

THE REVEREND JAMES WOODROFFE'S JOURNALS

**Social welfare and the parishioner–curate interface in
the parish of St Matthew, Bethnal Green, 1888–1892**

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Introduction

During the nineteenth century, churches in England's towns and cities were often called upon to deal with the social as well as the religious needs of their working-class parishioners. While typical urban workers mostly did not go to church or chapel, and were generally rather hostile to organised religion,¹ the parish clergyman was an essential figure to those hoping to access financial, medical and other assistance from charitable sources. The research for this dissertation focused on a very specific instance of the interface between a clergyman and his parishioners through the journals kept between 1888 and 1892 by the Reverend James Woodroffe, curate of St Matthew's, Bethnal Green,² and the factors that structured the relationships between the curate and his parishioners. The dissertation is divided into three main chapters that question, respectively, the ways that issues of class and gender, welfare networks and changing ideologies, and personal religious orientation structured the relationships between Woodroffe and the individuals who visited him in his role as curate. It makes the claim that looking at the relationships between the curate and his parishioners provides a unique insight into the lives of the poor of St Matthew's as individuals, rather than as a homogeneous class. In this way the dissertation adds to the literature on the poor as subjects and, by revealing their

¹ 'Christianity's appeal to its traditional following, the poor and lowly, seemed to evaporate in the industrial environment of the Victorian city', Cheryl Walsh suggests ('The incarnation and the Christian Socialist conscience in the Victorian Church of England', *Journal of British Studies*, 34 (1995), p. 351).

² Woodroffe was curate of St Matthew's from 1888 to 1896; however, journal entries from 25 November 1887 are in his handwriting. The journals referred to in this dissertation, covering the period up to August 1892, are at the Bishopsgate Institute. Later volumes for 1892–6 are at the London Metropolitan Archives.

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capacity to negotiate the systems of welfare available to them, returns a level of agency to the poor. At the same time, it complicates the motives and experience of the late nineteenth-century clergy by locating their lives within wider networks of changing religious and socio-political ideology while also recognising their personal subjectivity. To understand the relationships between Woodroffe and his parishioners, it is important first to acknowledge the particular circumstances of the parish of St Matthew, Bethnal Green.

The parish of St Matthew, Bethnal Green

In 1837, when the population of Bethnal Green had reached 70,000, Charles Blomfield, the Bishop of London, chose it as a 'model parish'.³ The parish church of St Matthew had been built in 1745 after the parish was detached from Stepney, with St John's added in the 1820s as a chapel of ease for the benefit of those unable to reach St Matthew's conveniently.⁴ However, with its growing population, the district was described in an address sent to the editor of the *Christian Remembrancer* by the Reverend Henry Mackenzie in April 1839 as being 'left without any adequate addition of churches, schools, or clergymen',⁵ with the result that its inhabitants were 'destitute of the means of religious and moral instruction'.⁶ It was therefore necessary, the address urged, to rescue the particularly overstretched parish of St Matthew from 'its present unhappy state'

³ Hugh McLeod, *Class and Religion in the Late Victorian City* (London: Croom Helm, 1974), p. 104.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ HM'K [Rev. Henry Mackenzie], 'Spiritual destitution of Bethnal Green, London', *Christian Remembrancer, or, The Churchman's Biblical, Ecclesiastical & Literary Miscellany* 21:7 (1839), p. 414.

⁶ *Ibid.*

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and, to do this, 'not fewer than ten additional districts' needed to be formed.⁷

Blomfield's undertaking was to test the theory that if large parishes were subdivided and provided with adequately staffed churches, with their own schools and charities, the people would attend.

By 1850 ten new churches, all free from pew rents,⁸ had been built so that there would be room for all. The resulting twelve churches in Bethnal Green were sometimes less than a quarter of a mile apart.⁹ The social investigator Charles Booth described these churches as having been 'dumped down', with a reliance on '[b]ricks and mortar [...] instead of living agents'¹⁰ to draw in and cater for the people, and the new buildings, lacking even the appeal of tradition, largely failed to attract.¹¹ The increased number of churches merely led to thinly spread congregations, and most of those built on Bishop Blomfield's initiative in the first half of the nineteenth century did not survive.¹² Booth noted that at the end of the century to 'remember Bethnal Green' was a phrase 'apt to be thrown in the teeth of those who try to inaugurate any great movement in the City on behalf of

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 415.

⁸ While at these and some other churches in the East End, such as St Jude's in Whitechapel, all seats were free and open to use by the poor, at others, such as Christ Church in Stepney, more than half the pews were reserved for those who paid. See Desmond Bowen, *The Idea of the Victorian Church: A Study of the Church of England, 1833-1889* (Montreal: McGill University Press, 1968), p. 271.

⁹ Susan Gane, 'East End history: Bethnal Green churches' [first published *London Society Journal*, 453 (2007)] <<http://www.dickens-and-london.com/BGChurches.htm>> [accessed 28 September 2016].

¹⁰ Charles Booth, *Life and Labour of the People in London. Third Series: Religious Influences*, ii: *London North of the Thames: The Inner Ring* (London, 1902), p. 76.

¹¹ Gane, 'East End history'.

¹² Only two of the ten new churches, that of St James the Less and that of St Peter, are still in use today. The two pre-1839 churches, St Matthew's and St John's, also remain open for worship.

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the Church'.¹³ The increased provision of churches had represented an attempt not merely to instruct the poor in religion and moral behaviour but also, more generally to regulate the urban environment,¹⁴ but as early in the programme as 1846, Bishop Blomfield was describing Bethnal Green as 'the spot where it is said that we have sown our seed in vain',¹⁵ prefiguring the outcome.

At the time when Woodroffe was keeping his journals, Bethnal Green was one of the poorest areas of the East End. According to Charles Booth's social classifications in *Life and Labour of the People of London*, only St George's-in-the-East in nearby Stepney had a higher percentage of its population 'In poverty' at the end of the nineteenth century.¹⁶ The parish of St Matthew, according to Booth's poverty maps – in which the streets were individually coloured-coded to indicate, from the results of Booth's research, the income and social class of their inhabitants – had a fairly mixed population. Many of the streets immediately surrounding the parish church and given as the addresses of the people who called on Woodroffe were shown on the map in dark blue, indicating what Booth categorised as 'Very poor [...] inhabited principally by casual labourers and others living hand to mouth',¹⁷ while lighter blue and mixed purple streets and even some pink and red ones were indicated elsewhere in the parish. This mixed population was reflected in the variety of callers Woodroffe received.

¹³ Booth, *Life and Labour*, ii, pp. 76–7.

¹⁴ Simon Gunn, *The Public Culture of the Victorian Middle Class: Ritual and Authority and the English Industrial City, 1840–1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), p. 106.

¹⁵ McLeod, *Class and Religion*, p. 104.

¹⁶ The figures given by Booth are 44.7% for Bethnal Green and 48.8% for St George's; see Marc Brodie, *The Politics of the Poor: The East End of London, 1885–1914*, Oxford Historical Monographs (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004), p. 207.

¹⁷ See 'Poverty maps of London', *Charles Booth Online Archive* <<http://booth.lse.ac.uk>> [accessed 28 September 2016].

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The period in which the volumes of Woodroffe's journals used in this dissertation were written was in various ways a turning point. The populations of the central districts of London was beginning to fall, with even the congested East End regions barely retaining their numbers.¹⁸ However, concern was increasingly focused on the problems that characterised the poorer areas – overcrowding, poverty and general social deprivation.¹⁹ In the earlier 1880s there had been fears of insurrection and social revolution, but as trade depression lifted and these failed to materialise, London's poor came to be seen as an urgent social problem – one that in the 1890s was seen to potentially damage the economic and productive health of the nation²⁰ – but nevertheless a limited one, rather than a broader threat to civilisation.²¹ London's East End population, richly represented in Woodroffe's journals, were increasingly recognised as a highly differentiated group, with large numbers of respectable working-class members who were quite separate from the 'feckless, hopeless remnant of the residuum'.²² Charles Booth's survey had undermined the idea that slum housing was physically isolated, demarcated and distinguished from the rest of society,²³ and Woodroffe's journals, recording visits from a broad cross section of individuals, support this view.

¹⁸ P. L. Garside, 'London and the Home Counties', in F. M. L. Thompson, *The Cambridge Social History of Britain 1750–1950*, i: *Regions and Communities* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 508.

¹⁹ Garside, 'London and the Home Counties', p. 510.

²⁰ G. R. Searle, 'The ideology of national efficiency', in *The Quest for National Efficiency: A Study in British Politics and Political Thought, 1899–1914* (Oxford, 1971).

²¹ Garside, 'London and the Home Counties', p. 512.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 515.

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Although the poor had not proved to be a threat to the stability of the metropolis and of the nation as had been feared, there was an awareness that reforms were necessary, and many thought that the church had an important part to play in this work. As *The Record*, a weekly publication that described itself as ‘the Evangelical Organ of the Church England’, put it in January 1882, these reforms were urgently required ‘to re-locate the church’s human, financial and physical resources to cope with changes in society, and to combat godlessness in the areas where Christianity was reported “not in possession”’.²⁴ Congregationalist clergyman Andrew Mearns recognised at around the same time that ‘the poor have been growing poorer, the wretched more miserable, and the immoral more corrupt; the gulf has been daily widening which separates the lowest classes of the community from our churches and chapels’.²⁵ London, described by the President of the Wesleyan Conference as ‘[t]his great centre of national, imperial world-life [...] the prize, the citadel, for which the powers of light and darkness must contend’,²⁶ was the particular focus: ‘We can use no language strong enough’, he declared, ‘to express our sense of the responsibility of English Christians in respect of the great city, its sin and sorrows.’²⁷ Therefore the church had a mission to perform for London’s poor to bring them usefully back within society’s pale and the Christian fold.

²⁴ Cited in Nigel Scotland, *Squires in the Slums: Settlements and Missions in Late-Victorian Britain*, International Library of Historical Studies (London; New York: I.B. Tauris, 2007), p. 2.

²⁵ Andrew Mearns, *The Bitter Cry of Outcast London* (London: James Clarke & Co., 1883), p. 4.

²⁶ *Wesleyan Conference Minutes* (1884), cited in Scotland, *Squires in the Slums*, p. 9.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

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Also important towards the end of reclaiming London's poor was the settlement movement: one of the first East End settlements was Oxford House in Bethnal Green, established in 1884. Unlike Toynbee Hall, founded in nearby Whitechapel earlier that same year, its residents were all professed churchmen, and it strove to cooperate with the local parish churches.²⁸ Following the death of Woodroffe's rector, Septimus Hansard, the next incumbent of St Matthew's, Arthur Foley Winnington-Ingram, was simultaneously head of Oxford House and installed several curates in the parish to take care of day-to-day business.²⁹ During Woodroffe's time at St Matthew's, however, the work of the parish fell on him as the church's sole curate. A close analysis of his daily record therefore gives an important insight into the lives of the parishioners who were in need of support.

Woodroffe and his journals

James Joseph Woodroffe was born in the Ionian Islands in 1855,³⁰ when his father, Dublin-born army surgeon Charles William Woodroffe, was serving with the 1st Somersetshire Regiment.³¹ During Woodroffe senior's posting in Corfu from 1853 to 1858, his wife Caroline gave birth to two other children, Charles George and Georgina Jane. The births of Charles George, Georgina Jane and James

²⁸ Bowen, *The Idea of the Victorian Church*, p. 332

²⁹ Scotland, *Squires in the Slums*, p. 63. One or other of these curates appears to have continued the journals up to at least March 1896. The volume that covers the changeover period in 1895 until this date is at the London Metropolitan Archives (Reference Code: P72/MTW/140).

³⁰ *Census Returns of England and Wales, 1891*. Kew, Surrey, England: The National Archives of the UK (TNA): Public Record Office (PRO), 1891.

³¹ No. 256 Surgeon Charles William Woodroffe LRCSI, *Staff Medical Officers of the Malta Garrison* <<http://www.maltaramc.com/staffimo/w/woodroffecw.html>> [accessed 28 September 2016].

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Joseph are recorded in the Ionian Islands Military birth registers.³² As the custom was to name eldest sons after their fathers, it seems likely that James was the second son. In 1860 Woodroffe senior served in China with the 1st Royals,³³ then later in the decade was back in the Mediterranean, arriving in Malta from Gibraltar in February 1868.³⁴ In November of the same year the family left for England, and by 1869 were in Cork, returning to Woodroffe senior's birthplace, Dublin, in 1870.³⁵ Promoted to Surgeon Major in March 1871, Charles Woodroffe retired two month later on half pay.³⁶ James Joseph matriculated at Trinity College Dublin, aged sixteen, in October 1871.

After graduating from Trinity College, Woodroffe served as curate first in Crosspatrick (1877–79), then in Abbeyleix (1880–81) and Clontarf, Co. Dublin (1881–86).³⁷ In 1885 his father died, and the next year Woodroffe became curate of Holy Trinity, Bromley Common, where the rector was Frederick Haines.³⁸ Woodroffe remained at Holy Trinity until 1888, though he appears to have spent some time at St Matthew's, Bethnal Green, in the final weeks of 1887 as the journal entries from 25 November of that year are in his handwriting. During his time at St Matthew's, Woodroffe lived with his widowed mother in Gore Road,³⁹

³² Ionian Island Military Regimental Births Register <<http://search.findmypast.co.uk/>> [accessed 28 September 2016].

³³ No. 256 Surgeon Charles William Woodroffe LRCSI, *Staff Medical Officers of the Malta Garrison*.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Crockford's Clerical Directory* (London: Church House Publishing, 1898) gives chronological details of Woodroffe's career.

³⁸ Frederick Haines, was like Woodroffe, was the son of a soldier and again like Woodroffe had Irish connections, having been born in Kilkenny in 1850 (J. A. Venn, comp., *Alumni Cantabrigienses* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1922–54).

³⁹ *Electoral Registers*, London Metropolitan Archives.

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where Caroline was 'Head of Family' and 'Living on her own Means'.⁴⁰ Woodroffe remained at St Matthew's until shortly after the death in January 1895 of Hansard, the rector, and became curate of St Saviour, Fitzroy Square, in 1896. Woodroffe's varied early years are important to understanding aspects of his later life and work.

To date, Woodroffe's journals have not been the subject of extensive academic research. Hugh McLeod mentions and quotes briefly from them in *Class and Religion in the Late Victorian City* as evidence for the large part that dealing with requests for relief played in an East End clergyman's daily round.⁴¹ With reference to the volumes used in the research for this dissertation, those covering the period from late 1887 through to 1892,⁴² McLeod describes the journals as a 'pathetic document'⁴³ and concludes that Woodroffe's period in Bethnal Green led only to bitterness and cynicism.⁴⁴ An exhibition held at the London Metropolitan Archives (LMA) in 2014 titled 'The Parish' brought together a wide-ranging selection of archival material on parish life in London and displayed a later volume of the journals kept by Woodroffe (in the exhibition referred to as 'Woodruffe').⁴⁵ The notes accompanying the display cited only

⁴⁰ *Census Returns of England and Wales*, The National Archives.

⁴¹ McLeod, *Class and Religion*, p. 112.

⁴² These are the volumes held at the Bishopsgate Institute.

⁴³ McLeod, *Class and Religion*, p. 112

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 113

⁴⁵ This volume covers the period August 1892 to March 1896. The LMA exhibition stated that Woodruffe [*sic*] remained curate at St Matthew's until September 1895 and that later entries were written by his successor; *Crockford's Clerical Directory* for 1898 states that Woodroffe was in post at St Matthew's until 1896. Just as Woodroffe began writing the journals a few months before he officially took up the curacy, it seems likely that there was some sharing of duties for a short time when he left the parish too.

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McLeod's book for additional information on the journals.⁴⁶ A small selection of entries from the later journals are also included in a volume titled *Victorian Diaries*,⁴⁷ although unlike others in this collection Woodroffe's journals were a working document of record and not a personal diary.

Woodroffe's journals are highly detailed, recording the full name and address of each applicant along with their particular request and the decision reached or advice given to them by the curate. In addition, the daily entries are cross-referenced to other visits made by the same individuals so that it is possible to follow their progress and the changes in their conditions and situations. In this way the journals give remarkable insight into the daily lives of the poor of St Matthew's. Woodroffe's journal entries also often include references to other clergy operating outside the parish, and his comments on them illuminate the sometimes contentious differences of opinion and practice to be found among the East End clergy. Hansard, the rector of St Matthew's, makes occasional appearances in the journals' margins as a commentator, offering support and advice for Woodroffe, and taking over maintenance of the journals during the curate's periods of absence.⁴⁸ Hansard's writing is larger and less easily legible than Woodroffe's, making it easy to tell the two hands apart. That Hansard kept equally detailed records during Woodroffe's absence indicates a reciprocity in the relationship. While Woodroffe's neat and careful writing in the journals was often ironic and humorously detached, with only very rare exposure of his

⁴⁶ Details of the exhibition, including a transcript of the exhibition case caption and the accompanying information leaflet, kindly supplied on request by M. Flynn of the London Metropolitan Archives in an email dated 12 May 2016.

⁴⁷ Heather Janet Creaton, *Victorian Diaries: The Daily Lives of Victorian Men and Women* (London: Mitchell Beazley, 2001).

⁴⁸ Woodroffe was absent from the parish for a couple of weeks each summer.

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personal feelings, Hansard was more openly emotional. He reacted with outraged protectiveness when he learns of the rudeness and of parishioners whether towards his wife or his curate, and at one point during Woodroffe's absence he took up several pages of the journals by writing, apologetically and in evident distress, about a severe attack of rheumatism that kept him bedridden for several days.⁴⁹ Therefore as well as being a valuable source on the lives of the poor of St Matthew's the journals reveal much about clergy and their personal relationships in the parishes of Bethnal Green.

That Woodroffe stayed at St Matthew's for eight years, until August 1896, and then went on to another parish again with a mixed population for a further fourteen years,⁵⁰ suggests – despite the bitterness and cynicism identified by McLeod in the entries he quotes – a positive motivation in Woodroffe's work too. This dissertation therefore takes a broader view of the interactions recorded in the journals, looking at the routine as well as the remarkable, to find patterns that can indicate underlying structures of class, gender and ideology. Rather than as an illustrative example of a genre – the parish journal, the Victorian diary – the dissertation uses Woodroffe's journals as a source for investigating the relationships between the curate and his parishioners. Drawing on established sources for the history of the East End of London, it builds a complex picture of the welfare relationships of St Matthew's in the late nineteenth century.

