maior."³⁴ Although compulsory assessment and the charging of women as well as men to the poor rate were significant elaborations on the more hesitant provisions outlined in the statutes of the time, what is most notable in the case of Faversham is the strong influence of parliamentary legislation on the town's social policies. The creation of a stock in Faversham in the 1570s "for the setting a worke of the poore people", the establishment of overseers of the poor, and the implementation of organized work schemes in the early seventeenth century followed almost immediately upon the passage of poor law legislation through parliament. From the beginning, therefore, statutes seem to have assumed greater importance in Faversham than elsewhere and, by the 1570s, a full-scale statutory response was in evidence.³⁵

But, as in Romney, the corporate and statutory responses overlapped. Alongside the regular provision of Faversham's overseers was the more indiscriminate charity of its chamberlains, or rather of its mayors and jurats using corporate funds in much the same way as their counterparts in Romney, for maintaining and apprenticing poor children, paying medical expenses, providing indiscriminate alms "to poor travellers" and plague relief to the infected, making repairs to almshouses, and, of course, supplying regular pensions and cheap corn to the needy.³⁶ In the sixteenth century, the relationship between

32. KAO, NR/FaC 8, fols. 172v, 185v, 188, 214v; AC 1, fols. 103, 113-13v; JQf 1/2/5; Fa/FaC 30, JQs 10; AC 3, fols. 19, 138v; FaC 53. The responses of Faversham and Romney to the poor migrant were more often sympathetic than cruel; Fa/AC 3, fols. 14, 33v, 138-38v; FaC 53, 62; JQr 2/29; JQs 1, 24; AC 1, fols. 200, 214v; NR/FaC 8.

33. KAO, Sa/AC 5, fols. 6v, 18, 29; AC 6, fols. 72v-73, 252v, 277, 356-56v; AC 7, fols. 78v, 169v, 220. Whipping, as a Romney man exclaimed, should not be done to "towne borne" poor; NR/JQf 1/2/35-36. Sandwich watched closely over the morals of its poor; Sa/AC 5, fols. 220, 222; AC 6, fols. 10v, 240, 282v, 361-62v; AC 7, fol. 10. See also NR/JQf 1/1; AC 1, fols. 25, 113-13v.

34. KAO, Fa/Z 33. Collectors were to "yield accompt quarterly".

35. KAO, Fa/FaC 7; AC 3, fols. 8v, 23. By 1579, there were ten men responsible for overseeing such things as the "stocke of mony" for the poor, their "stocke of come" and all "the poor people coming and going" in every street; Fa/AC 3, fols. 2v, 54v, 59v, 60v. For authorizing statutes, see 14 Eliz., c. 5; 18 Eliz., c. 3; 43 Eliz., c. 2. In 1577, almost £20 was disbursed by overseers to twenty-two persons in the form of regular pensions and several pounds more in casual relief; Fa/FaC 9.

36. KAO, Fa/FaC 3, fol. 2; FaC 4, bds. 1, 4; FaC 8, 9, bds. 1-3; FaC 10, 16, 20/1, 27; AC 1 fols. 200, 214v, 238v; P 146/12/2. For the administration of Faversham's corn stocks, see Fa/FaC 8, 16, 21, 26, 35, 44, 45, 62; AC 3, fols. 51-51v, 63v.

corporate and statutory officials was indistinct; in 1594 Faversham's mayor personally distributed 25 percent of the money raised for the poor through statutory rates. By 1600, however, as in Romney, the better organized system of statutory relief had begun to assume more and more of the burden of caring for the poor. Small almsgiving by mayors and jurats virtually disappears from the chamberlains' accounts in the first decade of the new century as the town council concentrated on larger scale, better planned enterprises such as work schemes and houses of correction.³⁷

Thus in each community humanitarianism combined with fear of social unrest to produce a corporate response to poverty. Beyond this first stage, however, their paths diverged. In contrast to Sandwich's repressive approach which quickly extinguished any tendencies towards constructive and systematic poor relief, Faversham rapidly produced a well-ordered system of aid which owed much to statutes and yet remained firmly under corporate control and direction. That over 43 percent of the community's 408 persons recognized as poor or potentially poor at the end of the sixteenth century were relieved in whole or in part illustrates the effectiveness of the town's poor relief apparatus.³⁸ New Romney, on the other hand, struggled on for decades with an *ad hoc* approach to meeting the expanding needs of its poor before giving way to a more organized statutory response in the 1590s. By 1602 over 60 percent of its recognized poor or one-fifth of its population were in receipt of a wide range of assistance.

In Faversham and Romney, therefore, the seventeenth century opened with a flurry of activity. Beginning with the major dearth of the 1590s and strengthened by the poor laws of 1597 and 1601, poor harvests in 1607 and 1608 and, in Faversham, a severe epidemic in 1609-10, statutory relief with strong corporate involvement had become a routine part of local government. However, in the absence of constant supervision from the central government or forceful demands for aid from the poor, civic activism in matters of relief tended to atrophy. Initiatives in poor law concerns gradually vanished in both communities after 1610 as active scrutiny of poverty officials by local governors diminished. Fewer directives were issued, no major projects were begun, and the poor almost entirely disappear from corporate records. The poor law continued to function, but only by inertia.³⁹

Consequently, by the 1620s, the effectiveness of those aspects of poor relief most dependent upon corporate involvement — work schemes, almshouses and houses of correction, the assize of bread and pauper apprenticeship — had withered.⁴⁰ It took the inadequate harvests, downturns in the cloth industry, recurrent political strife and growing social unrest of that decade to force all three towns to reassess their policies of administrative neglect. And, as in the past, their respective responses were very different.

