Domestic production and consumption in English pauper households, 1670–1840*

by Joseph Harley

Abstract

This article uses over 450 pauper inventories from Essex and Norfolk to examine domestic production and consumption in the homes of paupers. It finds that as the dependent poor obtained more consumer goods from the 1770s, their households became diverse spaces that contained a wide range of small-scale domestic industries such as baking, farming, and spinning. This evidence suggests that there are limits to Jan de Vries' 'industrious revolution' theory, which claims that households specialized and moved away from modest domestic ventures to acquire new consumer goods over the eighteenth century. Pauper inventories indicate that it was only from the early nineteenth century, when numerous consumer goods had already entered the homes of the poor, that domestic production became less prevalent in pauper homes. In doing this, the study also has important implications on other influential historiographical debates, such as the demise of the old poor law, the role of consumer demand, standards of living, and women and children's work.

Probate inventories – which record the goods that people owned at death for the purposes of adminstering their estates – have been extensively used by historians to research consumption and domestic production. These studies have revealed that with each generation the middling sort and elite acquired more and better goods over the early modern period. People's accumulation of possessions accelerated from the late seventeenth century, as burgeoning numbers of individuals procured novel items such as tea goods, chests of drawers, clocks, looking glasses and pictures.[1] Diversity and self-sufficiency was routine in the early modern household and many homes continued to be involved in brewing, textile manufacture, agriculture and other activities as they acquired these new belongings from the market. In Mark Overton *et al.*'s study of Kent, for instance, it was found that there were major changes in people's material

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[1] See for instance, Lorna Weatherill, *Consumer behaviour and material culture in Britain 1660–1760* (2nd edn, 1996); Mark Overton, Jane Whittle, Darron Dean, and Andrew Hann, *Production and consumption in English households, 1600–1750* (2004), pp. 87–120; Carole Shammas, *The pre-industrial consumer in England and America* (1990); Joanne Sear and Ken Sneath, *The origins of the consumer revolution in England: From brass pots to clocks* (2020).

culture as they continued to involve themselves in by-employment and production for use within the home between 1600 and 1750.[2] Others, however, moved away from these various forms of domestic production as new goods entered their homes. Although the material wealth of people in Cornwall paled in comparison to that of Kent, people there specialized and moved away from by-employment over the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, as small numbers obtained new items of furniture and tableware.[3]

The role of the poor has largely been overlooked in these studies, since probate inventories are much more difficult to locate for indigent populations compared to the middling sort and elite. Lorna Weatherill's classic study of consumer behaviour, for example, only included 28 labourers' probate inventories out of a total sample of 2902 inventories.[4] As a result of better archival cataloguing, Craig Muldrew and Ken Sneath have helped to address this issue by using large samples of labourers' probate inventories to examine consumption and production in labouring households.[5] However, their results are open to question as numerous academics have argued that probate inventories taken of labourers' goods are atypical.[6] Church courts, for example, could not charge a fee if the inventory value was less than £5, meaning that there was a financial disincentive to appraise the goods of poorer people.[7] The need for further research on the destitute becomes ever more important when one considers that the 'poor' (defined in their broadest sense) made up the majority of the eighteenth-century population,[8] and that it was only through their labours that the consumer goods of the Industrial Revolution were produced. Such a large group also had the potential to stimulate and drive demand for products. Finally, owing to an overreliance on probate inventories, numerous studies do not cover the second half of the eighteenth century onwards since probate inventories tend to fade out for the period after 1730.[9]

Studying the poor's domestic production and consumption allows one to critique aspects of important theories regarding the role of demand in the Industrial Revolution, particularly

[2] Overton *et al.*, *Production and consumption*.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Weatherill, *Consumer behaviour*, p. 168. Similarly, also see Overton *et al.*, *Production and consumption*; Anthony Buxton, *Domestic culture in early modern England* (2015); Shammas, *Pre-industrial*.

[5] Craig Muldrew, *Food, energy and the creation of industriousness: Work and material culture in agrarian England, 1550–1780* (2011), esp. pp. 163–207, 246–59; Ken Sneath, 'Consumption, wealth, indebtedness and social structure in early modern England' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Cambridge, 2008). Also see Sear and Sneath, *Consumer revolution*.

[6] For instance, Joseph Harley, 'Consumption and poverty in the homes of the English poor, *c.*1670–1834', *Social Hist.* 43 (2018), pp. 81–104; Weatherill, *Consumer behaviour*, pp. 191–4; Barry Coward, *The Stuart age: England, 1603–1714* (3rd edn, 2003), p. 55; Peter King, 'Pauper inventories and the material lives of the poor in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries', in Tim Hitchcock, Peter King and Pamela Sharpe (eds), *Chronicling poverty: The voices and strategies of the English poor, 1640–1840* (1997), pp. 156, 176; Sebastian A. J. Keibek and Leigh Shaw-Taylor, 'Early modern rural by-employments: A re-examination of the probate inventory evidence', *AgHR* 61 (2013), pp. 259, 261.

[7] Shammas, *Pre-industrial*, p. 19; Keibek and Shaw-Taylor, 'By-employments', pp. 259, 261; Margaret Spufford and Susan Mee, *The clothing of the common sort, 1570–1700* (2017), p. 5.

[8] Peter H. Lindert and Jeffrey G. Williamson, 'Revising England's social tables, 1688–1812', *Explorations in Economic Hist.* 19 (1982), pp. 385–408; Robert C. Allen, 'Class structure and inequality during the industrial revolution: Lessons from England's social tables, 1688–1867', *EcHR* 72 (2019), pp. 88–125.

[9] There are some exceptions to this such as Sear and Sneath, *Consumer revolution*, and Sneath, 'Consumption', Muldrew, *Food*.

the thesis of an 'industrious revolution' proposed by Jan de Vries. His theory places changes in the household's allocation of labour centre stage in economic development and emphasizes the importance of work effort (industriousness) and consumer behaviour. De Vries argued that households reallocated their time away from household tasks for personal use such as bread making and worked harder for longer hours in more specialized lines of work, to earn a cash income which could be used to purchase market-produced goods during the long eighteenth century (*c.*1650–1850). This could be done in several ways, such as through increased participation in wage labour outside the home, or by intensifying household production for exchange in a particular area such as textile manufacture. The ultimate reason that people made these changes at the level of the household was to gather enough resources to engage in the consumption of a wide range of goods.[10]

Historians have studied the numerous factors underpinning the industrious revolution (such as working hours, domestic production, and consumption) to uncover the extent to which the concept holds up to empirical scrutiny.[11] Probate inventories are important for uncovering the types of consumer goods that people owned and whether domestic production changed over the long eighteenth century as de Vries suggested. However, as noted above, probate inventories largely do not capture the material lives of the poor and studies have found contrasting results regarding domestic production. Research being undertaken at the University of Cambridge has made the issue even more complicated, by suggesting that historians have regularly over-estimated the importance of by-employment due to an overreliance on probate inventories.[12] Clearly there is little unity among historians and an alternative approach is needed.

This article addresses these issues by examining Essex and Norfolk pauper households using the largest sample of pauper inventories ever assembled. It is argued that as many paupers increasingly acquired a wider range of household possessions from the 1770s, their households were often diverse spaces which contained a range of domestic activities for personal use such as baking, farming, and spinning. Pauper inventories cannot be used to argue conclusively on the merits or not of the industrious revolution thesis, since they tell us little about working hours and wage labour outside the home. However, the results from the sources appear to call into question particular aspects of the theory. The inventories indicate that poor households were diverse spaces and did not specialise when new goods entered their homes as de Vries contended. It was only from the early nineteenth century, when many consumer goods were more ubiquitous, that these industries in the domestic sphere appear to have declined. This suggests that it was not the desire for consumer goods that drove changes at the level of the household. Rather, it is reasoned that pauper households adapted their activities as a way to combat growing levels of poverty from the late eighteenth century.

[10] Jan de Vries, *The industrious revolution: Consumer behaviour and the household economy, 1650 to the present* (2008).

[11] For example, see Gregory Clark and Ysbrand van der Werf, 'Work in progress? The industrious revolution', *J. Economic Hist.* 58 (1998), pp. 830–43; Hans-Joachim Voth, *Time and work in England, 1750–1830* (2000); R. C. Allen and J. L. Weisdorf, 'Was there an "industrious revolution" before the industrial revolution? An empirical exercise for England, c.1300–1830', *EcHR* 64 (2011), pp. 715–29.

[12] Keibek and Shaw-Taylor, 'By-employments', pp. 244–81.