⁴⁹ See Journals of J. J. Woodroffe [Woodroffe's Journals], curate of St Matthew's, Bethnal Green. LCM/282/2, Bishopsgate Institute (hereafter 'WJ'), 26–30 June 1891. On 24 and 25 June, the journals were written in another hand – presumably Hansard was too ill to carry out the task.

⁵⁰ See Booth, *Life and Labour*, ii, p. 198, for St Saviour's parish demographics in the late 1890s.

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Sources

An extensive source base for studying the East End in this period helps to contextualise Woodroffe's journals. In particular, Charles Booth's poverty map is an intriguing document for researching London's late nineteenth-century social history.⁵¹ Its categorisation of the capital's streets according to the assessed social status of its inhabitants is generalised, but it nevertheless goes some way to show the many gradations of social conditions within a tightly delimited area. Because the journals give the exact addresses of Woodroffe's visitors, an impression of his congregation can be gained by consulting Booth's maps, and they help to complete the picture where streets mentioned in the journals no longer exist: for example, the mesh of dark blue streets opposite St Matthew's church that has been replaced by a 1970s housing development. The volume of Booth's major work *Life and Labour of the People in London* titled *London North of the Thames: the Inner Ring* provides further information on the parish of St Matthew and other parts of Bethnal Green.⁵² This volume also covers the parish of St Saviour, Fitzroy Square, the parish to which Woodroffe moved in 1896, providing some background to his later career.

Other primary sources that illuminate contemporary attitudes and approaches towards the problems of poverty in the East End include sermons by London

⁵¹ See 'Poverty maps of London', *Charles Booth Online Archive* <<http://booth.lse.ac.uk/>> [accessed 28 September 2016]. In Sheet 5, 'East Central District', of the 1898 series the Old Nichol estate to the west of St Matthew's has been cleared, but the parish itself remains more similar, with the dark blue roads opposite the church as before.

⁵² Booth, *Life and Labour*, ii.

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clergymen such as Brooke Lambert and articles in the religious press.⁵³ As well as specialist reports in publications such as the *Economic Journal* and the *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society*, there are also a wide range of articles that commentate on housing and homelessness, employment and unemployment, medical care and the neglect of the poor in more general periodicals such as the *Spectator*, the *Pall Mall Gazette*, the *Fortnightly Review*, *Fraser's Magazine*, the *Contemporary Review* and the *Nineteenth Century*. That so much coverage is readily found is indicative of the importance attached to these issues at the time among the general reading public. There are also substantial contemporary compilations of writings on social issues, such as the Bosanquets' *Aspects of the Social Problem*,⁵⁴ while Helen Dendy Bosanquet's *Social Work in London, 1869 to 1912* provides a contemporary history of the Charity Organisation Society,⁵⁵ with which she and her husband had a long and close association.

Two contemporary works that were widely read and caused much discussion at the time of their publication were *The Bitter Cry of Outcast London* by the Congregationalist clergyman Andrew Mearns,⁵⁶ and *In Darkest England* by William Booth,⁵⁷ the Methodist preacher who founded the Salvation Army. Mearns's observations are often mirrored in circumstances reported by Woodroffe, and the specifics of the curate's reflections on the Salvation Army's

⁵³ For example, Lambert's 'East London Pauperism, a Sermon to the University of Oxford' (1868), in *Sermons on Pauperism* (London, 1871) and his article 'Charity: its aims and means', *Contemporary Review*, 23 (1873).

⁵⁴ Bernard Bosanquet, Helen Dendy Bosanquet, Charles Stewart Loch and M. Maccallum, *Aspects of the Social Problem. By Various Writers* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1895).

⁵⁵ Helen Dendy Bosanquet, *Social Work in London, 1869 to 1912: A History of the Charity Organisation Society* (London: John Murray, 1914).

⁵⁶ Mearns, *The Bitter Cry*.

⁵⁷ William Booth, *In Darkest England and the Way Out* (London: International Headquarters of the Salvation Army, 1890).

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work in Bethnal Green reveal his familiarity with General Booth's analyses.⁵⁸ Woodroffe's writing is rich in allusions to many other contemporary media too, from humorous newspaper columns to commercial advertising campaigns.⁵⁹ His responses to the strangers who visit late at night suggests the influence of the sensational press,⁶⁰ and numerous articles that appear in publications such as *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper* around this time give a flavour of his likely concerns about assault and robbery.⁶¹

Various sources for researching Woodroffe's own life are available, such as birth and death records, census returns and electoral rolls, calendars of wills, Post Office directories and, of course, *Crockford's Clerical Directory*. *Crockford's* is also useful for finding out more about the clergymen with whom Woodroffe came into contact and about whom he often had something to say in his journals. The bald factualness of these sources is complemented by the finely detailed and creatively written journals themselves. Just as the research for this dissertation has established the irreducibility of the poor of St Matthew's to a generic group, it finds the uniqueness of the clergyman through his attentive and individual perspective on the life of the parish. Corresponding to this diverse primary source base is a wealth of secondary analysis, within which the dissertation

⁵⁸ For example, his musings on the 'submerged tenth' when he sees crowds gathered around the Salvation Army Barracks in Bethnal Green Road (WJ, 9 January 1891).

⁵⁹ For example, he alludes to 'Mrs Caudle's curtain lectures', a comical series of articles that first appeared in *Punch* in the 1840s (WJ, 4 June 1890), and advertising slogans used by Pears' Soap (WJ, 16 January, 1890) and Whiteley's Department Store (WJ, 5 February 1891).

⁶⁰ For example, the 'tall, dark' man who call is reported by Woodroffe on 3 December 1890 is described as having a 'forbidding countenance'.

⁶¹ For example, 'Mysterious affair in Bethnal Green', *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper*, Sunday, 28 September 1890, p. 5, in which a local woman was beaten, almost strangled and robbed by a 'strange man' who came to her door.

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places itself. The following section will outline the works that have been particularly useful during the research both for their general background content and for their relevance to the research questions. It will also suggest ways in which the dissertation confirms or challenges points made in the literature, and how it builds upon and contributes to it.

Historiography

The work of historians in the field of medicine and public health provides an understanding of endemic health problems among, and limited medical facilities available to, the poor of St Matthew's. Parishioners who visited Woodroffe because they or a family member were in need of medical assistance would often be given a letter of recommendation for the Adelaide Dispensary, and I. S. L. Loudon's essay 'The origins and growth of the dispensary movement in England',⁶² part of a historical study of the dispensaries from 1770 to 1850, explains how the dispensary movement was in many ways a response to the crisis in health among the urban poor and also the pioneering role of the dispensary doctors who, visiting the poor in their homes, were uniquely placed to understand the public health challenges facing society. Anne Hardy's *Health and Medicine in Britain since 1860* follows the dispensaries into the period covered by Woodroffe's journals and also discusses the emergence of sick clubs and works clubs that operated on a subscription basis and the development of the hospitals movement in the late nineteenth century.⁶³ In general, the health of

⁶² I. S. L. Loudon, 'The origins and growth of the dispensary movement in England', *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, 55 (1981).

⁶³ Anne Hardy, *Health and Medicine in Britain since 1860*, Social History in Perspective (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001).

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London's poor improved after 1880, partly because of the compulsory notification of infectious diseases from 1889, the earlier introduction of smallpox vaccination and the building of sewers, which reduced the incidence of water-born diseases, but chronic illness was still a debilitating problem. Drawing on public health records, Hardy's *The Epidemic Streets* provides an understanding of the way that Victorian society dealt with infectious diseases many of which are seen among Woodroffe's parishioners.⁶⁴ Articles such as 'Death in London, 1750–1909' by Mary Kilbourne Matossian and Hardy's 'Diagnosis, death and diet' provide much useful information on the likely causes of and misunderstandings surrounding these conditions.⁶⁵ Details in Woodroffe's journal entries demonstrate the presence of continuing susceptibilities among his parishioners.

Keir Waddington's *Charity and the London Hospitals, 1850–1898* focuses on medical care in London at the time when Woodroffe was writing, relating it to philanthropy in the capital.⁶⁶ The book is particularly helpful in its coverage of the construction of a voluntary alternative to state funding of medical care, which there was a contemporary reluctance to consider, and its investigation of the relationships between not just patients and doctors, but also hospital governors and society, is helpful for understanding the broader context. There was widespread concern within the voluntary hospital sector at this time that patients who could afford to pay for medical care were abusing the system, and

⁶⁴ Anne Hardy, *The Epidemic Streets: Infectious Disease and the Rise of Preventive Medicine, 1856–1900* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993).

⁶⁵ Mary Kilbourne Matossian, 'Death in London, 1750–1909', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 16 (1985); Anne Hardy, 'Diagnosis, death, and diet: the case of London, 1750–1909', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 18 (1988), pp. 387–401.

⁶⁶ Keir Waddington, *Charity and the London Hospitals, 1850–1898*, Studies in History New Series (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2000).

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some of the complex anxieties surrounding this issue are examined in 'Unsuitable cases', also by Waddington.⁶⁷ The article includes explanation of the sometimes conflicted relationship between the dispensaries and the hospitals. While the work on the dispensaries and hospitals by Loudon and Waddington includes detailed information on the structure of health care available to the poor of London, both via voluntary provision and under the Poor Law, this dissertation reveals that the poor were certainly not always prepared to gratefully accept what they were offered in the way of often minimal voluntary health care, but knew and asked for what they wanted and sometimes preferred to attend hospitals of their own choosing even if others were more conveniently situated. Thus it presents the poor as subjects making attempts to negotiate their own health care rather than as always passive recipients, and in this way it complicates the relationship between the sick poor and voluntary health care system.

Many historians have considered nineteenth-century London from a perspective that highlights ideologies of poverty. Gertrude Himmelfarb's *The Idea of Poverty* provides a background to attitudes towards the poor from the late eighteenth to the mid nineteenth century,⁶⁸ while David Englander's *Poverty and Poor Law Reform and Nineteenth-Century Britain* explains changing ideas about poverty in the period after the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834 and how the New Poor

⁶⁷ Keir Waddington (1998), 'Unsuitable cases: the debate over outpatient admissions, the medical profession and late-Victorian London Hospitals', *Medical History*, 42, doi:10.1017/S0025727300063328.

⁶⁸ Gertrude Himmelfarb, *The Idea of Poverty: England in the Early Industrial Age* (London: Faber, 1984).

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Law worked in practice.⁶⁹ Michael Rose's *The English Poor Law* reprints a number of primary sources that outline the history of poverty and welfare across the period.⁷⁰ As the extent of London's urban poverty became more widely known, it seemed ever clearer that the solution lay not in moral reform among the poor but in social and political reform across the metropolis and beyond. Marc Brodie's *The Politics of the Poor* disputes assumptions that the working classes in London, unlike their counterparts elsewhere in the country at this time, were politically apathetic,⁷¹ and the dissertation shows that the poor in St Matthew's were, if not highly politicised in their attitudes to social welfare, certainly not wholly apathetic either. They were evidently aware of the importance of the franchise, and journal entries record their anxiety over the loss of this right of citizenship if they went into the workhouse. Some parishioners engaged in strikes in the docks and elsewhere, as the journals also note. The disruptive effect of such political action on daily life in the parish and on the well-being of his parishioners affects Woodroffe's attitude towards them, as is discussed further in Chapter 3 of the dissertation. The reactions of Woodroffe's parishioners when offered what they did not want, despite their neediness, provide specific and individual examples of the not always positive responses to charitable giving discussed by Brian Harrison in 'Philanthropy and the Victorians'.⁷² In this way, too, the dissertation shows the agency, rather than the apathy, of the London working classes.

⁶⁹ David Englander, *Poverty and Poor Law Reform in Nineteenth-Century Britain, 1834–1914: From Chadwick to Booth*, Seminar Studies (Taylor & Francis, 2013).

⁷⁰ Michael Edward Rose, *The English Poor Law, 1780–1930*, David and Charles Sources for Social and Economic History (Newton Abbot: David & Charles, 1971).

⁷¹ Brodie, *The Politics of the Poor*.

⁷² Brian Harrison, 'Philanthropy and the Victorians', *Victorian Studies*, 9 (1966).

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While movements for social and political reform were gathering, charity remained an essential support for the poor, much of it in London being administered by the Charity Organisation Society. The Society has sometimes been condemned as harsh and unfeeling for its aim of helping the 'deserving' while excluding another group found to be 'undeserving'. Book-length studies of its work such as those by Robert Humphreys and Charles Loch Mowat explain the detailed theory that underpinned the methods of the Society,⁷³ helping to give a more rounded picture. Michael Roberts's essay 'Charity disestablished?' focuses on the aims of the Society's founders, arguing for the importance of the ecclesiastical dimension, with its aim of avoiding the state centralisation of welfare, rather than the socio-economic impulse.⁷⁴ The counterpart to the administration of charity was the philanthropy of the middle and upper classes. While David Owen's *English Philanthropy 1660–1960* situates Victorian philanthropy within a long tradition of charitable giving,⁷⁵ it gives, as Harrison notes,⁷⁶ little emphasis to the religious origins of social reform. In his essay Harrison also discusses the importance of the responses that charitable giving evokes among recipients, which is an important factor in the relationships between Woodroffe and his parishioners. The inadequacy or inappropriateness of the help offered, the effects upon excluded groups of the poor, and also

⁷³ Robert Humphreys, *Poor Relief and Charity, 1869–1945: The London Charity Organization Society* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001); Charles Loch Mowat, *The Charity Organisation Society, 1869–1913: Its Ideas and Work* (London: Methuen, 1961).

⁷⁴ Michael J. D. Roberts, 'Charity disestablished? The origins of the Charity Organisation Society revisited, 1868–1871', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 54 (2003).

⁷⁵ David Edward Owen, *English Philanthropy 1660–1960* (Cambridge, Mass.; London: Harvard University Press; Oxford University Press, 1965).

⁷⁶ Harrison, 'Philanthropy and the Victorians'.

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sometimes their suspicions about their benefactors' motives all have implications for these relationships.

With women's history an important area of research, many historians have focused on the influence of gender as well as of class in social interactions between rich and poor. F. K. Prochaska's *Women and Philanthropy in Nineteenth-Century England* and Ellen Ross's *Slum Travelers* look at a similar phenomenon in a synthesising way, in that while Prochaska analyses the role of women in philanthropy and the effect their work had and includes much statistical evidence, Ross collects many of the writings of the women who made philanthropic excursions into the homes of the poor.⁷⁷ Ross shows that the middle- and upper-class women who visited the poor to befriend and assist them defy stereotypes, and are remarkable for their individuality and variety. Another book by Ross, *Love and Toil*, focuses on the experience of the working-class women of London's East End, many of whom were likely to have been visited in this way, and provides a complementary perspective.⁷⁸ The working-class women featured in *Love and Toil* have their counterparts in the women who called on Woodroffe. The descriptions in the dissertation of their visits confirm many of Ross's inferences about poor women's lives and their powers of endurance in hard circumstances, while in providing examples of the neighbourhood networks within which these women move the dissertation also supports F. M. L. Thompson's assessment of the resilience of working-class

⁷⁷ F. K. Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy in Nineteenth-Century England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980); Ellen Ross, *Slum Travelers: Ladies and London Poverty, 1860–1920* (Berkeley, Calif.; London: University of California Press, 2007).

⁷⁸ Ellen Ross, *Love and Toil: Motherhood in Outcast London, 1870–1918* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

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cultural structures.⁷⁹ Other aspects of the exploratory drive to visit the East End are examined in Seth Koven's *Slumming*,⁸⁰ which includes a discussion of the slum priests who were Woodroffe's contemporaries in terms of their sexual and gender identification. While Koven gives an impressive physical perspective on various slum priests, the dissertation considers one particular individual among this group from the perspective of his own writings and what these show of his attitudes and his relationships with his parishioners. In this way the dissertation adds an alternative viewpoint. A further aspect of the middle-class exploration of the slums is covered in Nigel Scotland's *Squires in the Slums*, which while mainly concerned with the settlement movement also discusses the East End context into which the settlers moved.⁸¹ Oxford House, the settlement established in Bethnal Green in 1884, is mentioned several times in the journals.

Historians have also traced the importance of philosophical and political ideology in the administration and distribution of welfare. Finlayson's examination of the mixed economy of welfare in *Citizen, State and Social Welfare* provides an overview of the transition towards the state's more dominant role.⁸² With the increasing involvement of the state in welfare, the influence of political thought on individual lives, and thus social control, become important considerations. Thompson's 'Social control in Victorian Britain', however, emphasises the simultaneous robustness of independent working-class cultural

⁷⁹ F. M. L. Thompson, 'Social control in Victorian Britain', *Economic History Review*, 34/2 (May, 1981).

⁸⁰ Seth Koven, *Slumming: Sexual and Social Politics in Victorian London* (Princeton, NJ; Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2004).

⁸¹ Scotland, *Squires in the Slums*.

⁸² Geoffrey Finlayson, *Citizen, State, and Social Welfare in Britain 1830–1990* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994).

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development despite society's urge to control.⁸³ Examples of resistant social networks of social capital recur in the dissertation alongside descriptions of the manoeuvrings of aspiring individuality. A further important shift in ideology that is relevant to the dissertation derives from the work of the idealist philosopher T. H. Green. Green saw government intervention in social life as justified because it simultaneously ensured individual liberty, and while the state did not construct an environment that ensured that an individual would do well, it provided the means for the creation of the 'common good'.⁸⁴ Among those taught by Green at Balliol College, Oxford, in the late 1860s was Bernard Bosanquet, who with his wife Helen Dendy Bosanquet went on to publish many books and essays on social work and social problems. Bosanquet described the function of the state as the 'hindrance of hindrances' to human development,⁸⁵ and thus an important positive contribution. However, he considered that while the state and its laws were necessary to promote the common good, social progress could often be better achieved by volunteer action.⁸⁶ Bosanquet found and defended this approach to social welfare in the work of the Charity Organisation Society, with which he had an enduring association.⁸⁷ At this period of increasing though often qualified support for state intervention, Woodroffe's journals provide

⁸³ Thompson, 'Social control in Victorian Britain'.

⁸⁴ Matt Carter, *T.H. Green and the Development of Ethical Socialism* (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2003), p. 188.

⁸⁵ William Sweet and Gerald F. Gaus (eds), *The Philosophical Theory of the State and Related Essays by Bernard Bosanquet* (South Bend, IN: St Augustine's Press [distributed by University of Chicago Press], 2001, pp. 189–90.

⁸⁶ William Sweet, 'Bernard Bosanquet', *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2016 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.)

<<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2016/entries/bosanquet/>> [accessed 28 September 2016].

⁸⁷ Sweet, 'Bernard Bosanquet'.

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many examples of the inability of the voluntary sector to cope satisfactorily with the needs of a growing urban population.