Faversham quickly revitalized its poor relief system, unfairly blaming its overseers for the town's troubles. These men, the town assembly asserted in 1625,

37. KAO, Fa/FAc 24. See also Fa/FAc 57; AC 3, fol. 145. For the town's work schemes in 1587, 1602, 1614-17, 1629 and 1632, see Fa/FAc 7; AC 3, fols. 8v, 23, 54v, 59v, 60v, 72v, 74, 89v, 93, 94v, 106, 116, 163v, 166v, 178; AZ 48. It is evident from these schemes as well as from those undertaken in Romney that the provision of work was considered an emergency measure only. Schemes were not designed to be a permanent part of relief but to continue only for a predetermined term.

38. The number of poor, which represents about one-third of the town's population, is derived from a 1595 list of poor supplemented by detailed overseers' accounts for 1594-96; KAO, Fa/FAc 24-26.

39. KAO, NR/FAc 8, fol. 142v; Fa/FAc 41-51; NR/ZPa 5/11-14; FVc 2.

40. KAO, Fa/AC 3, fols. 140v, 141, 145, 146, 156, 163v; NR/JQp 1/3/2, 35, 38; AC 2, pp. 22, 62. For a similar decline in parochial relief systems of other towns, see CLARK, "Migrant", p. 152; SLACK, "Poverty and Politics", pp. 192-94; A. T. PATTERSON, *Southampton* (London: Macmillan, 1970), p. 65.

in respect of their meane estate, either are afraide to offend their superiors or not sensible or feelings of the grevances and inconveniences which such offences bringe upon this Towne, by reason they beare plus indorse little or no of the charge and burthen thereof and therefore much neglect the careful execution of that charge as men unfit to be employed.⁴¹

As a remedy, "superior agents" or "magistrates", composing a new civic bureaucracy of fifteen prominent townsmen, were superimposed on the existing statutory structures and made responsible for the entire poor relief apparatus. A survey of poor children, an overhaul of the apprenticeship system, a rebuilding of both the almshouse and the house of correction, and a re-establishment of large-scale work schemes soon followed, marking the full re-commitment of the corporation to the alleviation of poverty and the supersession of a strict statutory response.⁴²

If Faversham responded to the crisis of the 1620s with renewed strength and purpose, New Romney did the opposite. As early as 1617, individual payments to the poor had ceased and a harsh note of repression had entered Romney's records. In the following year, at least five men were regularly employed at clearing the town of undesirables. Soon children, cripples, runaway apprentices and entire families as well as rogues, were being whipped and transported to the nearest officer or taken to the edge of town, given "a pott of beere" or a loaf of bread, and sent on their way. The corporation had obviously decided that no new initiatives in relief were necessary, that the statutory response was sufficient to handle indigenous poverty, and that a rigorous settlement policy was the best answer to popular unrest.⁴³

In an even more curious about-face, the 1620s in Sandwich marked the re-emergence of a genuine corporate concern for the poor. In 1622, the mayor and his colleagues raised among themselves £170 to purchase grain for the poor and a similar 1631 assessment came to over £323. By 1629, the corporation was exercising some central control of its parochial relief and had established a scheme for training poor children, a task never before considered important in Sandwich.⁴⁴

How do we account for such variations in long-term relief patterns: the absence of any corporate response in Sandwich until the 1620s; the rise and subsequent fall of government-sponsored aid in Romney; the formation, disintegration and ultimate revival of Faversham's organized relief structure? What peculiar characteristics of these communities will enable us to understand their differing and changing attitudes towards poverty: Sandwich's harshness tempered only in the 1620s; Faversham's empathy; Romney's early humanity and later shift to repression? In short, what are the factors which determined the attitudes and approaches of these towns and perhaps English towns in general to poverty and relief?

III

The initial response of towns to growing poverty in the last half of the sixteenth century appears to have been founded more upon humanitarianism than fear. Aid to the

41. KAO, Fa/AC 3, fol. 145.

42. KAO, Fa/AC 3, fols. 145, 156, 163v, 166v, 178; CPw 69; AC 4, fol. 11; FAz 8; FAc 62-63.

43. KAO, NR/FAc 8, fols. 179-88v, 205v-23.

44. Work schemes were also initiated in 1630, 1634 and 1639: KAO, Sa/AC 7, fols. 78v, 104v, 182, 188-88v, 194v-95v, 260v-61, 353v-54.

less fortunate was an outgrowth of the responsibility corporations had long assumed for their citizens. Distortions in this natural pattern of relief are to be explained not by overwhelming indigence, for few communities, including ours, had consistently high levels of poverty, but by the presence of political, economic or religious variables acting alone or in combination to prejudice this communal instinct. Of these, the latter is most readily disposed.