I

This piece takes a regional perspective by focusing on pauper inventories drawn from Essex and Norfolk. This is important to do as aggregate studies can sometimes overlook or obscure regional diversity.[13] Textile production was in terminal decline in Essex and Norfolk over the period and by the late eighteenth century most producers struggled to earn a living as manufacturing relocated to the north of England. Other industries such as silk production and lace embroidery helped to fill this void, but they never employed as many people as the worsted industries did. Following this, the populations of Essex and Norfolk became increasingly reliant on wage labour in agriculture.[14] Similar numbers of people were on poor relief in Essex and Norfolk according to the Parliamentary returns and both counties were relatively well connected to the rest of the country through road and water networks.[15] Residents of Essex, however, had a number of advantages over their counterparts in Norfolk. Some of the highest densities of retail outlets were found in the Home Counties. Owing to Essex's proximity to London and fairly swift urban growth in the county, the labouring poor in Essex could also expect to earn higher wages than in Norfolk and the population had greater access to myriad goods and trends that arose from the capital.[16]

Pauper inventories were made by poor law officials to record the possessions that a pauper owned at one point in time. The paupers would then continue to use their goods and at a later date, usually when they died, the goods would revert to the parish when they would then be sold, given to other paupers as relief in kind, or be used to furnish the parish poorhouse/workhouse. This means that in most cases pauper inventories record the possessions of people who were still alive and the goods were not in transit when they were appraised. The pauper inventories are structured very similarly to one another. Most start by detailing to whom the goods in the inventory belonged, who inventoried the goods, and where and when it was made. The household goods are then listed one by one and occasionally rooms or valuations of the goods are recorded.

Two hundred and twenty-eight pauper inventories have been found for Essex and 230 for Norfolk from 1670 to 1834. Of these, four inventories have been omitted from this study as they mainly list linen and clothing or are heavily damaged. Each of the pauper inventories have been cross-referenced to additional parochial sources to confirm that the subjects were on poor relief and to reconstruct familial backgrounds. Seventy-seven and 80 per cent of the

[13] Emma Griffin, 'Diets, hunger and living standards during the British industrial revolution, *Past and Present*, 239 (2018), pp. 76–8.

[14] Pamela Sharpe, *Adapting to capitalism: Working women in the English economy, 1700–1850* (1996); Steven King and Geoffrey Timmins, *Making sense of the industrial revolution* (2001), pp. 33–66; Maxine Berg, *The age of manufactures 1700–1820: Industry, innovation and work in Britain* (2nd edn, 1994), pp. 89–96.

[15] In 1801–03 around 16.4% and 15.2% of the Essex and Norfolk populations were on poor relief. Karel Williams, *From pauperism to poverty* (1981), pp. 149–50; Michael Freeman, 'Transport', in John Langton and Robert J. Morris (eds), *Atlas of industrializing Britain, 1780–1914* (1986), pp. 80–93.

[16] Hoh-Cheung Mui and Lorna H. Mui, *Shops and shopkeeping in eighteenth-century England* (1989); Weatherill, *Consumer behaviour*, pp. 43–69; E. A. Wrigley, 'A simple model of London's importance in changing English society and economy 1650–1750', *Past and Present* 37 (1967), pp. 44–70; Lena Cowen Orlin (ed.), *Material London, ca. 1600* (2000); K. D. M. Snell, *Annals of the labouring poor: Social change and agrarian England, 1660–1900* (1985), pp. 411–17.

Essex and Norfolk samples respectively were on regular relief in the form of a pension when their goods were appraised by the parish, while the remainder were on casual relief which generally took the form of intermittent cash and rent payments or the giving of items in kind such as clothing and food.

Most people had their goods appraised by the parish after prolonged periods of receiving poor relief, rather than having their possessions inventoried on day one. In total, 36 per cent of the pauper inventories were made when people started receiving regular or casual relief and 64 per cent were made of the belongings of people who were already receiving support.[17] This is potentially problematic, as it stands to reason that those who had just started relief may own more goods than those who had been receiving it for long periods of time. In spite of this, levels of ownership are remarkably consistent across the two sets of paupers. This strongly suggests that the selling of goods was common among people who received poor relief and the labouring sort before they became dependent on parish assistance. Large numbers of working-class autobiographies offer evidence to support this supposition. For instance, while a struggling shoemaker John James Bezer 'lived upon mother's pauper allowance' and was forced to sell 'the *last* two old chairs … for 1s. 9d' around 1834.[18] The writings of the vagrant Mary Saxby, the labourer Joseph Mayett and others show that non-paupers also regularly sold and pawned their things.[19] Pauper inventories thus record the possessions of people after most had sold some of their goods to make ends meet. Once individuals' belongings were inventoried by the parish, most would have found it difficult to sell and pawn their possessions to stay solvent. Officials could punish paupers who were found to be selling goods by withholding relief and others branded indigent items with the initials of the parish to limit this practice.[20]

It is difficult to assess pauper inventories from one county as a single collection, as systems of poor relief varied from parish to parish and local practice was dependent upon the economic, legal, and cultural features of the respective settlements. This problem is compounded by the fact that there was no statute or case law which allowed parishes to inventory and later take paupers' goods in return for support.[21] Despite this, most of the pauper inventories record the belongings of comparable *types* of paupers. Officials tended to appraise the possessions of people who were on poor relief due to misfortunes of the life-cycle such as old age, the death of a partner, and illness. Paupers who needed help due to economic pressures such as unemployment and underemployment were generally helped through other short-term methods such as casual relief, Speenhamland, and the roundsman system. The ages of only 14 paupers from the sample have been found, yet the results reveal an average age of 59, indicating that older parishioners

[17] 'Already on relief' is defined as receiving relief for two months or more before the pauper inventory was made. Most people in this category, however, had been on some sort of relief for years.

[18] John James Bezer, 'The autobiography of one of the Chartist rebels of 1848', in David Vincent (ed.), *Testaments of radicalism: Memoirs of working class politicians 1790–1885* (1977), p. 176. Also see, Jack Ayres (ed.), *Paupers and pig killers: The diary of William Holland a Somerset parson, 1799–1818* (1984), p. 278.

[19] Mary Saxby, *Memoirs of a female vagrant* (1806), pp. 14–15, 25–8, 50–2 and Ann Kussmaul (ed.), *The autobiography of Joseph Mayett of Quainton (1783–1839)* (Bucks. Record Soc. 23, 1986), pp. 57, 59, 65.

[20] On the branding of paupers' goods, see Joseph Harley (ed.), *Norfolk pauper inventories, c. 1690–1834* (2020), pp. 20–2

[21] Ibid., pp. 11–14.

were a priority of parishes when it came to inventorying people's goods. Of the 14, no one was in their 20s, one person was in their 30s, two were in their 40s, and most were in their 50s or above.[22] This means that the results from the inventories are potentially problematic, since most of the paupers in the sample were likely to have been less able-bodied and possibly less inclined to participate in domestic production than younger parishioners. Relief was, however, rarely enough to live off and so some form of domestic work was probably necessary to make thrift.[23] Furthermore, throughout the old poor law the elderly were one of the largest and most expensive groups of the dependent poor across the country,[24] meaning that the results will be illuminating for this important subsection of the population at the very least.

It is possible that parishes only inventoried the goods of people who were materially rich or formerly of the middling sort that had fallen on hard times. Yet, there are numerous reasons to suppose that pauper inventories are representative of the approximate ten per cent of the English population that were in receipt of poor relief during the long eighteenth century.[25] For example, of the twelve people who had inventories made of their goods in Martham, Norfolk between 1758 and 1772, only four or five were made of the goods of people who had previously paid rates or had spouses who had done so, and in each case the amounts that they paid were small (*c.*2–3*s.* in rates for the year) and generally irregular.[26] The median and mean number of goods listed in each inventory from the entire sample is 37 and 48 items respectively. Appraisers valued the goods of paupers in 71 of the inventories. Of these, the possessions were worth a mean of £3 16*s.* 6*d.* in total, with a range of £20 and 3*s.* Of course, these figures are imperfect, but they nonetheless indicate that we are not looking at an atypical group and that the inventories are representative of paupers more widely. Statistically, around two-fifths to half of the long eighteenth-century population would end up on poor relief at one stage or more in their lives, and so the sources can potentially be used to understand households at the point in the lifecycle when they turned to the parish.[27]

Pauper inventories from female-headed households were most common from the late seventeenth century to the third quarter of the eighteenth century, but after this date male-headed pauper inventories became more common (Figure 1). At least 83 per cent of the women who had their goods inventoried were widowed or single. The picture is less clear

[22] Ages have been found for a further nine pauper inventories from Dorset and Kent. Used alongside the inventories from Essex and Norfolk, the average age remains high at 62.

[23] This point is developed further later in this section.