With the dissertation's focus on the relationships between a curate and his parishioners, the work of church historians has been an important resource. Alan Haig's *The Victorian Clergy* looks at the nineteenth-century church as a career or profession rather than from a theological perspective,⁸⁸ while Frances Knight's *The Nineteenth Century Church and English Society* includes discussion of the various motivations, rewards and struggles of the Victorian curate, giving emphasis to the perceived dullness of the countryside to a young university-educated man.⁸⁹ On the other hand, Koven's *Slumming* discusses the possible attractions of the East End for members of the clergy to whom it might appear liberating.⁹⁰ All of these works help in creating a context both for Woodroffe's choice of a clerical career and for the particular directions that this career took. The particular predicament of the church in Bethnal Green in the first half of the nineteenth century has been written about by Arthur Burns, and his "My unfortunate parish" provides invaluable background on how the parish of St Matthew developed.⁹¹ It discusses the chronic absenteeism of many of St Matthew's rectors before Hansard took up the incumbency, and the chronic shortage of church accommodation in the increasingly crowded district prior to Bishop Blomfield's initiative. While Burns's essay looks at St Matthew's at a time

⁸⁸ Alan Haig, *The Victorian Clergy* (London: Croom Helm, 1984).

⁸⁹ Frances Knight, *The Nineteenth Century Church and English Society* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

⁹⁰ Koven, *Slumming*, ch. 4.

⁹¹ Arthur Burns, "My unfortunate parish": Anglican ministry in Bethnal Green 1809–c.1850', in Melanie Barber, Stephen Taylor and Gabriel Sewell, *From the Reformation to the Permissive Society: A Miscellany in Celebration of the 400th Anniversary of Lambeth Palace Library*, Church of England Record Society (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2010).

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characterised by incumbent absenteeism,⁹² the dissertation adds to the literature on the history of St Matthew's by focusing on a later period, when the rector was a more frequent presence in the parish; the focus is more on clerical effort than on clerical neglect, giving a contrasting image. Susan Gane's article written for the *London Society Journal* fills in the details of Bishop Blomfield's church-building programme between 1839 and 1850 and also gives a brief account of the fate of the ten new churches.⁹³ The chapter on Bethnal Green in McLeod's *Class and Religion in the Late Victorian City*, as well as giving details of demographic and occupational change in the parish of St Matthew during the earlier part of the nineteenth century, summarises prevailing attitudes to the clergy in the closing decades and the indifference of most parishioners to the church other than as a source of material help.⁹⁴ As Woodroffe's journals make clear, even though few attended services the church was a busy place in this other respect.

In his youth, Woodroffe's rector Hansard was heavily influenced by F. D. Maurice, a key figure in the Christian Socialist movement of the mid-nineteenth century. Hansard's obituarist in the *Spectator* described him as a 'disciple' of Maurice,⁹⁵ suggesting the importance of Christian Socialist values in the life of the parish. Peter d'Alroy Jones's *The Christian Socialist Revival* was helpful in the research for this dissertation as it relates the influence of Maurice to the activities of the

⁹² Burns, "My unfortunate parish".

⁹³ Gane, 'East End history'.

⁹⁴ McLeod, *Class and Religion*, ch. 4.

⁹⁵ *Spectator*, 16 January 1895, p. 32.

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later Christian Socialists who were Woodroffe's contemporaries.⁹⁶ Cheryl Walsh's essay 'The Incarnation and the Christian Socialist conscience'⁹⁷ draws a clear distinction between an individualistic way of thinking about salvation and the Christian Socialist sense of all mankind being part of the 'Body of Christ', helping to connect changing attitudes to charity and changing perceptions of the *laissez-fair* economy. The five-volume *Religion in Victorian Britain* from Manchester University Press and the Open University contains many useful essays as well as a collection of reprinted primary sources.⁹⁸ In particular, the essays by Gerald Parsons in the first two sections of Volume II provide much that is relevant to the research for this dissertation, including a discussion of the Christian Socialist revival.⁹⁹ Because of his close working relationship with Hansard, the resurgence of this current in late Victorian religious thought is particularly important in considering Woodroffe's relationships with his parishioners. Parsons's assertion that while many prominent church leaders espoused the 'social gospel' of Christian Socialism they were not representative of the average cleric is broadly born out by the evidence of the journals.¹⁰⁰ Although Woodroffe shows no particular inclination towards Christian Socialism in his dealings with those who call on him, his work at St Matthew's under the rector's authority would have been subject to the older man's influence.

⁹⁶ Peter d'Alroy Jones, *The Christian Socialist Revival, 1877–1914: Religion, Class, and Social Conscience in Late-Victorian England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968).

⁹⁷ Walsh, 'The Incarnation and the Christian Socialist conscience'.

⁹⁸ Gerald Parsons, James R. Moore, John Wolfe and Open University, *Religion in Victorian Britain*, 5 vols (Manchester: Manchester University Press in association with the Open University, 1988–97).

⁹⁹ See Parsons et al., *Religion in Victorian Britain*, ii.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 58

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The most significant way in which the dissertation differs from and contributes to the existing literature is in its assessment of the hitherto largely unexamined journals themselves. It considers a sustained period of the curate's reporting rather than just selecting a few particularly striking examples as did the London Metropolitan Archives exhibition and the *Victorian Diaries* volume. While McLeod dismisses the journals as 'a pathetic document', the research carried out for the dissertation has found them to be a rich source for understanding the relationships between Woodroffe and his parishioners, and in addition for appreciating the individual characters of the curate and the people of Bethnal Green. In order to fully examine the source several different methodological approaches have been used, as described in the following section

Methodology

The research for this dissertation involved engagement with a number of theoretical approaches. These included gender theory, theories of 'the gift', of the nature of altruism and of the modern metropolis, narrative theory and theories on writing as a personal exercise. Biographical research was also undertaken and revealed Woodroffe's unusually exotic birthplace and early family life as well as his more conventional education, training and parochial work as an adult. That Woodroffe was born in the Mediterranean, possibly lived in the Far East as a young child and received his university training in Ireland made him an exotic immigrant in the East End. On the other hand, to his parishioners he would as a clergyman have represented the establishment. This ambivalence is an aspect of his liminal position in terms of class. Gender theory, particularly John Tosh's writing on masculinity, answered a number of questions on both the rarity of

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and the similarities between Woodroffe's occasional visits from male parishioners.

The daily negotiation of material and other assistance within the parish makes Mauss's theoretical work on the gift,¹⁰¹ and Jones's chapter on gifts and giving that draws on Mauss's work, extremely relevant.¹⁰² Gifts are a symbol of prestige, and to make gifts is to show one's superiority.¹⁰³ Therefore asking for charitable gifts, as Woodroffe's parishioners often do, is no simple material matter but involves an admission of inferiority. That both Woodroffe and Hansard struggled particularly with the idea of giving to those who asked suggests the difficulty of this aspect of the gift for them too. Dixon's enquiry into altruism, with its focus on 'moral meanings' in Victorian Britain, further illuminates the ambiguity inherent in many instances of helping others.¹⁰⁴ The possibility that advocates of pity and altruism could merely be functioning as mouthpieces for the weak and poor who selfishly desire more power and wealth relates to Woodroffe's suspicion of and resistance to being asked to assist the poor out of his own pocket. The further paradox Dixon discusses, that any action undertaken to achieve a desired end, even if that end is the good of others, is undertaken in pursuit of the fulfilment of the agent's own desires and thus in their own interest, is less obviously a concern in Woodroffe's journal entries.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰¹ Marcel Mauss, *The Gift*, tr. W. D. Halls (Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2002) <libcom.org/files/Mauss%20-%20The%20Gift.pdf> [accessed 28 September 2016].

¹⁰² Jones, *Outcast London: A Study in the Relationship between Classes in Victorian Society* (London: Verso, 2013), ch. 13.

¹⁰³ Jones, *Outcast London*, p. 252.

¹⁰⁴ Thomas Dixon, *The Invention of Altruism: Making Moral Meanings in Victorian Britain*, A British Academy Postdoctoral Fellowship Monograph (Oxford; New York: Published for the British Academy by Oxford University Press, 2008).

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 363–4.

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However, it is an aspect of the wider issue of charitable provision as a means to fend off social unrest in the short term rather than seek measures to relieve its causes.

The way of life of the late nineteenth-century urban clergyman, differing greatly from that of his earlier rural counterparts in the freedom and mobility it offered, prompted an enquiry into how far Woodroffe's experience might be representative of that of the modern metropolitan. The journals indicate a detachment and cynicism that has similarities with the protective blasé attitude described by Simmel as characteristic of this individual.¹⁰⁶ Because of the nature of Woodroffe's personal writing style, an exploration of narrative theory and of the uses of self-writing suggested an additional direction. Through the writing down of them in the journals, the often chaotic events of the day became 'readable' (or '*lisibles*' in Ricoeur's terminology) as part of a re-created narrative of past events.¹⁰⁷ A consideration of the journals as a reflective space is included in the dissertation, and a case is made for their particular value in Woodroffe's relationship with Hansard, for whose benefit they were written.

By investigating the relationships between the curate and his parishioners through the closely detailed and intimate accounts contained in the journals, the work carried out for this dissertation responds to David Englander's suggestion that academic research should consider the poor themselves rather than merely

¹⁰⁶ Georg Simmel, 'The metropolis and mental life', in Philip Kasinitz, *Metropolis: Centre and Symbol of Our Times* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1995), p. 41. Simmel's essay was first published, in German, in 1903.

¹⁰⁷ Paul Ricoeur, 'Narrative identity', *Philosophy Today*, 35 (1991), p. 73.

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the management of the poor.¹⁰⁸ Steven King has written on the poor as subjects and about their responses to the systems of poor relief and welfare in the early years of the nineteenth century.¹⁰⁹ While Englander's article considers pauper petitions from the middle years, This dissertation extends the literature on the poor as subjects to the later years of the century and at the same time brings the so far largely ignored volumes of Woodroffe's journals forward as a valuable resource. It reinforces the case that incidents occurring and reported within a limited space can be important sources of understanding.

Chapter outlines

The approaches taken in researching the factors that structured the relationships between the curate and his parishioners enable conclusions to be drawn within the broad areas of class and gender, systems of welfare and changing ideologies, and religion and the self. Following this Introduction, Chapter 2 looks at how issues of class and gender structure Woodroffe's relationships with his parishioners. It considers the liminality of his position as a clergyman and therefore a gentleman, but also as a curate and therefore a member of what tended to be considered a clerical underclass. It also considers the ambivalent position he occupied in terms of gender, being unmarried and not the head of a household, not earning a living in an occupation dignified by physical strength or inherited craft, and spending much of his time among women rather than in all-male groups. The tensions arising from these ambiguities of status are

¹⁰⁸ David Englander, 'From the abyss: pauper petitions and correspondence in Victorian London', *London Journal*, 25 (2000), p. 73.

¹⁰⁹ Steven King, 'Friendship, kinship and belonging in the letters of urban paupers 1800–1840', *Historical Social Research*, 33 (2008).

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considered as factors in the relationships. Because of Woodroffe's involvement in the dissemination of charity, the concept of 'the gift' and how Woodroffe's role in this differs from that of the rector is also discussed.

The particular focus of Chapter 3 is the concept of the 'deserving poor'. The twin issues of demoralisation and pauperisation are discussed, along with the importance for the development of the Charity Organisation Society of the 'Goschen Minute' of 1869 – a policy statement from the Gladstone government that a distinction should be drawn between the 'deserving', who might be helped back to independence, and the 'undeserving', who should go to the workhouse.¹¹⁰ The chapter also looks at how political, social and religious attitudes towards responsibility for poverty and strategies for dealing with its effects changed over time and considers the part demographic developments were thought to play in social welfare. The importance of the values promoted by the Christian Socialist revival are discussed, as are family support systems and other networks of social capital. The significance of these underpinnings of the welfare system to Woodroffe's relationships with his parishioners is the theme of the chapter, which argues that the church did more than is sometimes recognised, while established local support networks did much that is often completely overlooked.

Chapter 4 looks at how the personal religious orientations of Woodroffe and his parishioners structured the relationships between them. Biographical research

¹¹⁰ Kathleen Jones, *The Making of Social Policy in Britain: From the Poor Law to the New Labour*, 3rd edn (London: Continuum, 2006), p. 35.

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on Woodroffe was carried out for this chapter and a previously overlooked eye-witness account of the curate was assessed. The nature of the journals as a source – what their purpose was, and what they can therefore provide evidence of – is an important consideration. The type of spiritual advice and consolation Woodroffe might have been able to offer his parishioners and the limited extent to which they turned to him for such support is discussed, as are the different standards of moral judgement Woodroffe applied to his parishioners and his fellow clergymen. Finally in this chapter, the role of the journals as a creative space in which Woodroffe was able to structure his experiences into a meaningful and communicable narrative is evaluated. An argument is made for the contribution that an interrogation of individual subjectivity can make to historical research.

Chapter 5 draws conclusions on the value of the journals as a unique document that gives insight into Woodroffe's relationships in the parish. It recognises the importance of the subjectivity of the individuals involved in interactions between the working classes and the clergy. It also notes reasons found in the journals for the failure of the ten new churches built in Bethnal Green to draw congregations. It finds evidence of the agency of the poor and their resistance to accepting what was offered if it did not meet their needs in aspirational as well as practical terms. In addition, it identifies reasons for the failure of the gift within an urban parish at this time. Finally, it makes claims for the specific kind of document that the journals represent – a business document of record, written as a personal communication with a particular reader by one who took pleasure in the act of

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writing – both as a particular space of creativity and as a source of historical understanding.

Gender and class

This chapter considers the part issues of gender and class played in structuring the relationships between Woodroffe and his parishioners. It also considers the liminality of Woodroffe's status in terms of both gender and class, and how this liminality contributed to structuring his relationships with the parishioners. The majority of Woodroffe's visitors were working-class women, and the chapter therefore looks for common characteristics among the comparatively few visits made by male parishioners. It considers the ambivalent masculinity of both Woodroffe and the working-class men who visited him and the significance of this in their relationships. Because of the material nature of the assistance that most of Woodroffe's parishioners sought, the concept of the 'gift' is examined for its relevance to their relationships with him. The chapter also considers Woodroffe's moral judgement of his parishioners and the parishioners' negotiating skills when confronting him.

Like that of many other clergymen in the late-nineteenth century East End, Woodroffe's prime role was to act as the interface between his parishioners and the various sources of financial, medical and other assistance available to the 'deserving' poor. They might have resented his intrusion when he visited them in their homes to check that their claims for assistance were valid, but his presence, as an almoner and source of referral to charitable providers, would have been tolerated, even if unwillingly, and he was likely to have met with no overt

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antagonism.¹ Woodroffe's interaction with the poor was, however, intense and intimate, often emotionally charged and occasionally traumatic. Curates, being members of the clergy, were at this time regarded as gentlemen, but the subservient nature of their position meant that some of the higher clergy regarded them as an inferior underclass within the church.² During his tenure, a curate was not provided with property and income by the church in respect of his pastoral duties in the way that a rector was but paid modest wages out of the incumbent's own pocket as a servant would have been.³ A curate could be moved on at any time if he was unpopular in the parish,⁴ which in practice meant that he could be disposed of at the whim of his vicar on the vaguest grounds of 'unpopularity'.⁵ As he was employed directly by the rector, his appointment terminated on the death or resignation of his incumbent;⁶ he could not depend upon retaining his position under the successor. However, despite displacement or disappointment, a curate was unlikely to retire from the church unless he had private means as there was no national clergy pension scheme until 1907.⁷ A curate might often not only be poor but, in his ambivalent and comparatively powerless position, also fair game for insults and practical jokes.⁸ Overall, then, the curate's lot was a fairly untypical life for a gentleman.

¹ McLeod, *Class and Religion*, p. 106.

² Knight, *The Nineteenth Century Church*, p. 125.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 208.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 124.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 208.

⁷ 'Fortunes of the clergy', *St George's-in-the-East* <<http://www.stgite.org.uk/>> [accessed 28 September 2016].

⁸ McLeod, *Class and Religion*, p. 106.

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In his role as curate, Woodroffe occupied a liminal position in terms not only of class but also of gender. All clergy at this time were male, but the curate's work among his parishioners – visiting the sick, facilitating medical care, engaging with women in discussions about their children, their husbands, other family members and neighbours – took him into areas conventionally thought of as within the woman's domain. Seth Koven remarks that East End 'slum priests' of the late nineteenth century often struck observers as sexually ambiguous due to the combination of an 'almost exaggeratedly masculine' physical presence and 'immense reserves of sentiment'.⁹ With little evidence of Woodroffe's physicality or his depth of sentiment,¹⁰ it is clear from the journals that the role he was required to play would itself have constructed some ambiguity.

A curate's lack of independence in his relations with his rector, who provided his livelihood and to whom he must defer as head of the clerical household, made his position in some ways similar to that of a wife. Woodroffe was responsible at the St Matthew's rectory for the 'household budget' of hospital and dispensary letters, doing his best to make the different types of letter last out until resources were replenished and having to make do with whatever letters remained if some resources were exhausted.¹¹ He had, however, to refer to the rector many matters of business that lay outside this domain: while he had authority, in discussion with the church warden, to arrange repairs to the WC, he was not

⁹ Koven, *Slumming*, p. 257.

¹⁰ A single eye-witness description is discussed in Chapter 4 of the dissertation

¹¹ For example, WJ on 1 April 1890, 6 October 1890, 16 January 1891 and 10 February 1891 records the number of letters available to be given out; WJ on 16 and 21 October 1889 records parishioners coming for dispensary letters and there being none to give out; WJ on 11 December 1889 and 25 August 1890 records parishioners coming for dispensary letters and, as there are none remaining, being given London Hospital letters instead.

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empowered to confirm the amount of money raised at the annual Sunday School service but had to pass this matter on to Hansard. Often what was required from the rector was influence rather than action, and while Woodroffe could hand out dispensary letters to sick parishioners, it was Hansard who signed off pension papers and provided 'characters' for those seeking employment. Hansard also conducted the majority of dealings with the wider world of trade and commerce, and carried out various public roles such as his chairmanship of the Charity Organisation Society's Bethnal Green committee.