In a traditional society where religion circumscribed most aspects of life and thought, ecclesiastical injunctions and biblical exhortations to charity were manifest in sermons, pamphlets and the poor laws themselves. These could be ignored only at the hazard of alienating large segments of the community. Of the corporations, only Sandwich's risked the wrath of citizens and preachers by neglecting the essential elements of Christian charity. And only in Sandwich, with its long tradition of radicalism, municipally-sponsored sermons, "reformist" preachers, official Sabbatarianism and strong emphasis on moral reform, was there a continuous application of Puritan principles and discipline to all aspects of local life.⁴⁵ Romney, on the other hand, refused to bow to the fashion of radicalism within corporations of the period; and, while Faversham showed signs of Puritanism, it contained a sizeable Catholic community and a number of orthodox, "conformist" vicars.⁴⁶

Several hypotheses have been advanced to explain the relationship between Puritanism and relief. On the surface the "Puritan harshness" thesis of R.H. Tawney, M. James and Christopher Hill accounts for the cruelty mixed with negligence we find in Sandwich; but it fails on conceptual grounds. Puritans rarely said or believed what this thesis claims.⁴⁷ The more recent idea of Puritan activism leading to generosity towards the poor, put forward by Paul Slack and A.L. Beier among others, fails on the evidence. No one could accuse Sandwichmen of "liberality and forwardness in well-doing."⁴⁸ The work of J. Sears McGee, however, might provide some clue to understanding the peculiarities of Sandwich. Puritans, he suggests, conceived of relief in spiritual terms, stressing education, moral discipline and "brotherly guidance" for those poor brethren amenable to "correction." Anglicans, on the other hand, categorized the poor and organized relief primarily in terms of physical needs.⁴⁹ The latter could explain the more practical approaches towards relief we find in Faversham and Romney, while the former might account for Sandwich's neglect

45. For evidence of Sandwich's Puritanism, see KAO, Sa/AC 2, fol. 230v; AC 3, fol. 69v, 133; LZ 1; GARDINER, *Historic Haven*, pp. 172-73; CLARK, *English Provincial Society*, pp. 37-38, 170, 177, 307, 323, 327, 371; *idem*, "The Prophesying Movement in Kentish Towns during the 1570s", *Archaeologia Cantiana*, XCIII (1977): 87. See also KAO, Sa/AC 5, fols. 15-16, 30v, 256v; AC 6, fols. 17v, 68v, 72v-73; AC 7, fols. 9, 14, 40, 57v, 150, 275, 319-20; BOYS, *History of Sandwich*, p. 745; APC, (1613-14), pp. 304-5, 614-15.

46. See, for example, the town's elaborate corporation-sponsored plays; KAO, NR/Fac 8; AC 7, fols. 73, 116-18; JB 6, fols. 215-16; W.A. SCOTT ROBERTSON, "The Passion Play and Interludes at New Romney", *Archaeologia Cantiana*, XIII (1880): 216-26; CLARK, *English Provincial Society*, pp. 98, 153-54. For Faversham especially, see *ibid.*, pp. 62, 77, 54; *idem*, "The Prophesying Movement", p. 88; KAO, Fa/AC 3, fol. 137.

47. R.H. TAWNEY, *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism* (London: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1926), pp. 253-72; M. JAMES, *Social Problems and Policy during the Puritan Revolution* (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1930), pp. 15-16, 20; M.M. KNAPPEN, *Tudor Puritanism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1939), pp. 412-17; CHRISTOPHER HILL, *Society and Puritanism in Pre-Revolutionary England* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1964), pp. 231, 271-72, 275-76; *idem*, *Puritanism and Revolution* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1958), pp. 221-25, 229-31; V. KIERNAN, "Puritanism and the Poor", *Past and Present*, 3 (1953): 45-53; JORDAN, *Philanthropy in England*, pp. 200-4; TRONRUD, "Poverty in Three English Towns", chap. VII.

48. SLACK, "Poverty and Politics", pp. 183-88; A.L. BEIER, "Poor Relief in Warwickshire, 1630-1660", *Past and Present*, 35 (1966): 95-100; JORDAN, *Philanthropy in England*, pp. 229-39, *et passim*.

49. J. SEARS MCGEE, *The Godly Man in Stuart England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), pp. 172-234.

of the material welfare of its poor and emphasis on moral discipline. The anomaly of Sandwich, however, where Puritan activism emerged negatively as repression and severity, leads us to look elsewhere for the greatest influences on the formulation of social policies.

It has been widely accepted by historians and early modern Englishmen alike that poor relief can be seen as a direct function of local economic prosperity. A Salisbury official, for example, complained that the town's great burden of relief could not be sustained for it had "no staple trade in it, and is so decayed and poore"; and similar complaints were voiced in both Romney and Sandwich.⁵⁰ If such an assumption is true as a general rule, it readily explains Sandwich's harsh, hands-off approach towards the relief of its poor. The town suffered frequent indebtedness and periodically high unemployment as a result of its heavy dependence upon volatile overseas cloth markets, and it was experiencing long-term economic contraction due to its rapidly silting haven and failing markets. In Sandwich, as Clark maintains, "social measures ... appeared to relieve poverty only at the price of further undermining the economic fortunes of small tradesmen (unable to pay high rates) and of driving more prosperous folk to leave the community altogether." The assumption of great responsibility and the generous provision of relief were unlikely in such circumstances.⁵¹