[24] Among others, see L. A. Botelho, *Old age and the English poor law, 1500–1700* (2004); Susannah R. Ottaway, *The decline of life: Old age in eighteenth-century England* (2004).

[25] On the numbers of paupers in England, see Lindert and Williamson, 'Revising', pp. 385–408; Allen, 'Class', pp. 88–125; BPP, 1777, IX, Second report. Reported by Thomas Gilbert, pp. 249–96; BPP, 1777, IX, Report from the committee appointed to inspect and consider the returns made by the overseers, pp. 297–539; BPP, 1803–4, Abstract of answers and returns … relative to the expenses and maintenance of the poor in England, p. 175; Williams, *Pauperism*, pp. 148–50.

[26] Norfolk Record Office [hereafter NRO], PD 710/68.

[27] For example, see the findings in: Harley, 'Consumption and poverty', pp. 81–104; Tim Wales, 'Poverty, poor relief and life-cycle: Some evidence from seventeenth century Norfolk', in Richard M. Smith (ed.), *Land, kinship and life-cycle* (1984), pp. 351–404; Steven King, *Poverty and welfare in England 1700–1850: A regional perspective* (2000), p. 80; Henry French, 'How dependent were the "dependent poor"? Poor relief and the life-course in Terling, Essex, 1752–1834', *Continuity and Change* 30 (2015), p. 201.

FIGURE 1. Distribution of Essex and Norfolk pauper inventories by gender, 1670–1834

with men, but where marital status could be determined, around 18 per cent were widowers or bachelors and 82 per cent were married. The proportions of men and women who received support inevitably varied from parish to parish, but these samples broadly reflect the relief profiles of numerous other parishes in the south and east of England over the long eighteenth century.[28] At least 25 per cent of the men and women from the pauper inventories lived with children.[29] This figure is likely to be an under-representation since it came from assessing wider overseers' papers where children were not always mentioned. Nevertheless, around 54 per cent of households which had children were headed by a woman and 46 per cent by a man.

In Norfolk most inventories were made during the 1720s and 1770s, whereas in Essex coverage is strongest during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Some decades in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries are therefore inadequately represented here (Figure 2). Most of the inventories were made in rural parishes meaning that studying urban trends is problematic.[30] With the gender, geographical, and chronological spread of the inventories being uneven, it is important to stress that the results are not comprehensive and for some decades they are necessarily tentative. Despite this, the numbers are sufficient to assess broad trends and reveal new insights into the rural domestic practices of the poor.

[28] King, *Poverty and welfare*, pp. 164–70.

[29] Children are defined as 15 years old or younger.

[30] If one classes 'rural' areas as possessing fewer than 1000 people and 'urban' areas as having more than this, then approximately three-quarters to four-fifths of the inventories can be categorized as rural and one-quarter to one-fifth urban. Most of these 'urban' spaces, however, were relatively small. Only ten of the inventories (2%) were made in settlements with a population of more than 2500 people. For more information on this definition, see Joseph Harley, 'Material lives of the English poor: A regional perspective, c.1670–1834' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Leicester, 2016), pp. 232–5.

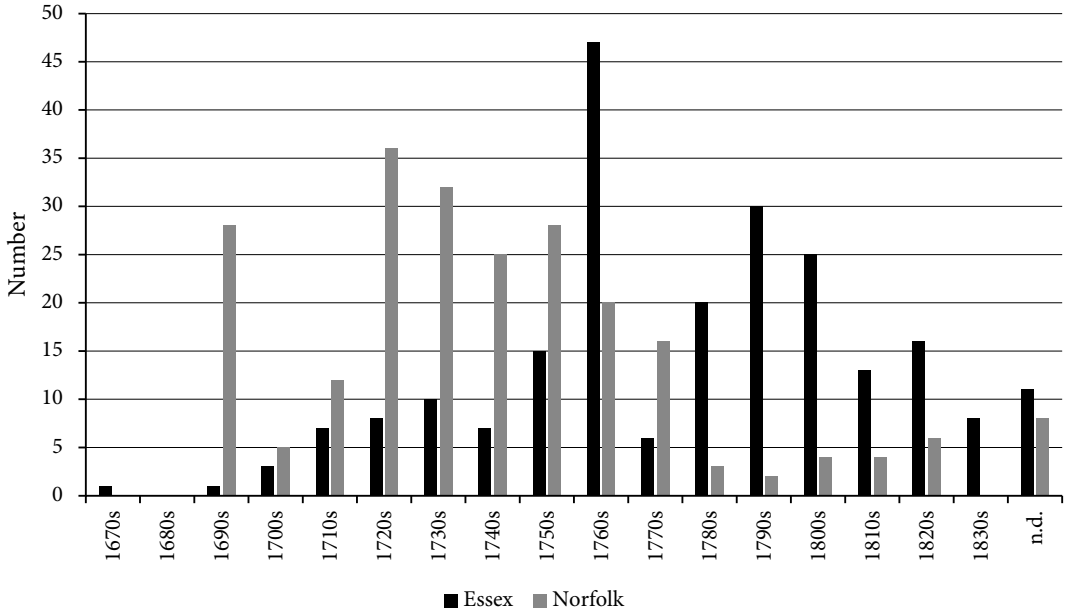

FIGURE 2. Chronological distribution of Essex and Norfolk pauper inventories, 1670–1834

The results are also divided by period and gender where necessary to show the reader relevant nuances in the data.

By quantifying the goods recorded in the pauper inventories, this article examines how often people participated in various forms of domestic production.[31] There are problems with this methodology. First, one should not use pauper inventories with the assumption that they are complete. Overseers tended to make surprise visits to parishioners' homes when they appraised their goods, but some paupers may have had the foresight to hide a few possessions in advance.[32] The goods in the inventories were often sold or recycled around the community after the pauper died, meaning that most appraisers probably neglected smaller items of little financial and utilitarian value. This means that items related to sewing and carding, as well as to craft industries such as button making and straw plaiting, are under-recorded in the inventories. People could have access to working tools which do not appear in the inventories, as they were borrowed from employers, hired, or communally owned. The laundering of neighbours' clothes, nursing, and taking in of lodgers could also be forms of domestic work and provide important earnings for the family economy,[33] but they are rarely found in the inventories since the tasks generally did not involve specialized tools.

[31] This is the same methodology used in probate inventory studies. See Overton *et al.*, *Production and consumption*, esp. pp. 33–86, 181–4; Buxton, *Domestic culture*, esp. pp. 95–117.

[32] For example, see Elizabeth Melling (ed.), *Kentish sources:* IV: *The poor* (1964), p. 104. On the hiding of goods, see Harley, *Norfolk pauper inventories*, pp. 67–9.

[33] Jane Whittle, 'A critique of approaches to "domestic work": Women, work and the pre-industrial economy', *Past and Present*, 243 (2019), pp. 35–70; Nicola Verdon, *Rural women workers in nineteenth-century England: Gender, work and wages* (2002), pp. 164–95.

Second, generic tubs, pails, and barrels could have been used for a range of tasks such as dairying, brewing, and food preservation, but unless adjectives are used to describe the items their use cannot be distinguished. Products like bread could also be made with unspecialized items such as earthenware pans, but if their use is not noted these items cannot be taken to reflect baking. The findings from the pauper inventories should thus be viewed as baseline figures rather than comprehensive statistics.

Third, it is possible that changes in production may stem from the poor buying more specialized items which are easier to identify in the inventories, rather than actual shifts in levels of participation. Changes in baking frequencies in the inventories, for example, may stem from people's growing use of kneading troughs.[34] While this is to some extent true, the results cannot be solely explained away for these reasons. Kneading troughs can be found in inventories from the late seventeenth century, and generic containers such as pails, barrels, and tubs, which can be linked to numerous activities, remained common or grew in ownership throughout the long eighteenth century.[35]

Fourth, it is difficult to analyse the scale of production and amount of time that people spent on various activities using inventories. For instance, somebody who just owned a spinning wheel in theory could produce as much yarn as someone who owned a multitude of spinning-related items if they worked intensely enough. It is also important to note that not all large-scale ventures were necessarily for commercial use and not all small operations were necessarily just for personal consumption. Most notably, it is not possible to determine how long was spent on domestic production compared to wage labour outside the home, which was probably the chief means by which the poor had supported themselves since the seventeenth century.[36] It is conceivable, for instance, that households continued to maintain levels of domestic production, while working more hours outside the home. Such findings would indicate that households had become increasingly industrious, but this change is undetectable in the inventories. This article thus only offers a partial insight into domestic work and there is a limit to how far one can take these arguments with regards to the industrious revolution theory. Yet, some cautious deductions and observations can be drawn about the scale and intensity of production by examining the types and numbers of productive items people owned.[37]

Finally, it is possible that some of the productive goods recorded in the pauper inventories were no longer in use and were left over from earlier periods in paupers' lives when they were younger and more able-bodied. While this is true in some cases, it is important to remember that poor relief was never intended to fully support people and that authorities expected individuals to use other means to supplement their incomes. On average, paupers in this sample from Essex and Norfolk who collected pensions received, respectively, 2*s.* 2*d.* and 1*s.* 7*d.* per week between 1670–1769, and 4*s.* 0*d.* and 3*s.* 1*d.* a week between 1770–1834. This would not have been enough to

[34] This issue is commonly noted in probate inventory studies. For example, Overton *et al.*, *Production and consumption*, p. 58.