The relationship between Hansard and Woodroffe that is shown within the journals is mostly conducted via matter-of-fact affirmation or advice from rector to curate in the margins against the latter's detailed entries: for example, Hansard added 'quite right' when Woodroffe took a stand against impertinence or fraud or struggled to handle difficult cases.¹² When he commented at more length on journal entries, such as to express indignation at insults to Woodroffe, his tone was similar to the one he used when condemning rudeness towards his wife.¹³ In addition to this kindly, or even chivalrous, support for his curate, however, Hansard occasionally engaged in humorous bantering on a clerical or parish issue, as on the occasion when 'an old garrulous man (name refused)' called to see the rector. 'As he seemed inclined to preach to me,' Woodroffe wrote, 'I shut him up,' against which Hansard commented: 'Ask him to preach for me Sunday Evening.'¹⁴ Therefore, while the rector's relationship with his curate was primarily focused on the work of the parish, there is in the journals evidence

¹² For example WJ, 15 December 1887; WJ, 4 January 1888; WJ, 8 October 1890.

¹³ WJ, 23 January 1891 and 3 August 1889 respectively.

¹⁴ WJ, 8 February 1888.

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of his more personal concern for Woodroffe and also a sharing of humour that suggests both a closeness of minds and an enjoyment in each of the other's observations on life.

Being some thirty years Woodroffe's senior, Hansard might well have felt in some ways paternal towards his curate. Within the rectory household,¹⁵ Hansard's daughter Gwendolin clearly had a privileged position, being noted occasionally in the journals as exercising some authority in her father's absence.¹⁶ She also engaged in bizarre and frivolous games with her father within the pages of the journals when Woodroffe was away (presumably on annual leave) and the rector was in his absence responsible for keeping the journals up to date. Although lightly crossed out, the entry 'Gwendolin Hansard called to ask for £20 to start a cats' meat walk' remains legible,¹⁷ as does 'Gwendolin Hansard [...] again – used abusive language. [...] Removed her with the least possible violence. S. Hansard', which follows a few days later.¹⁸ With Woodroffe not positioned as Hansard's heir – he was not in line to inherit the living on the rector's death – any paternal feelings Hansard had would not be directed towards him exactly as towards a son. The relationship can be seen as more like that between a father and an elder daughter, who was more

¹⁵ The census for 1891 has Hansard, his wife Edith and their children living in Bethnal Green, although the electoral register for 1891 gives Hansard's address as 1 Phillimore Gardens, Kensington. The Kensington residence fits with Woodroffe on 12 August 1890 giving the rector's 'Kensington Address' to a 'clergyman belonging to B.G. C.O.S.' who 'called to see Rector about some matter connected with the C.O.S.'

¹⁶ WJ, 11 November 1891.

¹⁷ WJ, 12 July 1889. Dealers in cats' and dogs' meat collected the meat in the morning from knackers' yards then took it around on a specified 'walk' dealing directly with the public (see Henry Mayhew, *London Labour and the London Poor: A Selection by Rosemary O'Day, and David Englander* (Ware: Wordsworth Editions, 2008), pp. 188–9).

¹⁸ WJ, 15 July 1889.

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responsible and less distracting than the young Gwendolin, and shared more of the father's daily cares while enjoying less indulgence and fewer privileges.¹⁹ Therefore within the rectory household Woodroffe's position was in a further respect ambivalently gendered and liminal, as unmarried clergyman and spinster daughter, male employee and family member.

Among Woodroffe's parishioners, personal or household issues were for female family members to deal with, and the vast majority of Woodroffe's callers were accordingly women: mostly married or widowed, or sometimes their unmarried daughters still living in the family home. They came most regularly to ask for referrals to the Adelaide Dispensary or the London Hospital for themselves or, more often, for family members or neighbours, or alternatively for help with basic needs such as for food or coal. It was very rare for a man to call for assistance of the domestic kind, unless the case were very severe or unusual. Of one such visitor Woodroffe wrote:

A man giving the name of Brathwaite, 27 Church Row called at the Rectory on Tuesday night (10.30 p.m.) alleging that his wife, just confined, was very ill & wished to see a clergyman. The baby had died.²⁰

This case was both tragic and mysterious, as Woodroffe continued: 'On searching up & down Church Row on Wednesday I cd not find anyone of that name.'²¹ On

¹⁹ At this time Woodroffe would have been in his mid thirties, Gwendolin in her mid twenties.

²⁰ WJ, 4 October 1890.

²¹ *Ibid.*

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another rare occasion, a man who had been a soldier came to Woodroffe in great distress about the condition of his mother's body, which was lying in the mortuary as the doctor had refused to certify cause of death; the inquest having been postponed, the closing of the coffin could not be authorised.²² The ex-soldier's stepfather was apparently responsible for the delay in proceedings, making this a dispute among men.

On more mundane occasions, the man of the household would be the one to bring to Woodroffe pension papers to be signed or enquiries about local charitable bequests, or to ask for help in procuring situations with important employers such as the Post Office or the GER. As already noted, these were the sorts of enquiries that tended to be passed on to the rector, making the transactions essentially those between the male heads of households and distinct from the type of matters negotiated between Woodroffe and his female parishioners. The occasions when men came to Woodroffe about personal matters on their own behalf were mostly only those when no female relative or neighbour was available to send, such as when a man was newly discharged from prison or was staying temporarily in a male lodging house.²³ In such cases the men did not have the dignity of being heads of households, and there was no expectation of referral to the rector for their requests.

It was not necessarily the case that commitments to employers caused men to send their wives for dispensary or hospital letters on their or their family's

²² WJ, 26 October 1891.

²³ WJ, 8 November 1888, and WJ, 7 October 1889, respectively.

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behalf, as often wives who requested letters for their spouses reported that the sick men – no more unwell than the women who often came to ask Woodroffe for their own or family members' referral letters – were out of work and often had been for some time. However, while men rarely came to Woodroffe for dispensary or hospital letters for the common or often chronic conditions that daily brought woman parishioners to his door – such as bronchitis and other respiratory disorders of the kind that were endemic in the East End at this time²⁴ – there were certain physical problems that they did present in person. In general these were the results of physical injuries sustained in the 'man's world' of work: for example, a male parishioner came to ask for help in obtaining a surgical splint for his knee after the patella had been fractured in an accident at the Surrey Docks.²⁵ Therefore it seems that the men of St Matthew's, while avoiding asking Woodroffe for help in connection with failing health that might simply continue to deteriorate, felt able to discuss with him accidental physical injuries that could often be completely cured. Their masculinity was on the latter occasions not called into question by a visit to the curate as they were suffering with the type of affliction that befitted a male breadwinner and preserved his masculine self-respect.

²⁴ Londoners were burning some seven million tons of soft coal annually in the 1890s (*Transactions of the Royal Sanitary Institute*, XIII (1892), cited in Matossian, 'Death in London', p. 195). When burned, this soft coal emitted sulphur dioxide which when combined with water vapour in the air produced sulphuric acid 'which has been causally connected to mortality from bronchitis' (Matossian 'Death in London', p. 195). There are many references in WJ to smoky chimneys (e.g. WJ, 23 September 1889; WJ, 23 July 1891), instances of complaints against industrial air polluters (e.g. WJ, 29 July 1890; WJ, 3 September 1890) and on one occasion a visit from 'the Smoke Inspector' (WJ, 10 July 1889). In addition, many of the trades and occupations engaged in by the parishioners who visited Woodroffe – such as rag-picking, leatherwork and clothing manufacture – were at the time becoming notorious for causing or contributing to respiratory diseases (see Carolyn Steedman, *Dust* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), pp. 20–1).

²⁵ WJ, 5 June 1890.

If a man came to Woodroffe at a time when he might have been expected to be at work, suffering from an ailments that was not itself a token of masculine activity, it would indicate his disengagement from the labour market and his inability to support his family. McClelland suggests that unemployment – and thus dependence on a wife or other members of the family, on the state or on charity – might be experienced by a man ‘not only as economic but also as psychic depression’,²⁶ and that loss of earnings and employment probably also led to ‘a sense of “incompleteness” and shame’.²⁷ By not engaging with Woodroffe on personal and domestic matters when doing so would be to acknowledge their personal dependency, his male parishioners also avoided ‘a loss of dignity which could not be contemplated’.²⁸ Similarly if a family were visited at home by a curate, the man of the household would avoid being seen. Charles Booth’s informers described how such visits to poor working-class homes would, if the man were at home, result only in ‘a conversation on the doorstep, or through the half-closed door’, and that a curate might even have the door shut in his face.²⁹ Such experiences were reported as common.

Despite the many differences in background and situation between Woodroffe and his male parishioners, they shared key deficiencies with regard to their masculine status. John Tosh has written about the ‘gendered meaning’ of the

²⁶ Keith McClelland, ‘Masculinity and the “representative artisan”’, in Michael Roper and John Tosh, *Manful Assertions: Masculinities in Britain since 1800* (London: Routledge, 1991), pp. 78–9.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 79.

²⁹ Charles Booth, *Life and Labour of the People in London. Third Series: Religious Influences*, i: *London North of the Thames: The Outer Ring* (London, 1902), p. 81.

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three contexts of home, work and all-male associations that he finds central to the 'public demonstration of masculinity' in modern western societies,³⁰ and all three are important in considering tensions in the relationships between Woodroffe and the men of his parish due to their differing but inescapable inabilities to make this demonstration. Each would have been aware of the other's masculine insufficiencies as well as his own, confusing status in their relationships and undermining 'the hierarchy which allows us to place masculinities in some kind of pecking order'.³¹ This hierarchy is more to do with patriarchal power than a particular class order;³² the latter would not have been in dispute between the middle-class curate and his working-class parishioners.

The first essential qualification for manhood, Tosh notes, is setting up a new household.³³ In the parish of St Matthew, however, entire families often lived in one or two rooms within a shared house,³⁴ meaning that this condition might often be only minimally met. Neither had Woodroffe set up a new household; he took his place within the clergy household represented by the rectory in his working life, while living privately with his mother just outside the parish.³⁵ In addition, Tosh says, the household once established must be sustained by the

³⁰ John Tosh, 'What should historians do with masculinity? Reflections on nineteenth-century Britain', *History Workshop* (1994), p. 184.

³¹ John Tosh, 'Hegemonic masculinity and the history of gender', in Stefan Dudink, Karen Hagemann and John Tosh, *Masculinities in Politics and War: Gendering Modern History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), p. 42.

³² Tosh, 'What should historians do', p. 189

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 185.

³⁴ 'In Bethnal Green are found the old weavers' houses, with large upper rooms, now usually partitioned off to make two or three rooms or accommodate two families' (Charles Booth, 'Condition and occupations of the people of East London and Hackney, 1887', *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society*, 51 (1888), p. 282).

³⁵ *Census Returns of England and Wales, 1891*. Kew, Surrey, England: The National Archives of the UK (TNA): Public Record Office (PRO), 1891.

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productive activities of the man.³⁶ Not only was it the case that neither the curate nor often his male parishioners had set up a new household, but also neither sustained or was likely to be able unaided to sustain by his own productive activities the household of which he was a part. According to Ellen Ross's research, in the early 1890s households could be fairly well fed if the main earner's wage was '31 shillings for London men in regular employment', and then only 'provided that the men turned most of it over to their wives'.³⁷ From the evidence of Woodroffe's journals, many men in St Matthew's earned well below that figure – representative weekly wages of 12 to 15 shillings for a boot repairer,³⁸ 18 shillings for a ticket cutter³⁹ and 24 shillings for a stoker are recorded⁴⁰ – and it was common for employment to be irregular or casual and hence income unreliable. As Ross notes, the earnings of wives and children were an important resource for working-class families, undermining the man's role of family supporter. Neither did Woodroffe support a household; his mother with whom he lived was recorded in the 1891 census as being the head of their shared household and living on her own means.⁴¹ Thus with regard to this first requirement for manhood, Woodroffe and his male parishioners were similarly unqualified.

The second requirement of masculine reputation that Tosh identifies is that the work through which the man supports his household must be not only

³⁶ Tosh, 'What should historians do', p. 185.

³⁷ Ross, *Love and Toil*, p. 44.

³⁸ WJ, 19 June 1889.

³⁹ WJ, 28 December 1887.

⁴⁰ WJ, 27 June 1888.

⁴¹ *Census Returns of England and Wales, 1891*. Kew, Surrey, England: The National Archives of the UK (TNA): Public Record Office (PRO), 1891.

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dependable and lucrative but also 'dignified'.⁴² Although the scope for this quality might seem limited among the trades of the working classes in Bethnal Green, it could be located in a man's skill, acquired by training or apprenticeship, which carried a moral worth comparable to that of the more elevated professions or callings of the middle classes.⁴³ Clearly, the sort of irregular casual work many of the parishioners of St Matthew's had to depend on was not dignified in this way – rag picker, wood chopper and onion peeler are among the occupations mentioned in the journals – but no more was the signing of receipts and handing out of letters that Woodroffe spent much of his time engaged in. This aspect of his work was similar to that of the office clerk, whose occupation was 'in middle-class terms [...] servile, while the labourer despised his soft hands and poor physique'.⁴⁴ At this time the role of office clerk was also becoming increasingly feminised as women moved into this place of work, adding to the ambivalence of Woodroffe's position.

The third essential of masculine status identified by Tosh, that of membership of all-male associations,⁴⁵ was also far from straightforwardly achievable by either Woodroffe or his parishioners. With his subordinate clerical position, Woodroffe was, for example, not included in the male-dominated organisational bodies that Hansard attended such as the Charity Organisation Society committee meetings. Arthur Burns notes that by the second half of the nineteenth century Bethnal Green had a dozen churches and a correspondingly high number of clergymen

⁴² Tosh, 'What should historians do', p. 186.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

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active within the district,⁴⁶ and Woodroffe made reference to many of these individuals in the journals. Usually, however, they merely represented destinations in other parishes to which straying callers might be redirected, and references to direct inter-clergyman practical dealings were extremely limited and involved Hansard rather than Woodroffe. Furthermore, on many occasions Woodroffe expressed a low opinion of the clergymen in nearby parishes: for example, with reference to Mr Strugnell of St Jude's he commented: 'Shepherd & Sheep are tarred with the same brush – the brush of grab-all-you-can irrespective of all laws human or divine';⁴⁷ he criticised Rev. Briggs of St Matthias's for giving a woman a letter of recommendation for employment even though he did not know her, adding: 'No wonder that clerical support is lightly esteemed';⁴⁸ and he cut out of the *Daily Telegraph* for Easter Tuesday 1892 and pasted into the journals an article about 'a clerk in holy orders' who had 'fallen very low through drink',⁴⁹ and after being 'charged with being drunk opposite the King's-cross Metropolitan Railway Station'⁵⁰ was 'discharged [...] on his undertaking to go to the workhouse'.⁵¹ This newspaper clipping confirmed the low opinions he wrote of in the journals.

It would seem, then, that Woodroffe did not find in the local clergy a source of meaningful companionship or desirable all-male society. The parishioners of St Matthew's, being often without work or casually employed and very rarely

⁴⁶ Arthur Burns, 'Case study: the Bethnal Green Churches fund', *Open University* <http://www.open.ac.uk/Arts/building-on-history-project/projects/Bethnal_Green_case_study.pdf> [accessed 28 September 2016].

⁴⁷ WJ, 18 June 1890.

⁴⁸ WJ, 31 October 1889.

⁴⁹ WJ, 20 April 1892.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ WJ, 20 April 1892.

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unionised, also lacked reliable all-male associations. There might be for them the public house, but that required money, and the chances were that it would be invaded by women – there are various comments in the journals about female parishioners ‘being given to drink’ or ‘tippling’ or being ‘not quite sober’, suggesting that they might well have been calling in there too.⁵² Thus it would lack the sought-for male exclusivity. For some men, perhaps, if all else failed, there might be the men’s ward of the workhouse, a bleak destination where at last those with no home and no work could associate exclusively with other men.⁵³ That both Woodroffe and his male parishioners lacked the opportunity for satisfactory all-male association confirms the shared nature of their ambivalent masculine status.

Mostly Woodroffe did not describe his female parishioners in visual terms, so although we may catch the whiff of an unclean woman or hear the sound of a slamming door as she flounced out,⁵⁴ we do not see her. However, the journals do contain some striking visual descriptions of male visitors that indicate a further aspect of his relationships with men. The men he described so vividly were not the accident victims or the pension-paper beneficiaries, but a more mysterious sub-group who tended to call at irregular times, often after dark. Woodroffe commented on features such as dark, thick facial hair contributing to a ‘forbidding countenance’,⁵⁵ and men of foreign nationality (‘possibly feigned’) who were, he believed, trying to take him for ‘fool enough to give money on

⁵² For example WJ, 16 April 1888, 26 February 1891, 1 June 1891.

⁵³ WJ, 6 June 1890.

⁵⁴ WJ, 23 January 1891.

⁵⁵ WJ, 3 December 1890.

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demand'⁵⁶ or otherwise dangerously mislead him. Woodroffe's anxiety about these strange callers might have been piqued by reports in the popular press, such as that in *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper* of 'a foreigner, of dark complexion, [...] a dark coat on his back'.⁵⁷ At the same time, Woodroffe's London was evolving into a modern metropolis, in which 'the individual was confronted for the first time by the unknown, unknowable multitude'.⁵⁸ His encounters with these shadowy, foreign-seeming strangers can be read as intrusions of fragments of this multitude into both his personal surroundings and his consciousness.

Woodroffe's concerns about the possibility of being fooled into giving away his money were not only due to the occasional appearance of mysterious strangers of this kind. He also felt among the parishioners who called on him the presence of those 'trying to impose on the clergy what is known as "the religious cadger's dodge"'.⁵⁹ His aversion to this 'cadging system', which he described as 'simply odious',⁶⁰ was more than a matter of social anxiety and was felt as a personal assault as the only way he could have given money in these situations was from his own pocket.⁶¹ His failure to hand over money was taken by the disappointed parishioners as an indication not just of his personal meanness but of his failing as a clergyman: 'She said it wd. go hard with the poor, if all the clergy were like

⁵⁶ WJ, 16 April 1891.

⁵⁷ See for example 'More East-End tragedies this (Sunday) morning', *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper*, 30 September 1888.

⁵⁸ Graeme Gilloch and Walter Benjamin, *Myth and Metropolis: Walter Benjamin and the City* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, in association with Blackwell Publishers, 1996), p. 139.

⁵⁹ WJ, 26 February 1891.

⁶⁰ WJ, 22 August 1888.

⁶¹ WJ, 15 April 1891.

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me,' he wrote, quoting one disappointed woman's reaction.⁶² Despite Woodroffe's characteristic and consistent firmness with his visitors, this response could sometimes have been painful to him as he noted in the same entry: 'I agree with her, (assuming respectability) that it is hard the C.O.S. [Charity Organisation Society] will not do its work thoroughly.'⁶³ She had only wanted 'eighteen pence [...] to get food to the end of the week',⁶⁴ and he saw it as the Charity Organisation Society's responsibility to have helped her in her unfortunate situation.