The thoroughness and immediacy of Faversham's response to poverty might conversely have been derived from the vitality of its economy and the relative affluence of its citizens. The community had great agricultural and industrial diversity, a vigorous seaborne commerce based upon the London trade, and a broad local distribution of wealth which could have made available to authorities the funds necessary for ambitious social welfare programmes.⁵²

The response of Romney, however, poses a problem. Once a prosperous medieval port with a thriving fishing and trading economy, Romney had become by the end of the sixteenth century a tiny market town without port facilities and dependent economically upon a vast but sparsely populated hinterland. The town continued to decline steadily throughout the early modern period, showing none of the signs of temporary economic recovery characteristic of so many other communities. Romney had less wealth, fewer opportunities and perhaps more reason for pessimism than either Sandwich or Faversham, and yet its early approach to the problem of poverty was both all-embracing and generous. In this case the argument which sees relief as a direct function of economic prosperity is certainly too simplistic.

50. SLACK, "Poverty and Politics", p. 171; KAO, NR/AC 1, fol. 47v; Sa/AC 7, fol. 317v.

51. CLARK, *English Provincial Society*, pp. 254, 353; KAO, Sa/AC 7, fol. 18. For Sandwich's economy, see BOYS, *History of Sandwich*; GARDINER, *Historic Haven*, *passim*; Sandwich Local Historical Society, *Sandwich People and their Occupations 1301-1939* (Sandwich: Sandwich Local Historical Society, occasional papers no. 6, 1978); W. B. STEPHENS, "The Cloth Exports of the Provincial Ports", *Economic History Review*, 2d ser., XXII (1969): 241-42; CLARK, *English Provincial Society*, pp. 67, 139, 222, 224, 303, 319, 400; CHALKLIN, *Seventeenth-Century Kent*; Felix HULL, ed., *The White and Black Books of the Cinque Ports* (London: Historical Manuscripts Commission, 1966), fols. 14, 17, 58v, 147v, 161, 204, 208v, 242v-43 (hereafter *Black Book*); William PAGE, ed., *Victoria County History, Kent* (hereafter *VCH, Kent*), 3 vol. (London: William Page, 1908-32), III: 406-8; KAO, Sa/AC 5-7, *passim*; ZB 2/56-57, 101; ZB 5; AC 1-3, *passim*.

52. For Faversham's economy, see among other sources Lt. HAMMOND, "A Relation of a Short Survey of the Western Counties", *Camden Miscellany*, XIV (1936): 10; Edward JACOB, *The History of Faversham* (1774), pp. 1-2, 94; CHALKLIN, *Seventeenth-Century Kent*, pp. 75-79, 150-56, 164, 170-79, 183-84, 271-72; F. J. FISHER, "The Development of the London Food Market, 1540-1640", *Economic History Review*, V (1935): 50, 56; ANDREWS, "Trade of the Port of Faversham", pp. 122, 128, 130; *VCH, Kent*, III: 420-24, 431-32; TRONRUD, "Poverty in Three English Towns", pp. 49-52; KAO, Fa/GF 1/1-4; AC 3, fols. 85v, 93; FAz 3.

In large part Sandwich and Romney, both declining towns, responded so differently to poverty because of the different character of their economies. By the end of the sixteenth century, Romney's economic and demographic contraction was virtually complete. Sandwich, however, was still very much in the process of decline; its industries continued to function and its haven remained open to overseas traffic. An atmosphere of despair and pessimism that pervaded Sandwich and is so evident in the treatment it accorded its poor, therefore, was constantly reinforced by ongoing economic contraction. Heavily reliant upon the volatile, labour-intensive cloth manufacturing and export industry for its employment and prosperity, Sandwich was also more susceptible than the isolated, agriculturally dependent New Romney to the period's frequent economic depressions and harvest failures and so, perhaps, had a higher proportion of poor. And, as an international seaport, Sandwich was probably more attractive to the migrant poor than the geographically isolated Romney.

Compounding the problem of poverty in Sandwich was its extreme susceptibility to plague and other epidemics. Having experienced outbreaks of disease much more frequently and with greater severity than either Faversham or Romney, its attitudes towards and treatment of its poor were affected in several ways.⁵³ The closing down of fairs and markets in times of plague created large-scale unemployment, the relief of which placed excessive short-term excessive burdens on civic finances. Such was Sandwich's fear of plague that at each visitation the town was forcibly cleared of all those poor unfortunate enough not to have iron-clad claims to settlement, while relief was denied to indigenous poor as a way of encouraging them to leave the town "voluntarily." Finally, three times in one century, in 1543, 1609-11 and 1644, Sandwich experienced massive depopulations due to severe epidemics.⁵⁴ The normal process by which newcomers were assimilated into the local community was shattered by the scale of immigration that followed these catastrophes. Sharp distinctions were drawn between long-term residents firmly ensconced in power and newcomers who, by their poverty or ambitions, threatened the *status quo*. The communal spirit, so necessary for the corporate acceptance of responsibility for the poor, was replaced in Sandwich by what might be called a siege mentality.⁵⁵

It is possible, therefore, that towns like Sandwich which experienced continuous and rapid economic decline reinforced by special susceptibility to market fluctuations because of an excessive dependency on a particular crop or product were less likely than others to be innovative or idealistic in social matters. In short, economic pessimism produced social conservatism. Faversham's prosperity and Romney's more stable, if still declining, economy, on the other hand, showed little of the harshness or "failure of civic nerve" that characterized Sandwich.⁵⁶ In addition, it is possible that communities most susceptible to vagrancy, high rates of migration and epidemics tended to develop a siege mentality which

53. In this period, Sandwich was hit on average more than once every three years while Faversham averaged four and one-half years between eruptions and Romney surprisingly escaped all epidemics but one: KAO, Sa/AC 5-7, *passim*; ZB 2; Fa/Fac 3-66; NR/AZ 37/1, 2.