[35] Barrels, firkins, pails, and/or tubs, for instance, are found in 49% of the inventories dated 1670–1769 and 52% of the inventories from 1770–1834.

[36] De Vries, *Industrious revolution*, p. 82; Shami Ghosh, 'Rural economies and transitions to capitalism: Germany and England compared (c.1200–c.1800), *J. Agrarian Change* 16 (2016), pp. 255–90.

[37] For more information on measuring scale of activity, see Overton *et al.*, *Production and consumption*, pp. 35–6.

live off, meaning that most paupers probably continued to produce goods at home even though they were deserving of relief and many were no longer as strong or dexterous as they once were.

II

This section seeks to establish when paupers increasingly owned a greater range of consumer goods. The data from the pauper inventories broadly suggests that between the late seventeenth century and the first half of the eighteenth century, the homes of many of the poor were relatively bare and contained few items (Table 1). Essex paupers tended to own more items of furniture such as chests of drawers, chairs, and tables than their counterparts in Norfolk during this period, but paupers from both counties generally owned few non-necessities such as looking glasses, fenders, and saucepans. It was during the second half of the eighteenth century when we see the most significant changes in Essex and Norfolk, indicating that this was the key period of change when the poor intensified their interaction with the market. There are, of course, exceptions as the consumption of some items such as beds was ubiquitous throughout the entire period, while the ownership of clocks/watches and feather beds was relatively low in Norfolk compared to Essex before the later eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In addition, owing to the small sample size of inventories from Norfolk during the final decades of the old poor law there are a few peculiarities in the data. For instance, table ownership in Norfolk was 88 per cent for the 1770s, but then it dipped to 70 per cent for 1780–1809, and increased to 100 per cent for 1810–1834. Notwithstanding these issues, the results overall suggest that the most notable change was during the 1770s, as this was the point when paupers increasingly owned a much wider range of items such as chests of drawers, tea goods, glassware, fenders, pokers, saucepans, and looking glasses. It is possible that the paupers had owned these items for long periods of time before their possessions were inventoried by the parish, meaning that the increase in items during the 1770s actually reflects the increased acquisition of goods in the previous decade or so. While this will be true in some cases it seems unlikely that most households followed this pattern, particularly considering that the same upward trends around the final quarter of the eighteenth century can also be found in alternative studies.[38]

We pause now to look at two important implications that these findings have on economic history, before examining production in the homes of paupers. First, many scholars now argue that Britain industrialized as a result of a series of long-term changes and have moved away from viewing the late eighteenth century as a unique turning point in economic and social development.[39] The sample size for the 1770s is only small, but the results indicate that the

[38] For example, King, 'Pauper inventories', pp. 155–91; Adrian Green, 'Heartless and unhomely? Dwellings of the poor in East Anglia and north-east England', in Joanne McEwan and Pamela Sharpe (eds), *Accommodating poverty: The housing and living arrangements of the English poor, c.1600–1850* (2011), pp. 69–101; John Styles, 'Lodging at the old bailey: Lodgings and their furnishings in eighteenth-century London', in John Styles and Amanda Vickery (eds), *Gender, taste, and material culture in Britain and North America, 1700–1830* (2006), pp. 61–80.

[39] For instance, prerequisite commercial and agricultural changes can be dated back to the sixteenth-seventeenth centuries. Joan Thirsk (ed.), *The agrarian history of England and Wales*, IV, *1500–1640* (1967); Shammas, *Pre-industrial*, pp. 76–118; Overton *et al.*, *Production and consumption*, pp. 7–8, 87–120.

TABLE 1. Percentage of Essex and Norfolk pauper inventories which record various consumer goods, 1670–1834

		c.1670–1749	*1750s*	*1760s*	*1770s*	*1780–1809*	*1810–1834*
Bed	Essex	100	100	100	100	99	97
	Norfolk	99	100	95	100	100	100
	All	99	100	98	100	99	98
Feather bed	Essex	53	53	11	67	51	46
	Norfolk	11	7	10	13	40	60
	All	20	23	11	27	49	49
Chest of drawers	Essex	21	27	26	33	40	49
	Norfolk	6	25	45	50	30	40
	All	9	26	32	45	39	47
Chair	Essex	95	93	76	100	91	97
	Norfolk	73	75	95	94	90	100
	All	78	81	82	95	91	98
Table	Essex	89	100	83	83	91	97
	Norfolk	66	79	80	88	70	100
	All	71	86	82	86	88	98
Tea-related items	Essex	1	13	17	33	71	77
	Norfolk	5	11	25	69	70	70
	All	2	12	20	59	71	76
Glassware	Essex	16	0	7	17	16	17
	Norfolk	4	7	15	19	30	10
	All	6	5	9	18	18	16
Saucepan	Essex	0	0	4	17	29	34
	Norfolk	2	4	5	6	0	30
	All	2	2	5	9	26	33
Fender	Essex	8	0	7	17	23	23
	Norfolk	0	0	0	13	0	30
	All	2	0	5	14	20	24
Poker	Essex	3	0	9	17	29	26
	Norfolk	0	7	15	19	10	10
	All	1	5	11	18	27	22
Looking glass	Essex	16	20	7	33	32	34
	Norfolk	15	7	10	44	20	40
	All	15	12	8	41	31	36
Clock/watch	Essex	3	0	7	33	23	29
	Norfolk	0	0	0	0	10	30
	All	1	0	5	9	21	29
Sample size		180	43	66	22	85	45

decade should still be considered as important in discourses of the Industrial Revolution.[40] With the poor increasingly appearing to engage with the consumer market during these years, this is likely to have had a considerable knock-on effect and stimulated production and activity in the wholesaling, retailing, and transport of various commodities. Many of the goods that the poor owned were probably acquired through informal markets and the second-hand trade, but such a significant increase in the range of consumer items in poor households was likely to have had some influence on the wider economy. This suggests that more credence should be given to the role of demand from the poorer sorts during the second half of the eighteenth century.[41]

Second, these results have important repercussions on our understanding of standards of living and consumption during the Industrial Revolution. Research on the working hours of the labouring sort has tended to paint a pessimistic picture, as empirical data has indicated that people worked longer hours and gave up more of their leisure time between 1750 and 1800 to make ends meet. With wages typically stagnating between the same dates, it has been supposed that material standards barely rose.[42] The results in Table 1 are in direct contradiction of this. Pauper inventories represent people who were dependent upon the ratepaying population and so show the material goods of some of the poorest in society. The fact that this group increasingly owned a greater range of belongings from the 1770s suggests that material standards were increasing and indicates that there were major changes in the material culture of the poor. Of course, some of the goods that paupers owned were probably kept from more prosperous times and poor law sources remind us that it was not uncommon for people to be lacking money, clothing, food, and fuel.[43] Moreover, probate inventory investigations show that the middling sort generally saw the same material advancements around a century earlier.[44] But to paint an entirely negative picture is clearly incorrect. Even if wages were stagnating from the second half of the eighteenth century, the poor were able to acquire goods through a considerable range of means, such as poor relief, the second-hand market, theft, and inheritance. Economic historians have long acknowledged the importance of wages and working hours, but greater efforts are needed to consider the informal economies that the poor used to make shift.[45]

[40] Further to this, I have 204 pauper inventories from Dorset, Kent, Leicestershire, Rutland, and Lancashire for the long eighteenth century which also indicate that the 1770s was a key turning point. These findings will be published in my forthcoming monograph, *At home with the poor: Consumer behaviour and material culture in England, c. 1650–1850*.

[41] This idea is not new; for example, see Elizabeth W. Gilboy, 'Demand as a factor in the industrial revolution', in R. M. Hartwell (ed.), *The causes of the industrial revolution* (1967), pp. 121–38. But historians have tended to emphasize supply and downplay demand, for instance, Joe Mokyr, 'Demand vs. supply in the industrial revolution', *JEcH* 37 (1977), pp. 981–1008.