In the late 1860s, Brooke Lambert, the then incumbent of St Mark's, Whitechapel, commented that '[t]he amount of charity which has flowed from West to East has demoralized the clergy and pauperised the yet honest poor'.⁶⁵ It was thought that indiscriminate charitable giving had, by its 'sentimentality and lack of method' also provided ample scope for the 'clever pauper'⁶⁶ – the kind of individual that Woodroffe often felt to be trying to run rings around him.

Handing out eighteen pence to the woman who asked him to subsidise her till the end of the week would have been, in these terms, both sentimental and unmethodical, and would theoretically have contributed to the problem either by rewarding a 'clever pauper' or by tending to pauperise the woman if she were a member of the honest poor. This was not an isolated example in the journals of the ambivalence in Woodroffe's responses to poor women who called on him.

The closeness to their individual situations that his position as a curate – liminal

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ Lambert, 'East London Pauperism', p. 109, cited in Jones, *Outcast London*, p. 247.

⁶⁶ Jones, *Outcast London*, p. 245.

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in terms of both class and gender – made the seeing of both points of view an occupational hazard.

Suspicion of the manoeuvring of the ‘clever pauper’ whose request for advice might be ‘merely a “cloak” for begging’⁶⁷ did, however, play an important part in structuring Woodroffe’s relationships with his parishioners. There is evidence in the journals of those in need attempting to play one clergyman off against another and, on the occasions recorded, being caught out. For example, when Woodroffe refused to sign a Naval Pension paper for a woman, he quoted her as calling him ‘a mean cur who was paid for doing nothing’ and declaring that she would make the rector sign.⁶⁸ On another occasion, when Hansard turned away a woman who ‘came twice to the house cadging’, she said she would ‘come when the curate is in and see him’ instead.⁶⁹ This behaviour on the part of parishioners was prone to backfire, as when one woman called at the rectory and told the servant there ‘that while it was useless to appeal to the Rector, she wd. get something out of the Curate’ the exchange was reported back to Woodroffe, who went on to note: ‘She did get something – viz. great plainness of speech’ and a referral to the receiving officer.⁷⁰ It can be seen from his response to this woman, and the one who wanted eighteen pence and whose plight was described above, that any empathy Woodroffe had with the poor did not survive evidence of their deviousness and dishonesty: his compassion for the woman whom the Charity Organisation had failed was qualified as ‘(assuming respectability)’.⁷¹ This moral

⁶⁷ WJ, 18 June 1888.

⁶⁸ WJ, 1 January 1890.

⁶⁹ WJ, 1 July 1891.

⁷⁰ WJ, 29 December 1890.

⁷¹ WJ, 15 April 1891.

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binary was important in structuring Woodroffe's relationships with his parishioners.

Although he shared Woodroffe's aversion to subsidising the poor with money on demand, it is noted within the journals that Hansard on many occasions made generous 'presents' or 'gifts' to parishioners.⁷² On Christmas day 1888, Woodroffe noted that the rector gave 'Presents of Comforters to the Girls' at church and the following week unspecified 'presents' to several women who called;⁷³ in January 1889 Woodroffe listed a number of women receiving New Year Gifts from the rector; on one day in January 1890 Hansard sent 'a present of 3/6 in orders' along with a personal note to a woman who called and 'a present of 7/6 in orders' to a man who was then sent on with a letter to the Charity Organisation Society for further help, and likewise a woman was given '7/6 in orders' before being sent 'with letter' to the Society a few weeks later;⁷⁴ a woman who asked for a dispensary letter for her baby also received 'a present from the Rector',⁷⁵ and when Woodroffe was informed that one of his woman parishioners was suffering with a broken rib in January 1891, he noted in the journals: 'Visited and took Rector's present.'⁷⁶ These are just a few examples among many of gifts that left the personal nature of the gift relationship intact.

⁷² In describing this type of giving by the rector, Woodroffe used the terms 'gift' and 'present' interchangeably, though 'gift' was also the term used for charitable assistance such as the Fournier Gift and the Parmiter Gift. He also referred to the rector giving 'a token of friendship' to a woman parishioner but its nature was not specified.

⁷³ WJ, 25 December 1888; WJ, 7 January 1889.

⁷⁴ WJ, 13 January 1890; WJ, 10 March 1890.

⁷⁵ WJ, 27 January 1890.

⁷⁶ WJ, 26 January 1891.

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Marcel Mauss wrote extensively about the significance of the gift in cultural relationships, and Gareth Stedman Jones's discussion of Mauss's research is particularly useful in bringing it into the context of nineteenth-century charitable giving. Crucially, gifts are a symbol of prestige, and to give is to show one's superiority.⁷⁷ From his secure and wealthy position this was something that Hansard was able to do according to his will and judgement. Further, by giving to the poor he would deflect, according to Mauss's study, Nemesis that would otherwise 'take vengeance upon the excessive wealth and happiness of the rich'.⁷⁸ Thirdly – and perhaps most importantly for the volatile East End context – giving generally serves as a method of social control: in order to receive, one must behave in an acceptable manner if only by expressing gratitude and humility.⁷⁹ The separation of the classes in London's East End had, however, led to what Jones terms the 'deformation of the gift':⁸⁰ with the disappearance of the relationship between persons had also disappeared among recipients the necessity of accepting their subordination and obligation. Hence the concern over who should receive the charitable gift: if not clearly subordinate and obligated, then they should definitely be 'deserving'.

Mauss's argument continues: 'To accept without returning or repaying more, is to face subordination, to become a client and subservient.'⁸¹ Clearly Hansard's parishioners were unable to repay him in kind, but it is significant that the journals record those who received gifts from the rector as making a 'return',

⁷⁷ Jones, *Outcast London*, p. 252, citing Marcel Mauss, *The Gift*.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

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such as when a woman called to 'return best thanks' to the rector, as if repaying a debt.⁸² It is perhaps unremarkable that parishioners should say 'thank you' for gifts received, but the phrase 'return thanks' does emphasise the reciprocity of the exchange between individuals. The 'unreciprocated gift', Mauss writes, makes the person who has accepted it inferior, particularly when it has been accepted with no thought of returning it.⁸³ In Mauss's discussion, the gift is seen as given by a man to another man or by a man to a woman: the gift passes from a superior man to a subordinate man, or from a man to a woman, usually a wife, who is by gender definition and status subordinate, and no thought of return is implied. Woodroffe's inability – or failure – to give as a superior man in the way that Hansard did therefore demonstrated his ambivalent position in terms of gender as well as of class.

The transactional relationship implying mutual respect that Hansard engaged in with the parishioners was not possible for Woodroffe in his position as persistent intermediary, and the differential between the two clergymen was significant in structuring Woodroffe's relationship with his parishioners. While Hansard could be firm and sometimes, in terms of the priorities of the poor, unsympathetic – for example, he refused ever to contribute to the cost of funerals, on the grounds that 'it is enough to look after the living',⁸⁴ although in the economy of the poor a funeral was an important and valid expense however

⁸² WJ, 1 February 1889.

⁸³ Mauss, *The Gift*, p. 83.

⁸⁴ WJ, 13 July 1891.

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hard it was for them to raise the money⁸⁵ – he was also in a position to perform acts of personal generosity. Woodroffe's role, on the other hand, required him to check up on parishioners who asked for assistance by visiting them in their homes. Those parishioners who needed to see the rector about their requests were told to call at specific times,⁸⁶ meaning that Hansard only had to accept their visits on limited occasions and to discuss with them matters that he was empowered to deal with, unlike Woodroffe who was available every day, including sometimes late in the evenings after church services,⁸⁷ and often had to turn parishioners away or deny their requests when they fell outside his remit. For these reasons, the poor were likely to judge Woodroffe more harshly and consider him less sympathetic than they did Hansard. This necessarily had an effect on Woodroffe's relationships with them.

While the parishioners were happy to receive gifts from the rector and duly returned their thanks,⁸⁸ they were not always compliant in their transactions with Woodroffe.⁸⁹ They might when receiving assistance promise to attend for confirmation at a later date,⁹⁰ but the lists drawn up by the curate of people to be confirmed show that many did not present themselves.⁹¹ They might ask him to

⁸⁵ See Ross, *Love and Toil*, pp. 192–3, on the importance of a 'decent funeral', and Edward Berdoe, 'Slum-mothers and death-clubs', *Nineteenth Century: A Monthly Review*, 29/170 (1891), pp. 560–3, for measures taken to pay for them.

⁸⁶ See for example WJ, 16 January 1890; WJ, 18 December 1890; WJ, 2 January 1891.

⁸⁷ WJ, 9 December 1889.

⁸⁸ Though those thanks were not always sincere, as when a woman who called to give the rector her best 'then went & abused him at the C.O.S.' (WJ, 24 December 1887).

⁸⁹ For example WJ, 24 September 1889.

⁹⁰ On 11 January 1889 a woman who asked for a dispensary letter for herself expressed her willingness to be confirmed, but Woodroffe noted against the entry 'A humbug'.

⁹¹ Of the forty-nine names on the list of people to be confirmed included in the journal on 30 January 1889, more than half are crossed out as either not presenting themselves for confirmation or not responding to the invitation to do so.

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visit them at home on the pretence of desiring spiritual sustenance, only to reveal their temporal motives on his arrival, to his annoyance if not to his surprise.⁹² They also often asserted their considered preferences rather than meekly submitting to Woodroffe's direction, even when doing so caused them a degree of inconvenience,⁹³ and they aspired beyond the mundane for their families' welfare and education.⁹⁴ If not particularly interested in the church, they showed interest in the future well-being of their families.⁹⁵ This aspirational intransigence is significant in Woodroffe's relationships with his parishioners, as he often had to encounter and compromise with their resistance to his suggestions.

As well as playing one clergyman off against another within St Matthew's as part of the 'cadging system' that Woodroffe deplored, the poor also circulated among the clergymen of surrounding parishes in search of what they needed in the way of material assistance. Possibly because they were unsure of the parish boundaries or because they misunderstood the principles on which they might be referred to sources of assistance, Woodroffe received numerous visits from people who lived outside the parish of St Matthew. Mearns, however, describes a woman who 'attended three different places of worship on the Sunday and some others during the week, because she obtained charitable help from all', suggesting that calling on a clergyman out of district might be a deliberate tactic

⁹² For example WJ, 26 January 1888.

⁹³ WJ, 15 December 1890.

⁹⁴ WJ, 4 June 1890.

⁹⁵ Contrary to Owen Chadwick's comment: 'The poor were not interested in the churches, but were hardly interested in anything' (Chadwick, *The Victorian Church. Part 2, 1860–1901*, 2nd edn (London: SCM Press, 1997), p. 268).

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of the 'clever pauper'.⁹⁶ Looked at another way, this astute weighing up of opportunities is an example of the agency of the poor in helping themselves and their families to survive in a challenging and rule-bound system.

This chapter has argued that Woodroffe's role within the parish was liminal in terms of class and ambivalent in terms of gender. His position as a middle-class 'gentleman' on the one hand and as a hireling of the incumbent on the other meant that he was both part of the rectory family and excluded from its inner circle. Using John Tosh's argument about the three essentials of masculine identity, the nature of the comparatively very few visits Woodroffe received from working-class men in the parish has been considered and the failure of both curate and parishioner to satisfy Tosh's criteria seen as a source of tension in relationships between them. Woodroffe's deep suspicion of some of his male visitors has been related both to contemporary anxiety about crime and the experience of the modern metropolis. Despite Woodroffe's firmness with callers who tried to manipulate or mislead him into giving them money or other assistance, his ability to see both sides and to criticise the inefficiency of authorities whose business it was to distribute charitable relief has been demonstrated. In all cases, parishioners forfeited his support if they failed to convince him of their 'respectability' or behaved dishonestly.

The nature of the 'gift' and the different gift relationships that featured in the journals has been explored, and again Woodroffe's liminal position has been

⁹⁶ Mearns, *The Bitter*, pp. 27–8, mentions a woman who 'visits three places of worship on Sundays and others during the week and gets charitable help from all'.

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found to be a significant factor in structuring his relationships with his parishioners, in terms not only of what he was able to give, which sometimes was not what the parishioners wanted, and in their reactions to his failure to give at all. That they were not always ready to accept what was offered has been seen as an important dimension of their agency and resistance within a complex system of boundaries and requirements that could seem opaque and arbitrary. Woodroffe's experiences in his daily work were also shaped by wider shifts in welfare networks and ideologies, and the impact of these on relationships between the curate and his parishioners will be considered in the next chapter.

Welfare networks and changing ideologies

This chapter looks at welfare and the relief of poverty, and in particular at the concepts of the 'deserving' poor and 'respectability'. Primary sources provide an insight into how clergymen, politicians, journalists and others perceived these issues at the time, and Woodroffe's comments and assessments show how he applied them in his daily work. This aspect of Victorian ideology has also been a key area of research for historians, as the richness of the secondary literature indicates. As background to the situation at the time when Woodroffe was writing, the chapter briefly reviews the effects and legacy of the Poor Law reforms of the 1830s and how these led to the practical and formalised measures for separating the spheres of charity and of Poor Law relief in the late 1860s. As well as considering the shifting balance in the mixed economy of welfare, the chapter looks at shifting religious attitudes as demonstrated in the Christian Socialist revival and also in the Salvation Army model. In addition to state and church solutions to the problems of urban poverty in the late nineteenth century, the chapter looks at examples of local neighbourhood networks of both social capital and gossip and their part in supporting the community. The chapter considers how these factors contributed to structuring the relationships between Woodroffe and his parishioners.

Historically, the distinction between the 'deserving' poor, who were poor through no fault of their own because of illness or accident or old age, and the 'undeserving' poor, who were poor as a result of laziness, drunkenness or other

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personal moral failings, had always been an important one to those administering relief. Although the distinction between the 'deserving' and the 'undeserving' had seemed basically a matter of personal morality earlier in the nineteenth century, by the 1890s it was increasingly recognised as far less straightforward. For the Charity Organisation Society,¹ thorough investigation was considered necessary as 'without it there would be no possibility of telling what sort of assistance could be tendered with advantage'.² It was also important that limited resources were not distributed inappropriately to those who were not deserving while others who should benefit were deprived.³ The aim of the Charity Organisation Society was not merely to help a man out of an immediate difficulty but to assist him in such a way that he might 'henceforth stand in his own strength against all shocks'.⁴ Therefore not everyone was suitable for their assistance. A few years earlier an anonymous clergyman writing in the *Wesleyan-Methodist Magazine* had remarked, 'There is much talk about the organization of charitable relief. Indeed, I sometimes fear that we shall soon have all "organization", and no "charity"'.⁵ There was, then, clearly plenty of scope for differences of opinion about the Charity Organisation Society and its methods.

¹ Founded in 1869 with the name Society for Organizing Charitable Relief and Repressing Mendicity, the Society adopted this shorter working name in 1870. District committees were established from 1870 also.

² 'The work of the Charity Organisation Society', *Spectator*, 8 October 1881, p. 16.

³ The *Spectator* review noted 'the existence of a class who prey upon charity, and divert it from its proper objects', and that among the Society's work was 'throw[ing] light into the holes and corners of which they are the tenants' ('The Work of the Charity Organisation Society', p. 16).

⁴ 'The Work of the Charity Organisation Society', p. 16

⁵ 'Home-mission work in the East of London', *Wesleyan-Methodist Magazine*, 21 (1875), in Parsons et al., *Religion in Victorian Britain*, iii, p. 284.

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Central among the questions for middle-class philanthropic networks wishing to help London's poor in the nineteenth century was what the respective spheres of charity and the Poor Law were to be in the process.⁶ In 1869, George Goschen, then President of the Poor Law Board, had set out to answer the question of how far it was possible to mark out the separate remits of the Poor Law and of charity respectively, and how 'joint action' might be ensured between the two.⁷ Goschen noted that 'large sums spent [...] in charity tended to attract pauperism to those districts where money flowed most freely';⁸ the fear was that the ease of accessing charitable relief would have a demoralising effect on those not yet in the pauper class by tempting them to rely on hand-outs rather than their own efforts:

One of the most recognized principles in our Poor Law is, that relief should be given only to the actually destitute, and not in aid of wages [...] no system could be more dangerous, both to the working classes and to the ratepayers, than to supplement insufficiency of wages by the expenditure of public money.⁹

Brooke Lambert, vicar of St Mark's, Whitechapel,¹⁰ declaimed in a sermon preached in 1870: 'I have seen the poor demoralized by charity, I have seen those who were made for better things sink by degrees, through unwise charity,

⁶ Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy*, p. 126.

⁷ Poor Law Board, *Twenty-Second Annual Report*, Appendix A, No. 4, 1869–70 (1870), reproduced in Englander, *Poverty and Poor Law Reform*, pp. 104–5.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 104.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 104–5.

¹⁰ The son of a baronet, Lambert studied at Oxford and was curate of St Mark's, Whitechapel, for a short time (1864–5) before becoming its vicar. By no means all East End curates followed such a smooth trajectory.

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into the pauper class.’¹¹ He continued to his congregation: ‘I beseech you to beware of how you perpetuate the condition of pauperism in the mass, by your over zeal in ministering to the wants of individuals.’¹² J. R. Green, at that time the vicar of Stepney, also regretted the detrimental effect of ‘the certainty of money from the west’¹³ on the poor of London’s East End, who he said ‘have been flung into the crucible of public benevolence and have come out of it simple paupers’.¹⁴ However well meant the charitable giving, it was too easy for the worker who had once yielded to become ‘a whining supplicant, ready to cringe for all he can get’.¹⁵ The concern these clergymen expressed about the administrative aspects of charity foreshadows the role of changing religious beliefs in the provision of welfare in the closing decades of the century.

Goschen had concluded that charitable organisations ‘would find their most appropriate sphere in assisting those who have some, but insufficient means, and who, though on the verge of pauperism, are not actual paupers’.¹⁶ Woodroffe’s journals contain many accounts of people of this kind who were in need of temporary support due to unfortunate circumstances, but who with a little timely assistance could be kept out of the pauper class and thus prevented from becoming a permanent public expense. A man with four children who called on Woodroffe was ‘Recommended to get a promise of work in writing from

¹¹ Brooke Lambert, ‘Pauperism and private charity [2 October 1870]’, in *Sermons on Pauperism*, p. 51.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ J. R. Green, *Stray Studies*, Second Series (1904), p. 127, cited in Jones, *Outcast London*, p. 244.

¹⁴ Green, *Stray Studies*, p. 137, cited in Jones, *Outcast London*, p. 244.

¹⁵ Lambert, ‘East London Pauperism’, p. 110.