54. KAO, Sa/AC 5, fol. 49v; AC 6, fols. 207v, 240, 242; AC 7, fols. 128, 136, 302, 321-22v; AP 1; C 4; ZB 2/101, 57; AC 7, fols. 10, 184v-85. Each of these devastating attacks reportedly wiped out as half of the town's population: Sa/ZB 5; CLARK, *English Provincial Society*, pp. 67, 303; BOYS, *History of Sandwich*, p. 733; KAO, Sa/AC 7, fol. 10; ZB 2/56-57, 101; C 4; GARDINER, *Historic Haven*, p. 221.

55. See KAO, Sa/AC 5, fol. 222. This siege mentality was reinforced in Sandwich by its high rate of vagrancy due to its position as an international seaport and by the settlement in 1561 of several hundred Dutch and Flemish immigrants, the "strangers", who, by their industriousness, posed a serious threat to local merchants; Sa/ZB 3/24; AC 5, fols. 15-15v, 26, 37v, 41v, 81-85v, 109v-12v, 260v, *et passim*; AC 6, fols. 8v, 9, 26v, 35v, 45v, 49v, 76, 128, 162v, 356-56v; AC 7, fol. 111v; APC, XIII (1581-82), pp. 277, 364, 369-73.

56. CLARK, *English Provincial Society*, p. 141.

destroyed community spirit and encouraged repression over relief, while isolated, relatively disease-free communities (New Romney) or those with economies strong enough to absorb incoming labour without undue disruption (Faversham), were left free to develop systematized poor relief.

It is often asserted that the poor suffered most in towns whose economies were weakest because of the detrimental effects of a poor economy on civic finances. Clark and Slack, for example, constantly reiterate the causal connections between an ailing local economy on the one hand and corporate financial insolvency on the other.⁵⁷ While it is hard to deny the direct relationship between increasing poverty and economic depression, the correlation between a town's financial resources and the state of its local economy might not be as simple and straightforward.

Sandwich's financial accounts, sparse as they are, reveal long-term indebtedness, falling revenues, increasing expenditures and high overheads, producing a picture of decline commensurate with that of its economy as a whole.⁵⁸ Its heavy reliance upon indirect taxes for its corporate revenues — market tolls, customs duties, export fees and licences — forged a close relationship between civic finances and the commercial fortunes of the community. However, it also seems to have been widely accepted at the time that Sandwich did not and perhaps could not tax its citizens heavily, suggesting that the town's fiscal poverty owed as much to political problems as it did to economic decay.⁵⁹

What is most noticeable about Faversham's financial accounts is the close correlation between the funds disbursed, collected and available in each year for which figures exist.⁶⁰ Substantial surpluses were uncommon and deficits exceedingly rare, though expenditures and income could experience extreme yearly fluctuations. This suggests a relatively immature financial apparatus; the corporation operated pretty much on a hand-to-mouth basis, levying special assessments as they were needed and carrying little from year to year. Such was the community's prosperity, however, that the government rarely failed to bring in sufficient revenues by such means, though demands for surplus funds not infrequently met stiff taxpayer resistance and a high rate of non-payment. For less well-to-do towns like Sandwich or Romney this was a dangerous course leading to indebtedness or, as in the case of the former, the wholesale abandonment of commitments.⁶¹ Faversham's prosperity, therefore, acted as a safety net protecting the corporation from financial difficulties. It did not, however, guarantee financial security or encourage long-term planning.

The pattern of civic income and expenditure in Romney, however, is very different. The typical image of the economically depressed, declining town suffering from high costs and low revenues holds true only for the 1580s and early 1590s when the town was obliged to borrow heavily, sell or mortgage its assets and levy extra taxes to meet its expenses.⁶²

57. CLARK and SLACK, *Crisis and Order*, p. 20; *idem*, *English Towns in Transition*, pp. 103, 109, 123; CLARK, *English Provincial Society*, pp. 12, 236-38, 246, 341; *idem*, "Migrant", p. 152; SLACK, "Poverty and Politics", pp. 171, 177-80; DYER, *City of Worcester*, p. 166; HILL, *Lincoln*, pp. 134-38; A.L. BEIER, *The Problem of the Poor in Tudor and Stuart England* (London: Methuen and Co., 1983), pp. 2-10, 25-28.

58. KAO, Sa/ZB 4/15-16; ZB 3/7, fols. 1-2; AC 6, fols. 246v, 341v; FAT 38.

59. KAO, Sa/ZB 57.

60. KAO, Fa/FAC 3-66. Unfortunately, complete or nearly complete figures remain for only sixteen years between 1578 and 1640.

61. Thus Sandwich was repeatedly forced to appeal to the county for assistance in relieving plague victims; KAO, Sa/AC 7, fols. 317v, 321-21v; ZB 2/56-57, 101; C 4.