[42] Allen and Weisdorf, 'Was there', pp. 715–29, 722; Voth, *Time and work*, p. 271; Hans-Joachim Voth, 'Living standards during the industrial revolution: An economist's guide', *American Economic Rev.* 93 (2003), pp. 223–4.

[43] For example, see the pauper letters in Thomas Sokoll (ed.), *Essex pauper letters, 1731–1837* (2001).

[44] For instance, the most common adjective used to describe looking glasses in the pauper inventories is 'small', whereas probate inventories show that the middling sort often owned highly decorative and expensive looking glasses. On middling consumption, see Weatherill, *Consumer behaviour*, pp. 25–42; Overton *et al.*, *Production and consumption*, pp. 87–120; Shammas, *Pre-industrial*.

[45] This is not to say that all studies neglect these factors, but that more is needed on non-wage, non-monetary sources of income and consumption. See here:

TABLE 2. Average number of activities recorded in Essex and Norfolk pauper inventories, 1670–1834

	1670–1769	*1770–1834*	*All years*
Essex	2.0	1.7	1.9
Norfolk	0.9	1.8	1.1
All	1.3	1.8	1.5
Sample size	294	152	454

III

We start to examine domestic production in pauper homes by quantifying the number of activities that could be ascertained from the inventories and measuring how this changed over the long eighteenth century (Table 2).[46] The inventories are split into two periods – 1670–1769 and 1770–1834 – as 1770 is the key decade when the possession of consumer goods in poor households increased most significantly (see above). The results show interesting regional differences. In Norfolk, the figures suggest that as people increasingly consumed more goods over the period, households diversified and engaged in a wider range of productive endeavours. On average, Norfolk pauper households participated in an extra activity from 1770 compared to 1670–1769. The inventories from Essex suggest that paupers were involved in a greater number of productive tasks than the poor of Norfolk. However, in contrast the results indicate no significant change over time, with the inventories dated 1670–1769 showing evidence of 2.0 activities on average and the inventories of 1770–1834 recording a mean of 1.7.

Tables 3 and 4 have been constructed to more precisely measure how domestic production changed over the long eighteenth century. The results show that between the late seventeenth and late eighteenth centuries the mean number of domestic industries in Norfolk pauper households was relatively low (0.7–1.1 per household), but that between the 1770s and 1800s each household participated in around an extra activity on average (1.8–2.0 per household). Between the same dates only 17–20 per cent of Norfolk households showed evidence of no domestic production. These results are based on inventories which should never be assumed to be complete, yet they nevertheless suggest that Norfolk households branched out. In Essex, there are much fewer inventories dated 1670–1749 (37) compared to Norfolk (138), and so the results for these decades are highly tentative. Nonetheless, they indicate that household production peaked between 1710–29 and then gradually declined. However, domestic production clearly remained important in Essex as pauper households participated in 1.8–1.9 activities on

Note 45 *continued*
Craig Muldrew and Steven King, 'Cash, wages and the economy of makeshifts in England, 1650–1800', in Peter Scholliers and Leonard Schwarz (eds), *Experiencing wages: Social and cultural aspects of wage forms in Europe since 1500* (2003), pp. 155–80; Steven King and Alannah Tomkins, *The poor in England 1700–1850: An economy of makeshifts* (2003); Griffin, 'Diets', pp. 71–111; John Hatcher and Judy Z. Stephenson (eds), *Seven centuries of unreal wages: The unreliable data, sources and methods that have been used for measuring standards of living in the past* (2018).

[46] This includes activities such as spinning, weaving, sewing, carding, baking, brewing, food preservation (e.g. salting), shoemaking, cider production, dairying, distilling, coppering, and arable/pastoral farming.

TABLE 3. Average number of activities related to domestic production recorded in Essex and Norfolk pauper inventories, 1670–1834

	1670–1709	*1710–29*	*1730–49*	*1750–69*	*1770–89*	*1790–1809*	*1810–34*
Essex	1.4	2.7	2.2	1.9	1.8	1.8	1.5
Norfolk	0.7	0.8	1	1.1	1.8	2	1.5
All	0.8	1.2	1.3	1.5	1.8	1.8	1.5
Sample size	38	63	75	109	46	61	45

TABLE 4. Percentage of Essex and Norfolk pauper inventories which do not record evidence of domestic production, 1670–1834

	1670–1709	*1710–29*	*1730–49*	*1750–69*	*1770–89*	*1790–1809*	*1810–34*
Essex	20	7	6	8	15	24	24
Norfolk	64	46	37	20	20	17	30
All	58	37	29	14	17	23	22
Sample size	38	63	75	109	46	61	45

average between 1750 and 1809. Only around one-fifth of the inventories showed signs of no domestic production between the same dates. Thus, households in Essex were clearly still diverse and busy spaces despite domestic production possibly being on the decline. From the early nineteenth century, households in both counties appear to have become less varied and participated in fewer forms of domestic production.

The fall in domestic production from the 1810s may stem from problems with the sample. As explored above, authorities took more inventories of households headed by men from the third quarter of the eighteenth century and the number of inventories that survive for Norfolk significantly declines from the 1780s. Yet, the larger number of inventories for Essex from the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century show a similar decline in domestic production to Norfolk. When the sources are separated into inventories which are male- and female-headed, the results also show similar patterns over time, with there being a noticeable increase in the number of activities recorded in the inventories between the 1750s–1800s and a decrease by the nineteenth century (Table 5).[47] More troubling, it could be argued that there was not a decline in domestic production in the early nineteenth century, as households increasingly moved to cottage industries such as straw-plaiting and glove making,[48] which are harder to detect in

[47] The greater number of activities in male-headed households probably stems from the fact that these homes tended to have more people in them than female-headed ones. It is beyond the means of this piece to analyse these gendered differences in the detail that it deserves.

[48] Verdon, *Rural women*, pp. 133, 141–61; Deborah Valenze, *The first industrial woman* (1995), pp. 113–27.

TABLE 5. Average number of activities recorded in male- and female-headed pauper inventories, 1670–1834

	1670–1709	*1710–29*	*1730–49*	*1750–69*	*1770–89*	*1790–1809*	*1810–34*
Male-headed	1.1	1.6	1.4	1.8	2.0	2.0	1.7
Female-headed	0.5	1.0	1.1	1.3	1.6	1.6	1.0

the inventories. This issue is difficult to overcome, but it is important to remember that, as Maxine Berg has argued, such industries were generally 'smaller and poorer than their great predecessors' such as spinning and 'sometimes not real replacements at all'.[49] There is also good reason to think that the inventories reflect a real decline in domestic production when we focus on trends in women and children's work.

Over the nineteenth century the male-breadwinner household gradually became the norm and opportunities for female and juvenile employment gradually declined. But during the early years of industrialization women and children appear to have been an important part of the workforce and increasingly looked outside of the home for work at the expense of domestic production.[50] Though often dependent upon regional circumstances,[51] farming remained a vital occupation employing around a third of all women at the turn of the nineteenth century.[52] A wide variety of textile industries including worsted, cotton, silk, and lace manufacture employed high proportions of female workers.[53] The numbers of women in domestic service increased from the eighteenth century, meaning that they outnumbered men in the sector by approximately nine to one in the mid-nineteenth century according to census data.[54] From the late eighteenth century growing numbers of children also worked outside the domestic sphere at younger ages,[55] resulting in less spare time and declining inclinations to help in the production of homemade commodities. Girls tended to learn how to make yarn, cheese, beer

[49] Berg, *Manufactures*, p. 94.

[50] Ivy Pinchbeck, *Women workers and the industrial revolution 1750–1850* (1985; reprint of 1930 edn); Sara Horrell and Jane Humphries, 'Women's labour force participation and the transition to the male-breadwinner family, 1790–1865', *EcHR* 48 (1995), pp. 89–117; Joyce Burnette, *Gender, work and wages in the industrial revolution* (2008), pp. 16–71, 306–26; Maxine Berg, 'What difference did women's work make to the industrial revolution?', *Hist. Workshop J.* 35 (1993), pp. 22–44; Berg, *Manufacturing*, pp. 117–44. This view is not without issue. Emma Griffin, for instance, argued that opportunities for women outside the home were declining during the industrial revolution. However, this claim is based on the analysis of only a dozen working-class autobiographies, of which many do not cover the early years of industrialization. Emma Griffin, *Liberty's dawn: A people's history of the industrial revolution* (2013), pp. 84–106.

[51] For example, circumstances were particularly difficult for rural female workers in East Anglia compared to parts of East Riding of Yorkshire. Verdon, *Rural women*; Sharpe, *Adapting*, pp. 71–100.