¹⁶ See Englander, *Poverty and Poor Law Reform*, p. 105.

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employer, & present it to C.O.S.',¹⁷ and Woodroffe told a woman whose brother-in-law was 'suffering from bronchitis, asthma, & a swelling in the groin' that while the church had no funds to help him, 'if he had work to go to after his illness, the C.O.S. would look into his case'.¹⁸ With the assurance of future employment as in these examples, Woodroffe's parishioners could indicate to the Charity Organisation Society that a brief period of assistance would enable them to return to a condition in which they could be self-sufficient and maintain their families.

Woodroffe was positioned at the interface where need and provision met, and because of the emphasis on only giving to those who were 'deserving', and who would benefit from rather than potentially be demoralised and pauperised by assistance, he needed to assess each visitor carefully. This implicit moral assessment was fundamental in structuring his relationships with his parishioners. If he felt they were 'deserving', and therefore eligible for charitable support, he would often send them on to the district branch of the Charity Organisation Society; otherwise, they were likely to be sent away unassisted and recommended only to apply to the relieving officer or the workhouse. At the heart of the new Poor Law promulgated in 1834 had been the notion of 'less eligibility': that the situation of the able-bodied recipient of poor relief 'on the whole shall not be made really or apparently as eligible as the independent labourer of the lowest class'.¹⁹ 'Less eligibility' was a matter not simply of material conditions but also of discipline and liberty: the routine of the

¹⁷ WJ, 24 August 1888.

¹⁸ WJ, 10 December 1891.

¹⁹ *Poor Law Commissioners' Report* (1834), II.1.8.

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workhouse was monotonous, families were split up, and inmates were not allowed to leave without permission. The Reform Act of 1867 had enfranchised male heads of households, for the first time giving the vote to many members of the urban working classes. At the time when Woodroffe was writing many houses in Bethnal Green were unusually small and might be occupied by a single family,²⁰ meaning that there was a larger than usual number of principal tenants in the area who, if they became dependent on poor relief, would be disenfranchised.²¹ Thus being deemed undeserving of assistance and being forced to enter the workhouse would mean a loss of not only self-respect, family life and independence, but also of citizenship.

With the workhouse always a grim possibility for those who were found 'undeserving' of charitable help, the need to demonstrate their status in various ways was a significant factor in the parishioners' relationships with Woodroffe. His assessment of their respectability is often noted in his journal entries, and it could be a very fine and complex judgement. A qualifying term such as 'seem' or 'look' is almost invariably included, indicating the provisional nature of his judgement.²² Following a home visit he made in March 1888, he remarked: 'Saw

²⁰ It was reported in 1888 that there remained in Bethnal Green 'many two-roomed houses occupied by one family' (*Report of an Inquiry as to the Immediate Sanitary Requirements of the Parish of St Matthew, Bethnal Green*, P.P. 1888 LXXXI, p. 539, cited in Brodie, *The Politics of the Poor*, p. 64).

²¹ 'Between 1891 and 1901, Bethnal Green had the greatest percentage of householder voter enfranchisement of any of the East End seats' (Brodie, *The Politics of the Poor*, p. 63).

²² See e.g. WJ, 21 August 1888 ('Looks a very respectable young man'); WJ, 14 January 1889 ('Seem very respectable people'); WJ, 15 January 1889 ('Seem respectable people'); WJ, 23 Sep 1890 ('seems tidy and respectable'); WJ, 30 October 1890 ('very respectable looking').

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all the family. Seem respectable & decent.'²³ However, he later added a further comment against the entry: 'A second visit did not leave such a favourable impression.'²⁴ Maybe he took them by surprise on the second occasion and they were unprepared for his scrutiny, or maybe their circumstances had taken a sudden downturn for some reason. Either way, the change in his opinion of them was significant enough to be recorded. The parishioners' being at all times subject to judgement by Woodroffe was a further important element structuring relationships between them.

Woodroffe's parishioners therefore had to impress him that they were not only deserving but also respectable. Respectability was a quality that it was a particular duty of mothers to perform by keeping themselves, their children and their homes clean and tidy, sending their children to school and Sunday school regularly and punctually, and maintaining sobriety not to mention deferential politeness in their encounters with Woodroffe, when all the time they might be on the brink of destitution.²⁵ In scrutinising the poor of St Matthew's in their own homes, Woodroffe did not act alone: the Charity Organisation Society had a numerous team of middle-class women visitors who took on this role.²⁶ Under such critical observation, it is not to be wondered at that even the 'deserving' poor could sometimes react with ingratitude, probably due in part to the

²³ WJ, 14 March 1888.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Ellen Ross discusses the many additional duties and obligations that in these years fell upon working-class mothers as 'the objects of national and local policymaking'; following the 1870 Education Act, they also 'lost more and more of their children's help, time, and earning ability', which further added to their difficulties in maintaining standards with diminished resources (Ross, *Love and Toil*, pp. 24–5).

²⁶ See e.g. Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy*, pp. 109–10.

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association this method had with Poor Law practices.²⁷ Not surprisingly, there are examples in the journals of help or advice offered by the clergy being less than politely received. In early 1891, Hansard wrote a note to Woodroffe against a journal entry concerning an unsatisfactory parishioner that as she 'has most ungratefully abused you not withstanding your & my kindness to her she need not apply to me again'.²⁸ In this way, parishioners who let a show of respectable deference slip could end by ruining their chances with the clergy of St Matthew's for the future.

Before 1867, each Poor Law Union in London had been responsible for the support of its own poor, the most impoverished districts with the most desperately poor people to support having onerously high rates, while the wealthiest householders with very few poor among them were charged very little.²⁹ In the early 1860s, there had been bread riots in parts of the East End, and the machinery of poor relief in the area had virtually broken down.³⁰ It was apparent that the system was not coping, and there were fears of civil disorder in London. For the governing classes these fears were focused upon East London in particular.³¹ The Reform Act of 1867 enfranchising urban working-class householders was passed in the hope that it would discourage an incipient alliance between them and 'the casual "residuum"'.³² However, social tensions and middle-class anxiety remained, and there was fear not only of a rising crime

²⁷ John Garrard, 'Urban elites, 1850–1914: the rule and decline of a new squirearchy?', *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies*, 27 (1995), pp. 606–7.

²⁸ WJ, 8 January 1891.

²⁹ Jones, *Outcast London*, p. 249.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 241.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*, p. 242.

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wave but also of 'a plague of beggars'.³³ Some twenty years later, this kind of apprehension clearly still influenced Woodroffe's and Hansard's reactions to some of their less compliant callers, such as the woman who was recorded as coming to the door in December 1889 and described by Woodroffe as a 'Xmas beggar who comes annually'. When, on his failing to open the door, she began to cry, he wrote her off as 'a miserable fraud'.³⁴ The previous winter, Woodroffe had received 'a long visit' from a representative of the London City Mission enquiring about a woman who lived in a nearby street who 'went everywhere begging'.³⁵ Woodroffe's advice to the well-meaning missionary was 'to leave her alone, & send her to the Workhouse'³⁶ rather than give her anything in response to her begging. This suspicion of mendicity, and the total rejection of those believed guilty of it, was an important factor in the relationships between Woodroffe and his parishioners and reflected an attitude that remained current in society at the time.

The woman who went from place to place around Bethnal Green begging had, according to the missionary visitor, been given assistance by Mr Briggs, vicar of the neighbouring parish of St Matthias, before approaching the mission.³⁷ Briggs's action in supporting her mendicity represented an example not just of the demoralisation of the poor but also of the demoralisation of the clergy. There was in the 1880s a 'belief that missionaries from civilization would dispel the

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ WJ, 23 December 1889.

³⁵ WJ, 24 January 1888.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*

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“shades” and “shadows” in which the poor dwelt’,³⁸ but several scathing references in the journals show that Woodroffe did not see the local clergy as necessarily helping in this endeavour. Indeed, on a subsequent occasion he was told by a woman who called on him that Briggs would give her a letter of recommendation for a job ‘even though he does not know her’,³⁹ which was clearly not correct practice in Woodroffe’s terms and undermined the value of clerical authority.⁴⁰ Two years later Woodroffe commented in the journals: ‘it is said that the working man dislikes the parson. I don’t wonder at it, seeing that nine-tenths of the cloth are coated with the rust of stupidity and narrow-minded folly.’⁴¹ He was clearly concerned about the obstacle to understanding that inconsistent and unprincipled behaviour on the part of the church could represent in relationships between clergy and parishioners.

While in his individual dealings with the poor Woodroffe generally and firmly resisted giving them money, he could react spontaneously and do so on particular occasions. An example of this was when a child who had gone to school without eating breakfast had taken with her a slice of bread wrapped in paper inside her school bag. This irregular behaviour came to the class teacher’s attention, and she placed the bread on the schoolroom fire. The child’s sister had been sent by their mother to ask Woodroffe whether this was the right thing for the teacher to have done, and he gave the girl ‘sixpence to buy food’ as ‘[t]he

³⁸ Gareth Stedman Jones, *Languages of Class: Studies in English Working Class History, 1832–1982* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 193.

³⁹ WJ, 31 October 1889.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* Woodroffe commented: ‘No wonder that clerical support is lightly esteemed.’

⁴¹ WJ, 26 November 1891. The clergyman who had drawn this criticism from Woodroffe was named in the journals as ‘Rev. Rust’. Woodroffe liked to frame his critical remarks in the form of puns and other plays on words, so this was very opportune.

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mother cannot afford to have her bread destroyed'.⁴² While Woodroffe was not in a position to discipline or dismiss the teacher – he could only advise the mother in this case to tell the school committee of her concerns – the bread-burning was an instance where he could make some small amends for the narrow-minded unkindness of someone who had a duty of care to a child, and he did so. Similarly, when visiting a family in the midst of a complicated crisis in January 1892, he 'left a shilling for immediate purposes' as there was a delay in the supply of relief to which they were entitled from other sources.⁴³ That Woodroffe on the whole kept his own personal giving under very firm restraint was therefore a significant feature of his relationships with his parishioners, but that he could be affected by examples of extreme moral injustice or acute urgent need, as these examples show, suggests counter impulses in his relationships with the poor. Making his own assessment of deservingness, he is on these occasions providing assistance to cover the failure of others to deliver appropriate and timely care. His preparedness to do this in situations that particularly arouse his concern is a further factor structuring his relationships with his parishioners.

In an article in *The Clarion* in 1892, journalist and socialist campaigner Robert Blatchford came to a conclusion that reflected the changing ideology of welfare at this time.⁴⁴ 'The average [Poor Law] Guardian', he wrote facetiously, 'divides his paupers into two classes':⁴⁵

⁴² WJ, 14 December 1891.

⁴³ WJ, 7 January 1892.

⁴⁴ Blatchford was a co-founder of *The Clarion* in 1891, following his dismissal from his highly paid job at the *Sunday Chronicle* because of his socialist beliefs. See Rose, *The English Poor Law*, p. 240.

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1. The undeserving wastrels who have 'only themselves to blame' for their misfortunes, and on whom kindness is wasted.
2. The 'industrious poor', who have become destitute through age or5 misfortune, and deserve the 'charity' of their more successful neighbours.⁴⁶

Blatchford's argument was that a man is not just what nature but also what circumstances make him; and '[i]f he becomes vicious from bad training, or evil surroundings, he is no more to blame than he is to blame for being taught to eat peas with his knife, or to consider pigeon-shooting a sport'.⁴⁷ And even if his failings were all due to nature, Blatchford contended that this man was 'still bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh',⁴⁸ appealing to his readers' Christian sympathies. He continued:

when we remember the cruelties and injustices of competitive warfare, and when we remember the slums, and the betting dens, and the dram shops, we cannot deny that in most cases, if not all cases, the loafer, the drunkard, and the criminal are what modern civilisation have made them.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Robert Blatchford, *The Clarion* (17 September 1892), in Rose, *The English Poor Law*, p. 240.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* The words echo Genesis 2:23, but more significantly point to passages in the New Testament such as I Corinthians 6:15: 'Do you not know that your bodies are limbs and organs of Christ?' (NEB).

⁴⁹ Blatchford, *The Clarion*, in Rose, *The English Poor Law*, p. 241.

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Blatchford believed that we therefore owed such 'wastrels' as these all the 'atonement' – again drawing on a biblical term – that we were able to give.⁵⁰ He went further when describing what was owed to the 'industrious poor', who throughout a life of toil had been 'robbed of the fruits of their labour':⁵¹

To these men the State is not only a debtor, it is a fraudulent trustee. It is not for the State, then, to speak of 'charity' to these men, but of reparation, of reverence, and of honour.⁵²

Through skilful blending of the language of Christianity with the language of socialism,⁵³ Blatchford indicated to his readers how the one justly and morally implied the other.

The relationship between socialism and Christianity in the 1880s and 1890s, however, was ambiguous. While a standard antireligious argument of the age was that the Christian religion was a total failure, in British socialism overall there was 'a distinct coloration of "religion"'.⁵⁴ Woodroffe's rector, Septimus Hansard, had been a close friend of Charles Kingsley who, along with J. M. Ludlow and F. D. Maurice, was a key figure in the Christian Socialist movement of the mid nineteenth century. According to Hansard's obituary in the *Spectator* in January 1895, Maurice had been one of his 'two great teachers and leaders' by

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ Carefully crafted rhetoric, as used in this article, was a key means by which Blatchford, 'the country's most widely read socialist propagandist', aroused the sentiments of his readers and listeners (see Dixon, *The Invention of Altruism*, p. 241).

⁵⁴ Jones, *The Christian Socialist Revival*, p. 4.

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whom '[h]is character was formed',⁵⁵ and after his ordination, the obituarist continued, Hansard became Maurice's 'disciple'.⁵⁶ Although there is no evidence in Woodroffe's journals that he had socialist leanings himself, he would have been aware of Hansard's history and long-standing respect for the values of his friends and mentors. Of further significance is that one of Woodroffe's predecessors as curate of St Matthew's was Stewart Headlam, who had also been trained by Maurice in his youth; in 1877 Headlam founded the Guild of St Matthew, which has a claim to have been the first explicitly socialist group in Britain.⁵⁷ This again would have been a factor in the environment in which Woodroffe dealt with his parishioners, though Hansard's having sacked Headlam from his post as curate in the year following the founding of the Guild because of what Seth Koven describes as the latter's 'bohemian radicalism'⁵⁸ would also have suggested limits to the balance of Christianity and socialism tolerated by the rector.

The revival in Christian Socialism during the closing decades of the nineteenth century reflected an increasing focus on class, economics and social issues in national political life. It was a period of systematic social investigation and, as a result, growing social awareness and social criticism, of which the surveys of Charles Booth in London and Seebohm Rowntree in York were symptomatic.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ *Spectator*, 16 January 1895, p. 32; the other 'great teacher' mentioned in the obituary was Thomas Arnold, who had been Hansard's headmaster at Rugby School.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ Kenneth Leech, *The Radical Anglo-Catholic Social Vision* (Edinburgh: Centre for Theology and Public Issues, 1989), p. 3.

⁵⁸ Koven, *Slumming*, p. 256.

⁵⁹ Parsons et al., *Religion in Victorian Britain*, ii, p. 58. At the same time that Charles Booth was compiling the seventeen volumes of his *Life and Labour of the People in London* (1889–1903), Seebohm Rowntree, inspired by Booth's work in London, was

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To suggest that the church's renewed interest in socialist values was merely pragmatic, however, overlooks the subtlety of the relationship between political, social and theological ideas.⁶⁰ The reality was that the church was becoming increasingly aware of the 'intractable nature of urban poverty'.⁶¹ Critics both inside and outside the church were urging Christians to work for political, economic and social reform that could eradicate poverty: traditional 'Christian charity' was not enough.⁶² Theologically speaking, if a Christian denied responsibility for social conditions, was that not a denial of membership in the Body of Christ?⁶³ Thus by the closing years of the century, campaigning journalists and social investigators had brought to public attention some of the shocking facts of urban deprivation, while an increasingly 'incarnationalist theology'⁶⁴ was encouraging among the clergy a much more direct concern with social issues.

That Woodroffe himself, as a working curate, may have had no particular impulse towards Christian Socialism reflects the nature of the interest in the movement within church circles:

the exponents of a revived Christian Socialism [...] included many of the most prominent church leaders of the day. Undeniably this also often meant that the Christian Socialism and social Christianity of the clerical,

researching poverty in York in preparation for the publication of his *Poverty: A Study of Town Life* (London, 1901).

⁶⁰ Parsons et al., *Religion in Victorian Britain*, ii, p. 58.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² Bowen, *The Idea of the Victorian Church*, p. 266.

⁶³ See Walsh, 'The Incarnation and the Christian Socialist conscience', p. 369.

⁶⁴ Burns, "My unfortunate parish", p. 294.

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episcopal and ministerial élites of late Victorian churches were unrepresentative of average clerical and lay opinion.⁶⁵

However, during the preceding half-century there had been a more general shift of emphasis across the theological traditions, including the Anglo-Catholic as represented by St Matthew's:

moral critiques of hell and substitutionary atonement, and the rediscovery [...] of the ethical message of the prophets and Jesus' preaching of the Kingdom of God as a present reality, were all aspects of a theological re-orientation which rendered late Victorian Christianity as a whole more immanentist, more this-worldly.⁶⁶

Woodroffe would have been subject to the influence of this changing emphasis, and indeed there is evidence in the journals that he found the church as it then was *too* worldly and too involved in the temporal life. He repeatedly bemoaned the fact that his parishioners did not come to him as a source of spiritual consolation but almost invariably as a source of the material support that it brokered.⁶⁷ Others were also variously sceptical of the link being forged between Christianity and socialism. Owen Chadwick reports a debate in the offices of the English Church Union in 1883 at which one contributor 'urged the separation of Socialism and Christianity, because people thought Christianity was producing

⁶⁵ Parsons et al., *Religion in Victorian Britain*, ii, pp. 51–2.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

⁶⁷ The failure of Woodroffe's parishioners to come to him for spiritual consolation is discussed further in Chapter 4 of the dissertation.

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the effect which was really due to Socialism',⁶⁸ another 'dwelt on the irreconcilability of Christianity with socialism',⁶⁹ and a third claimed that 'the best socialist teaching was to be found in the church catechism'.⁷⁰ The effects of socialism were met with uncomfortably in Woodroffe's work within the parish. He found the smooth running of daily life disrupted by striking workers, a woman requiring a birth certificate for her daughter being 'unable to pay for it as husband employed at Hay's Wharf is compelled to be out on strike'.⁷¹ Of a man who called on him for assistance because he was unable to work due to an injury to his leg, Woodroffe commented: 'I believe [...] he took a prominent part in the great Dock Strike',⁷² adding further: 'His appearance is not prepossessing.'⁷³ While Woodroffe made in the journals no explicit moral judgement about this man as a result of his association with the strike, the inclusion of a negatively inflected description suggests how this involvement might have impinged on the curate's relationships with his now politically engaged parishioners.