62. KAO, NR/AC 1, fols. 23, 26, 33v-34, 42, 43, 45v, 47v, 49v, 50; APC, XV (1587-88), 421-22. The town's financial records are virtually complete from the 1580s to 1625: KAO, NR/FAC 7, 8, *passim*, 33-38.

But, after recording a deficit in 1597, the town's finances took a curious turn. For over half a decade the tax load, levied principally on lands rather than commerce, exceeded expenditure and a £156 surplus was amassed: a huge reservoir of ready cash which remained intact for over twenty-five years and, at its peak in 1620, totalled an amazing £245. Three years later £279 was collected in taxes, £245 was spent and £420 was available, this from a poor community of probably fewer than 500 residents. In no year on record did prosperous Faversham, with a population three times as large, have so much to spend on the affairs of government.

It is obvious, therefore, that healthy civic finances owed less to local economic prosperity than to the manner in which taxes were levied and raised and this in turn revolved around the more pressing question of whether heavy taxation was politically feasible. The relationship between a town's economy and its civic finances was at best ambiguous. Miserable finances could coexist with a flourishing economy and individually wealthy citizens and vice versa.⁶³

We can be more conclusive about the relationship between the corporate relief of poverty and town finances. Time and time again decisions involving expenditures on poor relief matters were made in apparent disregard of financial considerations. The total demise of Sandwich's early attempts to relieve its indigent coincided with a temporary rejuvenation of its financial and economic fortunes as the town tapped the growing Elizabethan trade. And when revenues were surely at their worst in the 1620s and 1630s, as the bottom fell out of the English cloth market, corporate relief in Sandwich began to re-emerge. Faversham, on the other hand, curtailed relief after 1610 despite healthy finances. And, with a similar disregard for costs, New Romney launched its first full-scale assault on the problem of poverty in the early 1590s, several years before its chaotic finances showed any sign of recovery, and turned away from relief and towards repression in 1617 despite huge surpluses of available cash. One explanation for these apparent anomalies is that the cost to the corporation of relieving the poor was simply too small in these towns to be affected by questions of financial solvency. Aid there normally composed less than 10 percent of corporate outlay and, even in the worst years, did not exceed one-third. Poverty was not a massive financial burden driving these towns to the brink of bankruptcy. Indeed, as responsibility for relief shifted in the seventeenth century to statutory officials who imposed their own rates, corporate expenditures on the poor declined steadily.⁶⁴

Thus economic and financial variables are unreliable guides to social policies and attitudes in these towns. Too many major decisions affecting the needy seem to have been made in an economic vacuum. Of all the factors influencing the approaches to poverty of these Kentish boroughs, it was not the economic or financial but rather the political that had the greatest impact.

For most boroughs, the Elizabethan and early Stuart period was traumatic. At every turn the effectiveness and autonomy of local administrations were being challenged by predatory nearby gentry seeking to extend their influence as well as by county officials and the central government and its agencies interfering in local affairs.⁶⁵ As members of the

63. See, for example, O. COLEMAN, "Trade and Prosperity in the Fifteenth Century: Some Aspects of the Trade of Southampton", *Economic History Review*, 2d ser., XVI (1963): 21; J.C.H. AVELING, *Catholic Recusancy in the City of York 1588-1791* (Catholic Record Society, 1970), p. 14.

64. TRONRUD, "Poverty in Three English Towns", pp. 225-34, 310; *idem*, "Problem of Poverty", p. 45.

65. See CLARK and SLACK, *English Towns in Transition*, *passim*; *idem*, *Crisis and Order*, introduction; CLARK, *English Provincial Society*, pp. 251-55, *et passim*.

increasingly powerless but still highly privileged Cinque Ports federation, Romney, Faversham and Sandwich were especially susceptible to outsiders who, like Elizabeth herself, saw little reason "to suffer [the Cinque Ports] in such fruitless manner to enjoye so great privileges without doing any service." During this period Chancery sought to extend its legal jurisdiction into areas long held by the federation; the Privy Council repeatedly imposed its will upon local governments; and the Lord Warden of the Cinque Ports not infrequently regulated, mediated and supervised the affairs of Romney, Faversham and Sandwich in virtually every sphere of activity. Thus the dominant political feature of these towns in this period was local particularism — the incessant struggle to remain autonomous. Every tool from courts and charters to riots was used to buttress venerable privileges from "foreign" incursions.⁶⁶

One of the principal consequences of this struggle in towns was an intensification of the trend towards oligarchy, a defensive reaction designed to overcome external influence by vesting power in the hands of a select few. Before long, however, internal tensions grew, especially during elections, as newcomers and lesser citizens sought admittance to closed councils and the perquisites and privileges such membership provided. Many condemned oligarchic corruption and sought redress in an alternate leadership while others championed a form of government more open to the commonalty. Confiscations and banishments followed by protests, riots and tax revolts were the inevitable results. In the end, oligarchies were often forced to abandon their original role as defenders of local autonomy and seek the support of external agents such as the Crown to protect them from their own citizens.⁶⁷ In this way, resistance to the policies of the central government became bound up with opposition to local oligarchies.⁶⁸