[52] Burnette, *Gender*, pp. 50–7. See also Sharpe, *Adapting*, pp. 71–100; Verdon, *Rural women*; Pinchbeck, *Women workers*, pp. 7–110.

[53] Burnette, *Gender*, pp. 39–44; Pinchbeck, *Women workers*, pp. 111–201; Sharpe, *Adapting*, pp. 19–70.

[54] Bridget Hill, *Women, work and sexual politics in eighteenth-century England* (1994), pp. 125–7.

[55] Sara Horrell and Jane Humphries, '"The exploitation of little children": Child labour and the family economy in the industrial revolution', *Explorations in Economic Hist.* 32 (1995), pp. 485–516; Jane Humphries, *Childhood and child labour in the British industrial revolution* (2010), pp. 172–209; Griffin, *Liberty's dawn*, pp. 59–60.

and so on from their mothers,[56] and so with both parties spending more time outside the home these skills were lost across the generations. Coupled with the mechanization of industries such as spinning, intensifying regional specialization, and the rendering of customs such as gleaning and wood gathering as illegal, domestic industries appear to have declined as they became less competitive and feasible to undertake by the early nineteenth century.[57]

Taken as a whole, these results are particularly important. They show that as people increasingly bought more consumer goods from the 1770s, households diversified or continued to engage in myriad forms of domestic production. It was only in the early nineteenth century, when many consumer items had become more common and less novel, that households across the counties started to move away from diverse forms of domestic production and perhaps specialized. The next three sections will examine the main types of household activities that paupers were involved in and how they changed over the long eighteenth century.

IV

Textile manufacture could be an important way for women and children to contribute to the family economy. By making yarn oneself and getting a local weaver to produce the cloth, clothing could be produced for a family much more cheaply than it could be purchased from retailers.[58] Or, alternatively, families might be involved in textile manufacture through the putting-out system, whereby middlemen supplied the raw materials and marketed the finished product, while women organized the production at home in exchange for a piece rate.[59] Some historians have claimed that the amounts of money generated from these networks could be sizable. Craig Muldrew, for example, estimated that a wife and two daughters could contribute 42 per cent of the total family income through spinning.[60] More commonly, however, scholars have argued that spinning was poorly paid and not very productive.[61] In either instance, the pauper inventories show that textile manufacture was important in pauper households as 45 per cent of the inventories show some sign of the industry (Table 6). The results suggest that weaving was relatively uncommon in pauper households. In Essex and Norfolk only 2 and 3 per cent of the inventories respectively recorded looms or other weaving-related items.

[56] Berg, *Manufactures*, pp. 140–2.

[57] The literature on mechanization and regional differences is vast, but the main findings are neatly summarized in: Nigel Goose, 'Regions, 1700–1870', in Roderick Floud, Jane Humphries and Paul Johnson (eds), *The Cambridge economic history of modern Britain*, I, *1700–1870* (2014), pp. 149–77; Robert C. Allen, 'Technology', in Floud, Humphries and Johnson, *Cambridge economic history*, pp. 292–320. On gleaning and other customs, see Peter King, 'Customary rights and women's earnings: The importance of gleaning to the rural labouring poor', *EcHR*, XLIV (1991), pp. 461–76; Sharpe, *Adapting*, pp. 80–5; Verdon, *Rural women*, pp. 180–6; Valenze, *Industrial woman*, pp. 29–47.

[58] John Styles, *The dress of the people: Everyday fashion in eighteenth-century England* (2007), p. 142.

[59] Valenze, *Industrial woman*, pp. 71–5; Berg, *Manufactures*, pp. 180–203; Alice Clark, *Working life of women in the seventeenth century* (1982; repr. of 1919 edn), pp. 93–149; Ivy Pinchbeck, *Women workers and the industrial revolution, 1750–1850* (1985; repr. of 1930 edn), pp. 111–56.

[60] Craig Muldrew, '"Th'ancient distaff" and "whirling spindle": Measuring the contribution of spinning to household earnings and the national economy in England, 1550–1770', *EcHR* 65 (2012), p. 510.

[61] For example, Jane Humphries and Benjamin Schneider, 'Spinning the industrial revolution', *EcHR* 72 (2019), 126–55; Clark, *Working life*, pp. 93–149; Pinchbeck, *Women workers*, pp. 138–47.

TABLE 6. Percentage of Essex and Norfolk pauper inventories which record textile producing goods, 1670–1834

Textile manufacture (any type)	Essex	43
	Norfolk	48
	All	45
Preparation (i.e. carding/combing)	Essex	3
	Norfolk	<1
	All	2
Spinning	Essex	43
	Norfolk	47
	All	45
Weaving	Essex	2
	Norfolk	3
	All	2
Sewing	Essex	1
	Norfolk	<1
	All	1
Sample size		454

TABLE 7. Percentage of Essex and Norfolk pauper inventories which record spinning-related items, 1670–1834

	1670–1709	*1710–29*	*1730–49*	*1750–69*	*1770–89*	*1790–1809*	*1810–34*
Essex	0	60	56	69	42	29	9
Norfolk	33	44	56	58	60	33	20
All	16	48	56	64	50	30	11
Sample size	38	63	75	109	46	61	45

The preparation of textiles (such as combing and carding) is probably underrepresented in the inventories since it involved the use of inexpensive items such as combs. Archaeological evidence and sources such as diaries also suggest that sewing was much more common than the inventory data shows.[62] Most notably, the results show that hand spinning was prominent in eighteenth-century East Anglia. Domestic spinning grew in importance from the late seventeenth century in Essex and Norfolk and by the middle decades of the eighteenth century around half of all pauper households contained spinning-related items (Table 7). By the 1790s, however, domestic spinning was clearly in decline as the industry moved to the north. Between 1810 and 1834 only around one in ten inventories recorded spinning-related items. The last spinning wheel found in the sample was from an inventory dated 1821.

[62] Mary C. Beaudry, *Findings: The material culture of needlework and sewing* (2006); Maureen Day Goggin and Beth Fowkes Tobin (eds), *Women and the material culture of needlework and textiles, 1750–1950* (2009).

It is most probable that spinning only generated small amounts of money, which was not enough to live off or was used on an ad hoc basis for personal consumption. Out of the 173 pauper inventories which record spinning wheels, 98 households only had one and 44 had two. Moreover, the average number of spinning wheels per household appears to have gradually declined over the long eighteenth century.[63] Of course, a number of the pauper inventories record the possessions of single/widowed individuals or elderly people whose children had long moved out meaning that additional wheels were not needed. People could have also hypothetically earned a decent income from labouring on a single wheel by working long enough hours. Nevertheless, these numbers suggest that most people would not have been able to generate anything more than small amounts of cash. Additionally, none of the inventories record materials such as flax, hemp, or wool, suggesting that most people worked with small quantities that were not worth noting by appraisers. People may have used materials supplied to them by middlemen which would not appear in the inventories; but the complete lack of materials nonetheless indicates that most people only produced small quantities of thread. Furthermore, when materials were given to paupers by parochial officials they generally only appear in small quantities, indicating that most indigent individuals were only given enough materials to supplement their incomes or produce apparel for their family. For example, William Catt who had his goods appraised by Ightham (Kent) parish in 1726, only received 1*s*. worth of 'wooll and Carding' in around 1728.[64] Finally, while paupers worked on spinning wheels they appear to have laboured in other forms of domestic production, which would have probably distracted them from working long enough hours to earn high wages making thread.

V

With large parts of Essex and Norfolk being committed to agricultural production and the majority of the inventories being made in rural areas, it is probable that most of the paupers in this sample were involved in some form of agricultural work. But to what extent was this on smallholdings or larger farms of their own? The pauper inventories overall indicate that it was not unusual for the poor to be involved in some sort of domestic farming activity, but that in most cases this production would have taken place on commons (if available) or in gardens (Table 8). Livestock was found in only 4 per cent of the pauper inventories, but items connected to animal ownership such as butchering, dairying, and feeding items increased, suggesting that the pauper inventories may underrepresent animal ownership or that people used to own animals in earlier life. In all likelihood it is the latter, since animals had high financial and utilitarian value and so there is no reason why appraisers would neglect to note livestock if present. Crops are also rarely recorded in inventories, but when one looks at the ownership of tools such as spades, scythes, sickles, and so on, it is probable that many more people were involved in some form of arable farming. Between 1770–1834, for example,

[63] The averages are as follows: 1670–1709 2.0 wheels per household (38 inventories); 1710–49 1.6 wheels per household (138 inventories); 1750–89 1.7 wheels per household (155 inventories); and 1790–1834 1.3 wheels per household (106 inventories).

[64] Kent History Library Centre P202/12/2.