Woodroffe's comments in the journals indicate a concern that too much social intervention could demoralise more than it helped. He commented in the journals in early 1891 with respect to the Salvation Army Barracks in Bethnal Green Road: 'For the last day or two specimens (many in number) of "the submerged tenth" have been gathered there receiving from the Officers in charge tickets for food &c.'⁷⁴ The phrase 'submerged tenth' famously appeared in *In*

⁶⁸ Chadwick, *The Victorian Church*, p. 275.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 276.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ WJ, 2 September 1890.

⁷² WJ, 20 January 1892.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ WJ, 9 January 1891.

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Darkest England, published by William Booth, the founder of the Salvation Army, in 1890,⁷⁵ and this reference reveals Woodroffe's familiarity with current literature on the problems of poverty and his application of the ideas it raised to his own daily experience and that of the poor he worked among. This journal entry ends: 'Query: Is this social work raising or demoralising the masses?'⁷⁶ Woodroffe was seeing before his eyes a living example of social work in action, and his question indicates his ambivalence about its effects.

A solution proposed in *In Darkest England* was that of sending the overcrowded urban masses to farm colonies abroad to improve their life chances.⁷⁷ However, from comments in the journals made from time to time, it seems that Woodroffe may have felt that limiting their numbers in the first place was a better idea – that what was needed was an increase in personal responsibility rather than more external social intervention. He commented of a young woman visiting him at around this time: 'Married to a costermonger 10 months ago. Result one arrow in the quiver.'⁷⁸ This ironic biblical allusion is typical of Woodroffe's humour.⁷⁹ Many of Woodroffe's parishioners struggled desperately with their large families when they fell on hard times, such as the widow with '8 children (6 dependent)'

⁷⁵ Extrapolating from the statistics for poverty in London given in Charles Booth's *Life and Labour* series, William Booth estimated that, taking into account the populations of smaller towns and cities, a tenth of the nation's total population were in comparable circumstances. These he called the 'Submerged Tenth'. See Scotland, *Squires in the Slums*, pp. 1–2, for further details of the statistics.

⁷⁶ WJ, 9 January, 1891.

⁷⁷ Booth, *In Darkest England*, Part II, ch. 4.

⁷⁸ WJ, 5 January 1891.

⁷⁹ Cf. 'As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man; so *are* children of the youth. Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them', Psalm 127: 4–5 (NEB). Hansard could be blunter. When Woodroffe's predecessor as journal writer noted in July 1887 that he had been told by her neighbour that a parishioner was confined, the rector added a margin note: 'Then her husband must take care of her & not do it again' (WJ), 13 July 1887).

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who was receiving bread from the workhouse and came to ask his assistance in influencing the guardians to raise her allowance of 2/3 to support this numerous family.⁸⁰ That Woodroffe took an ironic view of this very real problem, encountered on a regular basis in his work with the parishioners, of family size outstripping family resources is a significant underlying feature of his relationships with them. It was a natural, rather than morally corrupted, fact of his and their daily life, and as such not subject in the same way to his moral judgement.

With so much public concern focused on the poor as a social problem and a social responsibility, the extent to which the poor looked after themselves and each other may be overlooked. The rector of St George's-in-the-East stated in 1880 that '[t]he bulk of the real aid given to the poor does not come from the rich but from the poor themselves',⁸¹ and there is clear evidence in the journals of considerable networks of personal support and material help among Woodroffe's parishioners. It was expected at this time that family networks would contribute to the support of enfeebled members, whether as parent, child or sibling, and Woodroffe's journals contain several detailed accounts of shillings here and there being contributed on a more or less regular basis by sons, daughters and others to ensure that members of the family were not a burden on the parish. For example, he notes of a woman who came to ask for some assistance from the rector:

⁸⁰ WJ, 18 April 1888.

⁸¹ *Church Congress Report* (1880), pp. 101–2, cited in Bowen, *The Idea of the Victorian Church*, p. 268.

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Her husband has been bed-ridden for nearly two yrs. Suffers from paralytic fits. Receives 3/6 from one son, & 2/6 from another per week.

Wife supports herself by needlework.⁸²

On another occasion, an unmarried woman who worked as a milliner was helped to pay her rent by her brother who contributed 3/6 per week, and she called on Woodroffe in the hope that she might be eligible for a little additional help from a local charity.⁸³ The extreme precision with which parishioners' incomes are audited in the journals reflects the intrusiveness of the investigations into their lives that were made when they applied for charitable assistance. Omitting to mention the smallest coin received might be construed as wilful deceit and mark them out as undeserving, damaging their relationships with Woodroffe.

A difficult balancing act was involved for the low-paid working classes who were expected to subsidise an older generation while perhaps earning barely enough to support themselves and their own children from day to day. It could also be uncomfortable for those receiving help from their families, as for the woman receiving support from her grown-up sons whose situation Woodroffe reported thus: 'They do what they can to help her, but she feels that in taking this help she is taking it off the children's backs.'⁸⁴ The budget of one woman who came to request help for her sister was described as follows:

⁸² WJ, 30 November 1887.

⁸³ WJ, 25 November 1890.

⁸⁴ WJ, 20 October 1891.

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husband (70 yrs. of age) a weaver paralysed, woman 75 yrs. of age, & lame. One son with 7 children gives a weekly allowance of 2/-, & 1/- a week from a daughter.⁸⁵

Of another elderly parishioner, Woodroffe remarked: 'His age is 76 yrs. to-day [...] His son in America gives him 4 dollars per month';⁸⁶ the man's 'eldest daughter lives with him. She is married & has two children.'⁸⁷ While this complicated family network of mutual support spans not just generations but also continents, it was not only families that supported one another financially: Woodroffe noted that a widower with multiple health problems was able to attend St Bartholomew's Hospital 'by going in a cab (money for same being given by relatives & neighbours)'.⁸⁸ These informal support networks, where welfare is delivered by family, kin and friends,⁸⁹ were at this time an important element in the mixed economy of welfare.

As well as these socially responsible welfare networks among the poor, however, there is evidence in Woodroffe's journals of other types of networks, such as the networks of tale-telling gossip that revealed to him the machinations of certain of the parishioners who asked for support. He heard from one confiding woman that a local widow 'used to work for her during her husband's lifetime and was considered a tidy, respectable, hard-working woman',⁹⁰ but in

⁸⁵ WJ, 17 June 1889.

⁸⁶ WJ, 23 November, 1890.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ WJ, 10 December 1891.

⁸⁹ See Geoffrey Finlayson, 'A moving frontier: voluntarism and the state in British social welfare 1911–1949', *Twentieth Century British History*, 1/2 (1990), p. 184.

⁹⁰ WJ, 26 February 1891.

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her widowhood had 'taken to going in & out constantly at the Green Gate',⁹¹ a pub in Bethnal Green Road. This widow had called on Woodroffe and maintained that she was ignored by her late husband's relations, and thus had no one to help support her, but Woodroffe's informant said that on the contrary the woman and her husband's family were 'as thick as inkle-weavers'.⁹² Woodroffe concluded that the widow was 'given to lying & tippling, & [...] trying to impose on the clergy what is known as "the religious cadger's dodge"'.⁹³ Negotiating with neighbours who incriminated each other in this way was a further element in his relationships with his parishioners that would have confirmed the necessity for caution when assessing their requests.

Some networks of local gossip were more simply opportunistic, as when a widow with three children and soon to undergo an operation for the painful condition of 'turned-in eyelashes' came to Woodroffe having been told by a neighbour that 'coal. etc. was given away at Xmas',⁹⁴ or when a woman called to enquire about the vaguely described 'widows gift': 'Somebody has informed her that I have such a gift to give,' Hansard wrote while updating the journals in Woodroffe's temporary absence; 'I have none such.'⁹⁵ Also, parishioners sometimes came to Woodroffe in the hope of receiving copies of their baptismal or marriage certificates free of charge. While he was indignant at their requests and insisted that such paperwork must be paid for, there was possibly some room for

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² *Ibid.* 'Inkle-weavers, like other persons, following special trades, kept themselves apart to prevent the discovery of their mystery, and so naturally grew very clanny to each other' (W. C. Hazlitt, comp. *English Proverbs and Proverbial Phrases*, 1907).

⁹³ WJ, 26 February 1891.

⁹⁴ WJ, 5 December 1889.

⁹⁵ WJ, 23 June 1891.

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confusion in their understanding as historically in Bethnal Green several churches had offered free registration of baptism and cheap or 'penny weddings' to encourage those who might otherwise not have partaken of the sacraments.⁹⁶ Parishioners' misapprehensions that brought them to him with unreasonable or inappropriate requests were a factor in Woodroffe's relationships with them, as was his discrimination between on the one hand optimistic misunderstandings and on the other, deliberate deceit.

While disappointments of the kind they met with at the church would have been disheartening, and sometimes devastating, for the poor, there was – apart from the social capital of neighbourhood networks – no real alternative available to them other than what the churches provided in the way of relief.⁹⁷ Furthermore, as Bowen notes, it is easy to overlook how much was achieved by 'the social service work of the Victorian Church' when considering 'what was left undone'.⁹⁸ Woodroffe necessarily gives more detailed accounts of the complexities of what could not be done than of what was simply and routinely achieved. The many dispensary letters and London Hospital letters handed out, and the school places obtained for parish children, are dealt with in a few words, often abbreviated to 'A.D.L.', 'L.H.L.' and 'N. & P. Sch.', though these benefits would have had a significant effect on the day-to-day lives of the parishioners.

⁹⁶ The situation in the 1850s is described by Burns as a 'Dutch auction' between the clergy, which 'no doubt had pastoral benefits' but endangered the 'fragile financial framework' that sustained the district clergy (Burns, "My Poor Parish", p. 293). It is therefore not surprising that the practice met with Woodroffe's disapproval.

⁹⁷ Bowen, *The Idea of the Victorian Church*, p. 336

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

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This chapter has looked briefly at the establishment of the Charity Organisation Society in response to the need to clearly demarcate the separate spheres of charity and Poor Law relief outlined in the Goschen Minute of 1869. The widespread concern about the negative pauperising and demoralising effects of unregulated giving and the concept of the 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor were discussed. That Woodroffe was continually having to judge his parishioners according to these criteria was seen as a major structuring element in his relationships with them. Despite Woodroffe's precise and firm judgements against members of the working classes who failed to satisfy him of their deservingness, it was seen that he also judged morally members of the middle classes, such as the bread-burning school teacher, who let down those to whom they had a duty of care. The Christian Socialist revival and how it affected Woodroffe's role was also discussed. His rector, Hansard, had been involved in the movement some decades earlier, but it was noted that there was no evidence in the journals of Woodroffe having particular socialist leanings himself. Indeed, his anxiety that too much social intervention could, like unprincipled almsgiving, lead to demoralisation of the poor was remarked upon. Family and neighbourhood networks of support for the poor were also seen to be important in St Matthew's, though providing aid to extended families could clearly put the well-being of immediate family members at risk. Networks of social capital that transmitted gossip and other information were seen to benefit both the parishioners and sometimes also Woodroffe himself when they led him to the discovery of instances of devious behaviour.

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That in the journals Woodroffe gave more attention, and space on the page, to difficult cases and unfortunate encounters than to occasions when he was able to assist quickly in a practical way tends to give a distorted impression of his daily work in the parish. Many parishioners every day visited Woodroffe and went away helped and satisfied. The failures of the Victorian church to help the poor must be seen in balance with what it did achieve as a rudimentary social service mechanism – the only one available to the poor of St Matthew’s at this time. The next chapter will consider the extent to which Woodroffe’s motivations as a clergyman within this church can be inferred from the journals and the place of spiritual, rather than social, service in his relationships with his parishioners. The attitude of the poor towards the church was not straightforward, and the chapter will also consider the many factors unrelated to religious belief or spirituality that complicated it.

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This chapter will discuss the extent to which Woodroffe's personal religion is represented in the journals and the evidence for the place of spirituality in his relationships with his parishioners. His attitudes towards his fellow clergymen will also be considered. The fact that the urban working classes did not attend church in great numbers is discussed in relation to the experience of Bethnal Green. Finally, the part the journals themselves played in Woodroffe's relationships with and attitudes towards his parishioners, and the place of the journals in his construction of selfhood, are discussed. The essential nature of the journals – a business document and at the same time a dialogue with another individual, the rector; not intended for publication but not private either; carrying factual reports that are nevertheless inflected with humour and reflection – is seen to give them particular value as a source.

Woodroffe's biographical background, which was discussed in detail in the Introduction, is important in considering his relationships with his parishioners. His early life experiences before he moved to St Matthew's – growing up in a comfortably middle-class family in the Mediterranean, possibly travelling to the Far East, and then after completing his education at Trinity College Dublin working first in rural Ireland and then in Kent – had been very different from theirs. His accommodation in Gore Road overlooking Victoria Park,¹ consisting of

¹ Frances Knight notes that following the Pluralities Act of 1838 a curate was not normally permitted to live more than three miles from the church to which he was

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‘Two back rooms, first floor, furnished’,² and where his immediate neighbours included several teachers and at least one other clergyman, would again have set him apart from the lives of the parishioners in unassailable middle-class respectability. His reasons for leaving Bromley Common for the East End of London should also be considered. Two reasons that often caused curates to move parishes – the death of the incumbent or personal disagreement with him – seem not to have been the cause as he was a visitor with Haines at the time of the 1901 census.³ Therefore there must have been other reasons that led to his change of location.

Seth Koven discusses the ‘manly adventures of life in the slums’ enjoyed by the young men of Oxford House,⁴ the nearby settlement that is mentioned several times in Woodroffe’s journals,⁵ and whose residents were all professed churchmen.⁶ Koven notes that the Anglican slum priests, like the settlers, also adopted celibacy and simplicity in their daily lives as part of their religious vocation and programme of social reform,⁷ and while they were often ‘almost exaggeratedly masculine in their powerful physical presence’,⁸ this masculine

licensed (Knight, *The Nineteenth Century Church*, p. 120). The distance from Gore Road to St Matthew’s was around 1.5 miles. William Stainer, the curate of St Matthew’s before Woodroffe’s predecessor Lamplugh, had also lived in Gore Road.

² In the electoral register, the ‘Landlord or other Person to whom rent is paid’ is given as his mother, ‘Mrs. Woodroffe, same address’. See *Electoral Registers*, London Metropolitan Archives.

³ *Census Returns of England and Wales*, The National Archives.

⁴ Koven, *Slumming*, p. 253.

⁵ For example, Woodroffe advised a cabman wanting to ‘turn over a new leaf’ to join a club there (WJ, 26 September 1889) and was visited by a charity worker seeking the address of a sick child who used to be visited by a member of Oxford House (WJ, 4 February 1891). Therefore the settlement’s activity was significant in Woodroffe’s work.

⁶ Bowen, *The Idea of the Victorian Church*, p. 332

⁷ Koven, *Slumming*, p. 255.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 257.

potency might be balanced with 'immense reserves of deep sentiment'.⁹ That Woodroffe remained unmarried is affirmed by census records, but no evidence is available to indicate whether this was a key element in his religious vocation or a condition of his curacy.¹⁰ Hugh McLeod suggests that while some clergymen 'invested the East End with a murky romance', Woodroffe's period in Bethnal Green 'produced only bitterness and cynicism'.¹¹ Nevertheless, Woodroffe continued to work among London's poor for the rest of his clerical career. From St Matthew's he moved to St Saviour's, Fitzroy Square, a parish extending north and south of Euston Road that had, according to Charles Booth, 'a shifting as well as a poor congregation'.¹² Based on his research carried out in the late 1890s, Booth reported that, unlike its neighbouring parish of St Pancras, St Saviour's contained 'no well-to-do quarter', while in the southern section there had been 'a steady decay for years', and at the time of his research there were 'no middle-class people left and only a diminishing proportion of the upper working class'.¹³ Woodroffe remained at St Saviour's as curate until 1910, the year before his death, which suggests that his retirement may have been forced upon him by ill health rather than a matter of choice. At any rate he remained for the rest of his working life in a decidedly mixed urban parish.

While Koven refers to the impressive physical presence of some slum priests, there is little evidence regarding Woodroffe's physical presence. However, an elderly parishioner interviewed for a 1963 article in the *Church Times*, who had

⁹ Koven, *Slumming*, p. 257.

¹⁰ Woodroffe's predecessor as curate at St Matthew's, Alfred Barrett Lamplugh, had been married: he is recorded in the 1901 census as a widower.

¹¹ McLeod, *Class and Religion*, pp. 112–13.

¹² Booth, *Life and Labour*, ii, p. 198.

¹³ *Ibid.*

worked at the rectory as an 'odd-job boy' in the late nineteenth century, remembered Woodroffe, who was at that time in his mid thirties, as a 'hump-backed man with a sharp temper'.¹⁴ Without knowing what form the interview with the eye-witness took, it is not possible to fully evaluate this statement. Critics of oral history point also not only to the way that memories are corrupted over time – in the case of the *Church Times* interviewee, a period of some seventy years had elapsed – but also to the influence that 'dominant ideologies', such as that physical condition equates with moral decay, may have on what interviewees report.¹⁵ The nineteenth century increasingly aligned physical fitness with moral strength,¹⁶ and this ideology can also be seen in literature, where villains have commonly been shown as evil not simply through their deeds, but also through physical disability or impairment. British culture has many well-known examples of the villain who is both physically and morally corrupt, from the eponymous king in Shakespeare's *Richard III* (1592), the hunchbacked usurper who murders his nephews, via Dickens's bad-tempered and grotesque dwarf Quilp in *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1840), to Stevenson's Edward Hyde, the evil and hideous alternative persona of Henry Jekyll in *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886), published shortly before Woodroffe began writing the journals. Woodroffe's journal entries certainly indicate a capacity for sardonic humour and sharpness towards rude or

¹⁴ Denis Shaw, 'Parson Woodroffe's diary', *Church Times*, 16 August 1963, p. 7.

¹⁵ C. M. Peniston-Bird, 'Oral history: the sound of memory', in Sarah Barber, and C. M. Peniston-Bird, *History Beyond the Text: A Student's Guide to Approaching Alternative Sources*, *Routledge Guides to Using Historical Sources* (New York: Routledge, 2009), pp. 107, 108.