Poverty first appeared as a major problem at a time when such political tensions were extreme. In many communities the new officials and rates necessary to care adequately for the indigent were seen and opposed by common taxpayers as an extension of oligarchic authority and by local governments as an extra burden guaranteed to increase the fervour of their opponents. Only intense fear of revolt from the poor, or tenacious pressure from

66. K.M.E. MURRAY, *The Constitutional History of the Cinque Ports* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1935), p. 219; *idem*, "Faversham and the Cinque Ports", *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 4th ser., XVIII (1935): 77; W. JONES, "Chancery and the Cinque Ports in the Reign of Elizabeth", *Archaeologia Cantiana*, LXXVI (1961): 143-52; *Black Book*, fols. 61v, 74v, et passim; KAO, NR/CPw 6, 7, 12; FAc 6, fol. 154; FAc 8, fols. 133v, 135v; Fa/CPw 68-69; AC 3, fol. 156; Sa/ZB 3/8-14. Interference by the Privy Council in the grain trade was most common; APC (1596-97), pp. 534-35; (1597-98), pp. 29-31; (1630-31), nos. 587, 604, 605, 805; Victor PONKO, "N.S.B. Gras and Elizabethan Corn Policy: a Re-examination of the Problem", *Economic History Review*, 2d ser., XVII (1964-65): 24-42; KAO, Sa/AC 6, fol. 226; ZB 2/80-84; CLARK, *English Provincial Society*, p. 232. See also Robert TITTLER, "Incorporation of Boroughs, 1540-1558", *History*, LXII (1977): 24-42.

67. KAO, NR/JQf 1/2/42; 1/2/19; Fa/CPI 9; Sa/AC 7, fols. 348v-49v; NR/AC 1, fols. 8v-26v; Public Record Office (hereafter PRO), S.P. 12/169/39-40; KAO, Fa/JV 11, 48; Sa/AC 6, fols. 212v-14; APC, XVIII (1589-90), p. 395; KAO, NR/AC 1, fols. 3, 48; CPw 66, 92; *Black Book*, fols. 36-37; British Museum (hereafter BM), Lansdowne MS. 67, fols. 209v-10. MURRAY, *Constitutional History*, p. 115; C. HAMMER, "Anatomy of an Oligarchy: The Oxford Town Council in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries", *Journal of British Studies*, XVIII (1978): 1-27; J.T. EVANS, "The Decline of Oligarchy in Seventeenth-Century Norwich", *Journal of British Studies*, XIV (1974): 46-76; CLARK and SLACK, *English Towns in Transition*, p. 134.

68. See, for example, PRO, S.P. 12/169/40 xi, p. 3, 5; 39 ii; 40 ix; 40 x; KAO, NR/AC 1, fols. 18v-19, 33v-34, 47v; AC 2, pp. 21-22, 62; CPm 17; JQp 1/3/2, Sa/AC 7, fols. 105v-6, 156-57; FAT 38; ZB 1/2/8, 30-33; Fa/FAc 51; AC 3, fol. 132v; CLARK, *English Provincial Society*, pp. 252-54, 340-41; APC, XVIII (1589-90), p. 214; XV (1587-88), pp. 421-22; Madeline JONES, "Election Issues and the Borough Electorates in Mid-Seventeenth-Century Kent", *Archaeologia Cantiana*, LXXXV (1970): 19-28; F.L. BUSHMAN, "English Franchise Reform in the Seventeenth Century", *Journal of British Studies*, III (1963): 43-45.

the central government, could induce such communities to address systematically and charitably the problem of poverty.

Such was the political situation in Romney, Faversham and Sandwich. Throughout the sixteenth century, Sandwich was riven with internal strife of a particularly violent nature.⁶⁹ By 1595, oligarchic corruption had become so bad that the commonalty revolted against the town treasurer “who had mispended ... their monies”, and quarrelled openly with those who kept him in office. There then followed three decades of recrimination, necessitating the repeated intervention of the Lord Warden and the Privy Council.⁷⁰ Throughout this period, the corporation’s decrees were scoffed at, its regulations scorned and its assessments ignored.⁷¹ So eroded was the authority of the government that it even feared to impose the rates needed to haul itself out of near bankruptcy. Such an atmosphere was probably not conducive to the introduction of extensive relief schemes. Perhaps significantly, the re-emergence of corporate relief in the late 1620s followed closely the re-establishment of open government in Sandwich.

Although Faversham had its share of oligarchic corruption, internal strife seems not to have been a prevailing feature of its political life. There the ruling élite policed itself more closely than in Sandwich and, consequently, never fully lost the confidence of the commonalty. As well, the oligarchy in Faversham seems to have been careful not to identify itself too closely with hostile outside forces. Indeed, having effectively deflected local hostility onto the Crown and the Lord Warden by visible acts of resistance, Faversham’s rulers often appeared as champions of civic autonomy.⁷² Corporate relief of poverty, therefore, instituted quite early in Faversham, was not likely associated in the minds of the commonalty with closed government or with an outgrowth of centralized power. Rather it grew out of civic initiative and by its distinctiveness acted to reinforce local autonomy. Only with an attempt, in 1610, to create from the town’s numerous guilds a single “fellowshippe, societie and companye” controlled by the ruling élite, did factional conflict arise and organized poor relief languish. It is perhaps significant that the failure of the new guild and the creation of more open government in the 1620s saw the revitalization of corporate relief.⁷³