TABLE 8. Percentage of pauper inventories which record arable, pastoral, and outdoor-related activities, 1670–1834

		1670–1769	*1770–1834*	*All years*
Animals (actual)	Essex	7	5	7
	Norfolk	2	5	2
	All	3	5	4
Animals (actual and potential)	Essex	14	26	21
	Norfolk	5	19	7
	All	9	24	14
Crops	Essex	4	2	3
	Norfolk	3	0	2
	All	3	1	3
Agricultural/ outdoor tools	Essex	38	41	39
	Norfolk	16	35	19
	All	23	39	29
Sample size		294	152	454

TABLE 9. Mean and median number of agricultural- and outdoor-related items recorded in Essex and Norfolk pauper inventories, 1670–1834

		1670–1769	*1770–1834*	*All years*
Mean	Essex	4.4	6.7	5.6
	Norfolk	3.3	5.2	3.8
	All	3.9	6.4	5.0
Median	Essex	3	4	4
	Norfolk	2.5	6	3
	All	3	5	3
Sample size		294	152	454

39 per cent of pauper inventories recorded agricultural/outdoor tools compared to 23 per cent in the proceeding period.

It is most likely that the poor worked outdoors on a small scale to provide the family with food or fuel. Where livestock is recorded, it is generally only a single animal for food that is noted.[65] In fact, out of the 20 inventories that recorded livestock only nine of these recorded more than one animal. Of these, four people had poultry; two had bees; one had two pigs; one had a cow, three sheep, and one lamb; and one owned a cow, pig, and ass. Such small numbers

[65] Animals for transport were relatively uncommon. Horses were not found in any of the inventories and asses were noted in three of the 20 inventories which recorded animals.

of livestock did not need much land to graze on and so is highly suggestive of paupers using their gardens.[66] These animals may have also been kept on commons, but with enclosure sweeping through the south, access to this land was drying up over the period.[67]

Crops of some sort are only mentioned in twelve inventories and these too indicate that the scale of production was small. The pauper inventory of Widow Norton's goods in Hingham, Norfolk recorded 'Wood & Corn' worth only 3*s*.[68] Widow Tutell of Gissing, Norfolk owned '2 bushels of weate'; Susan Burrows of Redenhall with Harleston and Wortwell, Norfolk had 'some wheat'; and in John and Ann Hudgill's Aveley, Essex garden in 1826 there were potatoes and beans growing.[69] The produce recorded in the inventories did not even always come from paupers' own land. John Bruster's buttery in Mashbury, Essex, for instance, included 'Large parcels of Wheat Gleans', suggesting that the crops were gleaned off a local farmer's lands.[70] Tables 8 and 9 indicate that the percentage and mean/median numbers of agricultural/outdoor tools that people owned increased over the eighteenth century, implying that the growing of food was more common than the crop figures suggest. The vast majority of these tools, however, were hand tools such as spades, hatchets, and hoes, and they were largely only owned in enough numbers for one or two people to maintain a small plot of vegetables in a garden of some sort. The words 'garden' or 'gardening' appear more often in the inventories than 'wheat', 'hops', or 'corn', further indicating that the tools were primarily used in a domestic setting.[71] These implements could also be used to collect fuel. Six of the inventories from central and eastern Norfolk, for instance, recorded flag spades which were probably used to dig up peat from the Fens in the west or wetlands in the east of Norfolk. Axes and hatchets, which would have primarily been used to maintain grounds or collect firewood, were found in 36 per cent of the inventories which noted agricultural/outdoor tools. These results clearly indicate that large-scale agricultural production was beyond the means of paupers using their own lands or commons. Instead they engaged in arable and pastoral production on a much more modest scale to produce small amounts of food and fuel for personal consumption. These results correspond well to several other studies which show that around one-quarter to one-third of the rural poor were involved in the small-scale growing of vegetables and that animal ownership was relatively low among the poor by the late eighteenth century.[72]

[66] Overton *et al.*, *Production and consumption*, pp. 40–1. Although these numbers are small, livestock could still be highly important to people. See Jane Humphries, 'Enclosure, common rights, and women: The proletarianization of families in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries', *JEcH* 50 (1990), pp. 24–31.

[67] Michael Turner, *English parliamentary enclosure: Its historical geography and economic history* (1980); Roger J. P. Kain, John Chapman and Richard R. Oliver, *The enclosure maps of England and Wales, 1595–1918* (2004); J. M. Neeson, *Commoners: Common right, enclosure and social change in England, 1700–1820* (1993); Snell, *Annals*, pp. 138–227.

[68] NRO, PD 575/128.

[69] NRO, PD 50/44; NRO PD 295/102; Essex RO [hereafter ERO] D/P 157/18/10.

[70] ERO, D/P 57/18/1.

[71] 'Garden'/'gardening' are noted 12 times, whereas 'wheat', 'hops', and 'corn' are recorded five, two, and one times respectively.

[72] Among others, see Griffin, 'Diets', pp. 88–9, 99–100; Ian Gazeley and Sara Horrell, 'Nutrition in the English agricultural labourer's household over the course of the long nineteenth century', *EcHR* 66 (2013), pp. 762–4; Frederic Morton Eden, *The state of the poor*, I–III (1797); David Davies, *The case of labourers in husbandry* (1795); Leigh Shaw-Taylor, 'Labourers, cows, common rights and parliamentary enclosure: The evidence of contemporary comment c.1760–1810', *Past and Present* 171 (2001), 95–126; Snell, *Annals*, pp. 174–80.

TABLE 10. Percentage of Essex and Norfolk pauper inventories which record various food processing activities, 1670–1834

		1670–1719	*1720–59*	*1760–89*	*1790–1809*	*1810–34*	*All years*
Baking	Essex	67	65	63	40	54	56
	Norfolk	4	5	35	33	60	15
	All	18	20	53	39	56	35
Brewing	Essex	58	23	10	24	3	17
	Norfolk	18	9	28	3	10	15
	All	26	12	16	23	4	16
Dairy work	Essex	0	10	1	4	6	6
	Norfolk	2	2	13	0	0	3
	All	2	4	5	3	4	5
Food preservation	Essex	8	3	3	13	6	6
	Norfolk	2	2	0	0	0	2
	All	4	2	2	11	4	4
Sample size		57	161	112	61	45	454

VI

In this section we focus on the turning of raw produce into food and drink. Overall, the pauper inventories suggest that food processing was less common than textile production and farming, and that the poor in Essex engaged themselves in a slightly wider range of activities than their counterparts in Norfolk (Table 10). Evidence of baking (generally bread) was found in around half of the Essex pauper inventories throughout the entire period. In Norfolk, on the other hand, the prevalence of baking items significantly increased from 4–5 per cent between 1670–1759 to 60 per cent between 1810 and 1834. Food preservation, such as salting and pickling, was found in only 6 and 2 per cent of inventories from Essex and Norfolk. Only 5 per cent of inventories showed evidence of butter, cheese, or milk processing, indicating that dairying was relatively uncommon in both counties. The distillation of spirits could not be ascertained in any of the sources and only two inventories showed evidence of cider production, probably owing to the fact that cider was primarily drunk in south-west England.[73] The drinking of beer and ale was conversely more common elsewhere in England, with brewing being found in 17 and 15 per cent of Essex and Norfolk inventories respectively. In Norfolk brewing was found in 28 per cent of inventories 1760–89 and declined in the decades after this. In Essex, on the other hand, brewing appears to have peaked during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century and then declined.

Most of the objects connected to food and drink production were owned in small numbers, suggesting that these activities were primarily for personal consumption. This is not to say that the selling of surplus beer, cheese, or other produce did not happen and was not important

[73] Henry French, *The middle sort of people in provincial England, 1600–1750* (2007), pp. 53, 72.

where present, but it is to say that this was probably not the main purpose of these activities. Large quantities of finished foodstuffs such as beer or butter, for example, are rarely noted in the inventories. Most of the people who owned brine or powdering tubs for preserving meats and other food only owned one. No one owned more than three tubs. More than half of the inventories that record dairying goods recorded only one item connected to milk, butter, or cheese production. In contrast, research on labourers' probate inventories – which likely record the goods of the labouring sort who were wealthier than most – indicates that such activities were much more common than in pauper inventories.[74] Muldrew, for instance, found that 29 and 37 per cent of his sources recorded dairying and brewing equipment respectively during the eighteenth century.[75]

Collectively, the results from the pauper inventories indicate that domestic production of food and drink was important in some indigent households, but that it was generally conducted on a small scale. Where and when the activities were of importance also varied considerably. Brewing, for instance, appears to have peaked in Essex in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century and in Norfolk it reached its zenith during the 1760s and 1780s. With the exception of baking, most households had clearly started to move away from domestic food processing by the early nineteenth century. The last inventory to record evidence of dairying in Norfolk was dated 1773. Brewing and food processing were only found in 4 per cent of inventories between 1810 and 1834. The next section will consider how the results from the pauper inventories cast light on the thesis of an 'industrious revolution'.