The relationship between relief and politics is perhaps best illustrated in New Romney where, in the 1580s, the first significant demands of poverty coincided with sharp internal conflict. Fierce factional rivalry for political power spawned blatant corruption as dismissals, disenfranchisements and expropriations were met by threats and violence. Several times, amidst secret meetings, conspiracies and openly rigged elections, the prized office of mayor changed hands until, in 1584, one man, William Southland, assumed the mantle of power. For the next six years New Romney was under his virtual dictatorship. No longer was

69. KAO, Sa/AC 3, fols. 14, 155-56v, 207v, 238-43, *et passim*; AC 5, fol. 128v; AC 6, fols. 7-7v, 222v; APC (1547-50), pp. 536-37; CLARK, *English Provincial Society*, pp. 13, 79-80, 140.

70. KAO, Sa/AC 6, fols 129-29v, 212-14, 229, 240, 242, 244, 255v-56, 270, 275v, 286, 320v, 326, 327v; AC 7, fols. 18, 150, 156v-57; ZB 1/3/0-33; *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic (1619-23)*, p. 219; CLARK, *English Provincial Society*, pp. 255, 325; BUSHMAN, “English Franchise Reform”, pp. 43-45.

71. Resistance to oligarchy lessened the effectiveness of the town’s attempts to control the housing of poor, to regulate the grain trade and to provide relief; KAO, Sa/AC 6, fols. 240-40v, 242, 374v; ZB 2/57, 81; 3/11-13; AC 7, fol. 43.

72. VCH, Kent, III: 399; KAO, Fa/AC 3, fol. 44; CPg 1; *Black Book*, fols. 48v, 83-83v, 86; MURRAY, “Faversham and the Cinque Ports”, pp. 77-81; CLARK, *English Provincial Society*, pp. 252-53.

73. KAO, Fa/GF 1-4; CLARK, “Migrant”, pp. 151, 162 n. 98; MURRAY, “Faversham and the Cinque Ports”, pp. 81-82.

corruption given even a semblance of legitimacy; leases, patronage and outright gifts of the town's money were his to dispose of almost at will.⁷⁴ The result was a corporation sinking more and more into debt as taxes went unpaid and legal challenges to its authority multiplied. Caught in the middle of this conflict were the poor. In 1587, Southland's opponents appealed to the Privy Council, "in the name of the poorer inhabitants, artificers and laboring men of New Romney", against the

great tax or fyne layed upon them ... and of diverse mysgovernmentes of the said Maiour and his faction, through which occasions the welthier sort had and would withdrawe them selves and leave the towne, whereby the poore that had ben by them maynteyned and sett on work were nowe reduced to great want and poverty.⁷⁵

Part of the justification for this assessment was "to relieve the iiiij poore and yonge fatherless children towards their education." In both 1588 and 1589, disbursements to the poor came to a near standstill, pauper apprenticeship was virtually abandoned and the corporation was forced to sell some of its lands because "the six poore childrens diett ar behinde and not paid for by the space of one yere or thereabouts."⁷⁶ The destitute, it seems, were the first to suffer in times of political chaos.

It took the direct and forceful intervention of the Crown and Lord Warden to end the political infighting in Romney and, significantly, to establish statutory poor relief in the town despite its near bankruptcy.⁷⁷ The community's rapid expansion of relief in the decades that followed probably owed much to this early influence of outside forces. In the absence of constant supervision, however, Romney's relief apparatus fell into disuse in the second decade of the seventeenth century despite the easy availability of money. And coinciding with the onset of renewed political discord in the 1620s and 1630s, the system virtually collapsed.⁷⁸

Thus the long-term trends of poor relief in each town seem to have been a function of its political experience. If we can generalize from the above comparisons, the severity of a community's internal conflict seems to have directly influenced the quality of relief it offered its poor. Social initiatives, it appears, were unlikely to materialize in politically unstable circumstances. In unified communities with more open governments, however, comprehensive welfare systems could, and perhaps in the case of Faversham, did develop and flourish, though even there an extensive relief organization appeared fragile when antagonism replaced co-operation in the 1610s. In the tumultuous world of the early modern English town, social reform was of decidedly secondary consideration and political decisions carried overwhelming weight.

74. See *Black Book*, fols. 35v-38, 41-47; KAO, NR/AC 1, fols. 1v-50, *passim* (especially fols. 9v-11v, 20-22); JB 3, 4; CPw 63, 66; FAc 36-38; BM, Lansdowne MS. 67, fols. 209v-10; PRO, S.P. 12/169/20, 39-40.

75. KAO, NR/AC 1, fols. 30, 34v-35, 42, 43-43v, 47v-48, 49v, 50; FAc 36, APC, XV (1587-88), pp. 421-22.

76. KAO, NR/AC 1, fols. 33v-34, 50-50v; ZPa 4/1, 4; FAc 35-36.

77. KAO, NR/FAc 8, fols. 29-48v; FAc 37-38; CPw 63, 66; AC 1, fols. 60v, 66v, 74; ZPa 4/1.

78. KAO, NR/AC 2, pp. 21-22, 62, 135, 142, 143; JQp 1/3/2, 35, 38; CLARK, "Migrant", p. 162 n.; *idem*, *English Provincial Society*, pp. 341.