VII

Inventories (of any kind) only offer limited evidence to confirm or disprove the industrious revolution theory. They allow one to study consumption and domestic production, but they fall short of telling us how hard people worked and how long families were occupied with these various forms of domestic production compared to wage labour. Consequently, it is important to stress that the findings are only tentative and that further work is needed to confirm (or disprove) these claims. Nevertheless, the sources do reveal several warning signs which undermine the theory. In order for an industrious revolution to have happened in pauper households, we might expect the inventories to show a decline in small-scale domestic activities for personal consumption as people focused on work which could earn them money; or we would expect households to specialize and scale-up one form of domestic production to make produce which could be profitably sold to others. The paupers in this sample were often elderly and consequently not as industrious as they might have been, yet while they were involved in new patterns of consumption from the late eighteenth century they also appear to have still been engaged in various domestic activities. This runs counter to de Vries' idea that households specialized to acquire new consumer goods. There are two possible reasons why pauper households continued to be diverse spaces. First, paupers may have continued to have

[74] Harley, 'Consumption and poverty', pp. 81–104; Weatherill, *Consumer behaviour*, pp. 191–4; Coward, *Stuart age*, p. 55; King, 'Pauper inventories', pp. 156, 176; Keibek and Shaw-Taylor, 'By-employments', pp. 259, 261.

[75] Muldrew, *Food*, p. 255.

been occupied in domestic production as a method to reduce costs and thereby save money which could be used to purchase consumer goods. Alternatively, households simply continued to work in myriad ways to make ends meet.

There can be little doubt that the poor were interested in acquiring consumer goods. Numerous contemporaries, for instance, wrote disdainfully about how the poor were apparently becoming preoccupied with frivolous and demoralizing goods such as tea, gin, white bread, readymade clothing, and luxury goods.[76] To claim that numerous poor households continued to labour with domestic production to obtain various consumer goods, however, seems unlikely. The poor witnessed some of the most challenging circumstances that they had faced in generations during the eighteenth century. Real wages appear to have stagnated for many men from the late eighteenth century and it was not until several decades into the nineteenth century when they recovered.[77] The food of agricultural workers was nutritionally poor and expensive, taking up around three-quarters of their incomes.[78] Populations were growing exponentially and textile work increasingly moved to the north, resulting in widespread unemployment and underemployment in the south.[79] Levels of pauperism and costs for ratepayers increased on an unprecedented scale as a result of these new challenges. In Essex and Norfolk 16.4 and 15.2 per cent of their respective populations were on poor relief at the turn of the nineteenth century, compared to a national average of 11.4 per cent.[80] With the poor facing these issues, it seems most likely that changes in domestic production came from the basic need to make ends meet and not the desire to acquire additional belongings.

VIII

When probate inventories have been analysed by wealth, it has generally been found that poorer households engaged in fewer forms of domestic production compared to wealthier homes between the late seventeenth and mid-eighteenth century.[81] However, because probate inventories generally record the possessions of more affluent people and fade out over the eighteenth century, these results are open to question and we do not know what happened in

[76] Jonathan White, 'Luxury and labour: Ideas of labouring-class consumption in eighteenth-century England' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Warwick, 2001).

[77] Charles H. Feinstein, 'Pessimism perpetuated: Real wages and the standard of living in Britain during and after the industrial revolution', *JEcH* 58 (1998), pp. 625–58; Gregory Clark, 'Farm wages and living standards in the industrial revolution: England, 1670–1869', *EcHR*, 54 (2001), pp. 477–505; Gregory Clark, 'The condition of the working class in England, 1209–2004', *J. Political Economy* 113 (2005), pp. 1307–40; Robert C. Allen, 'Pessimism preserved: Real wages in the British industrial revolution' (unpublished working paper, Oxford University Department of Economics, 2007). However, it is important to note that wage and costs of living series have recently come under sustained criticism regarding their accuracy. Most notably by Hatcher and Stephenson, *Unreal wages*.

[78] Griffin, 'Diets', pp. 82–91; Gazeley and Horrell, 'Nutrition', pp. 757–84; Shammas, *Pre-industrial*, pp. 121–56; Robert Fogel, 'New sources and techniques for the study of secular trends in nutritional status, health, mortality, and the process of aging', *Historical Methods* 26 (1993), pp. 5–43; Roderick Floud, Robert W. Fogel, Bernard Harris and Sok Chul, *The changing body: Health, nutrition, and human development in the western world since 1700* (2011).

[79] King and Timmins, *Making*, pp. 33–66; Berg, *Manufactures*, pp. 89–96, 162–222.

[80] Williams, *Pauperism*, pp. 149–50.

[81] Shammas, *Pre-industrial*, pp. 34–40; Overton *et al.*, *Production and consumption*, pp. 137–53; Sneath, 'Consumption'.

poor households over the Industrial Revolution. This article has helped to address this problem. Using pauper inventories, it has been found that as paupers increasingly acquired a wider range of consumer goods during the second half of the eighteenth century, their households were engaged in a number of activities including breadmaking and agricultural work, as well as more established forms of production such as spinning. These activities are likely to have primarily been for personal consumption and modest pots of money, as they appear to have generally been small in scale. It was only decades after various items had entered pauper homes that households became less work-orientated.

The findings raise questions as to whether the industrious revolution theory needs revising and how applicable it is in different settings. It is important to note that it is not my intention here to resolve fully whether the concept is ultimately correct or inaccurate. Little can be said about how people split their days between domestic and external work using inventories. Moreover, numerous other studies have offered convincing evidence that people did, indeed, work longer hours from the eighteenth century.[82] Yet, the results indicate that aspects of the theory – namely how households apparently specialized and moved away from small-scale production before consuming various new goods – are problematic. While these facets of the theory have been successfully applied to certain contexts such as Friesland in the Netherlands,[83] this piece reminds us that the move from a largely rural self-sufficient society to a more market-orientated capitalist economy can vary considerably and take different paths depending upon local and regional context.

This study also has key implications on other influential historiographical debates such as the demise of the old poor law, women's work, and consumer behaviour. From the late eighteenth century, the poor laws reached their 'crisis' years as the numbers of people on poor relief and costs of the system increased substantially. The decline in domestic production has often been connected to this,[84] yet little work has been conducted to analyse the nature, extent, and date of this change. This research shows that the decline in domestic production started around 1810 in Essex and Norfolk. Because this date closely coincides with some of the largest increases in poor relief expenditure and when parishes increasingly experimented with new policies such as the roundsman system, it is probable that this decline in domestic work had some part to play in this 'crisis'.[85] The literature on women's labour is complex and often contrary as some writers choose to emphasize the new opportunities for work that some women had, while others stress the long-term decline of their presence in the workforce and the rise of the male-breadwinner household.[86] This article far from resolves this debate, but since women were often the main producers of goods in the domestic sphere the research reveals fresh insights into female roles and agency. Clearly women of the period were not passive and would adjust what was produced

[82] For example, Voth, *Time and work*.

[83] Jan de Vries, 'Peasant demand patterns and economic development: Friesland, 1550–1700', in William N. Parker and Eric L. Jones (eds), *European peasants and their markets: Essays in agrarian economic history* (1975), pp. 205–66.

[84] For example, George R. Boyer, *An economic history of the English poor law 1750–1850* (1990).

[85] This is not to say that this was the main reason for the 'crisis' of the old poor law. Other factors include the loss of common rights, war, harvest failures, and rising food prices. Peter Dunkley, *The crisis of the old poor law in England 1795–1834: An interpretive essay* (1982).

[86] This extensive debate is well summarized in: Verdon, *Rural workers*, pp. 7–39.

in the home in accordance to their needs and levels of poverty. Finally, the research allows us to understand the material culture of poverty more fully. It has shown that one needs to look beyond wages and prices and examine the second-hand trade, poor relief, credit, theft, and myriad other informal economies, to understand how people bypassed their low incomes to consume more goods over the eighteenth century. Additionally, the inventories show that the poor were not just consumers of items in the late eighteenth century, but could also be important producers of goods such as food, drink, and textiles. Research on consumption and production is often polarized with scholars talking past each other and not researching the two topics together.[87] This article shows that to understand the domestic sphere a greater awareness of both consumption and production is needed.

[87] There are, of course, exceptions including: Overton *et al.*, *Production and consumption*; Shammas, *Pre-industrial*; Muldrew, *Food*.