¹⁶ Cindy Lacom cites Charles Kingsley's sermons, 'which evoked the term "muscular Christianity," [and] linked athleticism and physical stamina with [...] moral strength' (Lacom, "'The time is sick and out of joint': physical disability in Victorian England', *PMLA*, 120 (2005), p. 547). This has particular relevance to the clergy of St Matthew's as Hansard and Kingsley were close friends from boyhood until the latter's death.

aggressive adult callers, but there is also evidence of his sympathy for and interest in children.¹⁷ The elderly interviewee's comment is interesting in that it forms a link with Woodroffe's life, but in the absence of other corroboration the truth of his description of the curate as hump-backed remains questionable. From the evidence of the journals Woodroffe's temper could indeed be sharp when provoked, so perhaps the odd-job boy particularly provoked him.

The journals contain no particular suggestion that Woodroffe was a man with 'immense reserves of deep sentiment' comparable to those of the Anglican slum priests Koven describes,¹⁸ but as they were essentially a business document for recording and communicating parish matters between curate and rector there is no reason why they should. His motivation in his work may or may not have been similar to theirs. His stability – remaining at St Matthew's for eight years, until the death of the incumbent, and then working at St Saviour's for the remaining fourteen years of his career – suggests that he was unlike the volatile Stewart Headlam, a previous curate at St Matthew's, who had been fired from his post by Hansard in 1878 for, among other things, his 'bohemian radicalism'.¹⁹ Although Hansard had been considered a radical himself in the 1850s,²⁰ it is likely that as a disciple of F. D. Maurice, he would have followed the older man's lead in favouring 'social leadership by the upper-middle-class elite'²¹ of which he, like Maurice, was a member. Appointing a curate who shared these views would

¹⁷ Furthermore, WJ, 8 September 1891, gives a particularly striking description of a young woman aged sixteen: 'Rather attractive-looking girl, tall, eyes blue, hair brown, beetlebrowed'. The image seems incipiently Pre-Raphaelite, suggesting further potential dimensions to the curate.

¹⁸ Koven, *Slumming*, p. 257.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 256.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Jones, *The Christian Socialist Revival*, p. 24.

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have made for a more agreeable co-existence between rector and curate, and on a less mundane level, the spiritual interests of the parishioners would not have suffered due to disharmony between the incumbent and his curate.²² Interaction between Woodroffe and Hansard in the journals researched for this dissertation seems always harmonious. As discussed in Chapter 2, Hansard's attitude towards Woodroffe included both kindly, even chivalrous, support and bantering humour.

Unlike the personal diaries of nineteenth-century clergymen, which might contain glimpses into their interior worlds and their moments of spiritual unease,²³ Woodroffe's journals were a parish business document and a space of interaction between himself and the rector rather than a site of interior reflection or confession. Therefore they do not include any explicit evidence of Woodroffe's personal religious beliefs or his spiritual life. Apart from a particular spiritual vocation, however, several reasons made the church a viable choice of career for a man in Woodroffe's position. He was not a poor man or apparently solely dependent on his pay as a curate: he was from a comfortably middle-class family, and left around £2,000 on his death in 1911.²⁴ It would undoubtedly have been helpful to the smooth running of the parish if the curate's life were not overshadowed by anxiety about money and personal subsistence, and he could, as it were, serve God rather than be continually trying to please men in case he

²² Knight, *The Nineteenth Century Church*, p. 124.

²³ See *ibid.*, ch. 4, for discussion of the personal diaries of Francis Massingberd and John Rashdall.

²⁴ Calendars of Wills and Administrations, 1858–1922. National Archives of Ireland <http://www.willcalendars.nationalarchives.ie/reels/cwa/005014919/005014919_00389.pdf> [accessed 28 September 2016].

were dismissed from his position because of 'unpopularity' – this being a persistent risk for curates,²⁵ as discussed in Chapter 2 of this dissertation.

Although the life of a curate was not a highly paid one, for men who had to choose a profession the church was one of a long-established 'trio' that was available to them (the law and medicine being the other members),²⁶ and while a man without a little money of his own should avoid taking holy orders, 'to men with some private means and a genuine, if not very ardent, desire to do useful work'²⁷ the choice of profession could offer real attractions: 'There is no position that gives its holder so many opportunities for exercising a beneficial influence upon his fellow men.'²⁸ Therefore a career in the church offered both a recognised professional role and an opportunity to contribute to the well-being of society. Regarding Woodroffe's move to the East End, in 1887 his predecessor as curate of St Matthew's, Alfred Barrett Lamplugh, was appointed rector of Etchingham, meaning that there was a vacancy in the parish.²⁹ Woodroffe had moved to England from rural Ireland the year after his father's death in 1885.³⁰ As a university-educated man, he might well have found the life of a parochial clergyman that he had led up till that move lacking in stimulation, and a hard one to assume,³¹ in which case becoming curate of St Matthew's in busy Bethnal

²⁵ Knight, *The Nineteenth Century Church*, p. 124.

²⁶ 'Orders as a profession', *Spectator*, 19 December 1896, p. 889. Alan Haig argues that the church was more of a 'service', comparable to the civil and military services, than a profession (*The Victorian Clergy*, p.16), whereas the *Spectator* article reflects a contemporary view.

²⁷ 'Orders as a profession', p. 889.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Lamplugh was, however, back in the East End as a curate by 1894, first at St Mark's, Walworth, and then at St Jude's, Whitechapel (see *Crockford's Clerical Directory*).

³⁰ See *Crockford's Clerical Directory*.

³¹ Knight, *The Nineteenth Century Church*, p. 142.

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Green, whether by his own choice or at the invitation of the church, would have had definite attractions even if he were not as ardently motivated as the slum priests discussed by Seth Koven.

Living on the other side of Victoria Park from St Matthew's allowed Woodroffe to escape from parish life and engage in outside activities if he wished. This is an important way in which the life of a Victorian town clergyman differed from that of his rural counterpart. In country districts, the clergyman had to be 'all things to all men', and his life and person were to a considerable extent public property.³² In the town, on the other hand, his involvement with his parishioners was mediated through activities specifically related to the church and its sphere of influence. At the same time, the town was lively and exciting, a field for activity and for the play of ideas, where the clergyman could choose his interests, whether pastoral or intellectual. The urban clergyman's role was specialised, and therefore 'modern', unlike that of his country counterpart who continued mostly to carry out the unspecialised functions of the pre-industrial parson.³³

While Woodroffe did not discuss his own spirituality in the journals, on many occasions he expressed regret that parishioners did not want to discuss spiritual matters with him. It is not clear exactly what sort of engagement he hoped to have with them in this respect. In his interactions with the poor Woodroffe often exacted their promises to be confirmed after he had helped them in some way;³⁴

³² Haig, *The Victorian Clergy*, p. 295.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ See e.g. WJ, 2 January 1889; WJ, 11 January 1889; WJ, 1 February 1889; WJ, 28 March 1889.

many, however, did not follow through.³⁵ Beyond this encouragement to engage in the sacraments there is no evidence in the journals that Woodroffe strove to persuade his parishioners to a religious way of life. Owen Chadwick suggests that a lot of social endeavour at this time sprang from the desire to convert,³⁶ but on the evidence of Woodroffe's journals such effort in St Matthew's would have been likely to lead only to further false assurances from the parishioners.

The Christian church does, however, enumerate seven 'Spiritual Works of Mercy' that the faithful should carry out,³⁷ which include comforting the afflicted – potentially highly relevant to parish visiting when so often people called on the curate because of illness or other suffering. It may be that as well as discharging this duty, Woodroffe wanted the opportunity also to admonish sinners, counsel the doubtful and instruct those he considered ignorant on a one-to-one basis in his parish visiting. These three spiritual works of mercy are particularly the duty of those with canonical training to perform, hence the importance to the clergyman of a spiritual component in his parish work to enable him to fulfil them.³⁸ A spiritual element in his visits would have provided Woodroffe with scope also to practice patience and forgiveness, considered by the Christian

³⁵ In early 1889, Woodroffe began drafting a list of persons to be confirmed on 6 May of that year. More than half of the forty-nine names included are later crossed out as having either not presented themselves or not responded to the invitation to do so. See WJ, 30 January 1889.

³⁶ Chadwick, *The Victorian Church*, p. 271.

³⁷ The exact statement of the Spiritual Works of Mercy varies from source to source, though all include the same activities and derive from biblical references. See e.g. Michael Glazier, and Monika Hellwig, *The Modern Catholic Encyclopedia*, rev. and expanded edn (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 2004), pp. 195–6.

³⁸ In some sources, comforting the afflicted is included with the spiritual works of mercy that not all are equipped to perform as they may require 'a definitely superior level of authority or knowledge', or it is said that 'not everyone is considered capable or obliged to perform the first three [or four] without the proper tact, knowledge or canonical training to do so'.

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church as spiritual works of mercy required of all. Without the spiritual element in his visits, he is left with only with the seventh obligatory spiritual work of mercy to perform, which is to be practised unconditionally by all: that of praying for the living and the dead.

The disappointing lack of opportunity to provide spiritual counsel to the poor was directly relevant to Woodroffe's work in the parish and the service that as curate he should provide. Only very rarely occasions was he able to record: 'A real spiritual case [...] Did not ask for any temporal assistance.'³⁹ After making visits to parishioners, reports such as 'Ostensible object spiritual; real object of request temporal' are more typical.⁴⁰ Many other requests for spiritual consolation were also decidedly mixed, as when he was visited by an elderly man from a lodging house asking for 'spiritual consolation (coupled with a strong desire to get work) for having led a bad life',⁴¹ and a married woman called on him 're spiritual consolation & a complaint about a bad husband'.⁴² Sometimes spiritual consolation did seem at first to be genuinely what his parishioners wanted; however, following a series of visits to a woman with a long-term illness and her temporarily out-of-work husband he learned from the man that they were also in arrears with the rent on their room.⁴³ Even when spiritual consolation was valued by parishioners, there was, as in this case, almost always the hope for a little money or other material assistance from him too.

³⁹ WJ, 9 December 1890.

⁴⁰ WJ, 26 January 1888.

⁴¹ WJ, 6 June 1888.

⁴² WJ, 29 April 1889.

⁴³ WJ, 7 January 1892.

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The contrasting occasions when requests for spiritual support were genuine were described in few words and without condescension by Woodroffe: when he responded to a woman's call for him to visit her sister 'suffering from advanced consumption' he recorded merely 'Temporal assistance is not desired, but spiritual advice & consolation';⁴⁴ and when at a woman's request he visited her husband suffering from diabetes he simply noted 'Man very ill. A real spiritual case. Woman nearly knocked up with night watching. Did not ask for any temporal assistance.'⁴⁵ These rare occasions when spiritual consolation was genuinely sought stand out from other accounts of interaction with the poor for their simplicity and lack of dramatisation. Unfortunately, calls where temporal assistance was not desired but only spiritual were often brief and, as in the case of the woman with advanced consumption, concluded succinctly in the journals with the word 'Dead'.⁴⁶ Overall, spiritual nurture seems to have played little part in Woodroffe's relationships with his parishioners except when the end was near and worldly possessions were of no further use to them. Although expressing disappointment, Woodroffe seemed realistically unsurprised when those who appeared to want spiritual assistance turned out to want material help instead. The way in which he juxtaposed in the journal entries the ostensible and actual reasons for parishioners to request his assistance suggests a degree of sardonic amusement, and one that he shared with Hansard. A woman who arrived with a certificate from a doctor saying that, for her, 'confinement in a Workhouse wd. prove fatal' had on previous occasions applied to him for help 'maintain[ing] that hers was a spiritual case' but on this later occasion, as he described it, she

⁴⁴ WJ, 25 October 1888.

⁴⁵ WJ, 9 December 1890.

⁴⁶ WJ, 25 October 1888.

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'presented the certificate without religious twaddle'.⁴⁷ A pragmatic realism seems to have been Woodroffe's approach in the face of this sort of failing among his parishioners.

With regard to the spiritual life of Woodroffe's parishioners, there is little explicit evidence in the journals. Their reluctance to follow through on agreements to be confirmed is recorded, as is the popularity of 'churching' after childbirth.

Weddings were clustered on Christmas Day,⁴⁸ when the ceremony was carried out free of charge, and at other times they were fairly casually arranged, with plans to marry sometimes abandoned without notice: 'Wedding at 11 a.m.. Did not turn up. We waited till 1.30 p.m.';⁴⁹ 'A wedding fixed for 11 a.m. did not turn up. The Authorities waited till 1.40 p.m. and then closed the Church by order of the Rector'.⁵⁰ Generally, St Matthew's seems to follow the pattern of low attendance among the working classes: on many occasions Woodroffe noted that there was no congregation at church and thus no service,⁵¹ and shortly before Christmas in 1889 commented: 'Usual Morning Service. Congregation 3 besides officials.'⁵² Despite the impressive findings of the Religious Census of London, taken on 24 October 1886,⁵³ it would seem that the 'usual' congregation at St Matthew's was not large.

⁴⁷ WJ, 3 May 1889.

⁴⁸ There were fifteen weddings at St Matthew's on Christmas Day 1888 (WJ, 25 December 1889), sixteen in 1889 (WJ, 25 December 1889) and eighteen in 1891 (WJ, 25 December 1891).

⁴⁹ WJ, 16 February 1891.

⁵⁰ WJ 5 October 1891.

⁵¹ For example WJ, 27 March 1888; WJ, 20 April 1889 ('Easter Eve'); WJ, 26 December 1889.

⁵² WJ, 20 December 1889.

⁵³ This census, taken on 24 October 1886 and originally reported in the *British Weekly* on 17 December of that year, shows congregations well into the hundreds for both

There were many reasons why the working classes did not habitually go to church. Owen Chadwick suggests:

The working men never quite understood what the churches were doing in their midst. [...] they often respected the individuals and were grateful. But they never quite knew what they were about. The representatives of the church were half-suspected of being [...] moral policemen in mufti, or enthusiasts odd in their intelligence and activity.⁵⁴

Winnington-Ingram, who following Hansard's death in 1895 became rector of Bethnal Green, was of the view that the principal belief of the working man was a sense of injustice, and that he was inclined to classify the churches among the causes of that injustice.⁵⁵ Also keeping the poor away from church were social pressures towards decency: they were ashamed to come to church in their ordinary clothes, feeling a pressure to 'dress up' for the occasion.⁵⁶ On the other hand, there is evidence that in the 1880s and 1890s the working classes were dissatisfied that clergymen and ministers did not preach the gospel any longer because they preached instead on fair wages.⁵⁷ Some working-class congregations thought 'that the "real thing" was passing',⁵⁸ and although not in

morning and evening services at St Matthew's. However, the date was that of Harvest Festival Sunday, which as the census report notes was likely to have considerably inflated the numbers present in church (*Religious Census of London* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1888), p. 21).

⁵⁴ Chadwick, *The Victorian Church*, p. 266.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 267.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 268.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 281.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

general much drawn to churches preferred those where the ritual was more elaborate.⁵⁹

While he tried to encourage confirmation among the parishioners, Woodroffe said little about their failures to accept his invitations to attend, and like their tendency to see him always as a source of financial assistance rather than a spiritual counsellor appeared to be accepted as mere frailty and imperfection. However, their deliberate and deceitful manoeuvring, such as when requests for advice from him turned out to be 'merely a "cloak" for begging',⁶⁰ drew Woodroffe's greater condemnation.⁶¹ However, his severest criticisms in the journals were reserved for members of the church who set a bad moral example. On many occasions Woodroffe commented negatively and angrily on the personal lives and public actions of his fellow clergymen in Bethnal Green. Among his bitterest comments was one made about Alfred Strugnell, the vicar of St Jude's. At this time among some of the East End clergy there was a practice of offering to marry people for reduced fees, and sometimes also waiving residential qualifications. Edward Francis Coke, vicar of St James the Great, Bethnal Green, at the time, was notorious for this,⁶² and it would seem from Woodroffe's assessment of Strugnell that the latter was following suit. When Woodroffe was visited by a couple resident in the parish of St Matthew's but

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 311. However, a woman who visited Woodroffe asking to be baptised said that she preferred St Matthew's to other more ritualistic churches (WJ, 4 June 1890).

⁶⁰ WJ, 18 June 1888.

⁶¹ A general expression used in the journals to cover behaviour of this kind was 'humbug', as when a woman came to the church asking for bread and, on being informed that 'we never gave to those who asked', then 'came into the Church again through the front door, & tried to humbug Miss Oldman' (WJ, 26 October 1891).

⁶² Charles Booth notes that at St James the Great at the time of his inquiry (1897-8) 'marriages [...] were almost gratuitous (the actual charge was seven pence)' (*Life and Labour*, ii, p. 79).

married by Strugnell, he commented: 'Shepherd & Sheep are tarred with the same brush – the brush of grab-all-you-can irrespective of all laws human or divine. "The ignoble army of skinflints praise thee, O Beelzebub."' ⁶³ Also severely critical was his reflection on the religiously inspired social work of the Salvation Army when he saw 'specimens (many in number) of the submerged tenth' gathered outside its barracks in Bethnal Green Road 'receiving from the Officers in charge tickets for food &c.' ⁶⁴ He commented: 'The house was full from one end to another' ⁶⁵ – a biblical reference to the temple of Baal ⁶⁶ – while the police were needed to keep people moving on the public footway. However literally these demonic references were meant, it would appear that Woodroffe considered the Reverend Alfred Strugnell of St Jude's and General William Booth of the Salvation Army comparably culpable.

Other biblical references appear in the journals with decidedly if sardonically humorous effect, such as the one to the costermonger's wife, who had been married a mere ten months with the 'Result one arrow in the quiver'. ⁶⁷ The unfortunate Strugnell was subjected to classical as well as biblical disdain for misappropriating marriage ceremonies along with the accompanying fees:

Quid non mortalia pectora cogis,

Auri sacra fames?

⁶³ WJ, 18 June 1890.

⁶⁴ WJ, 9 January 1891.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ See 2 Kings 10:21.

⁶⁷ WJ, 5 January 1891. The reference is to Psalm 127: 4–5.

[Fell lust of gold! abhorred, accurst!

What will not men to slake such thirst?]⁶⁸

These quotations and allusions were part of the arsenal Woodroffe used in portraying the people with whom he dealt. In a more workaday context, his retelling of the delivery of some coals in the course of which a long-suffering woman was 'Sent here by Mrs Page to whom she was sent by Mr Eagles to whom she was sent by Mr Tilbury' suggests in its deadpan long-windedness a recognition of the humorous absurdity of this series of events.⁶⁹ This aspect of the journals – the even-handedness with which Woodroffe satirises his working-class parishioners and his middle-class peers and responds either with weary amusement or with condemnation of their moral faults – is important in structuring his relationships with his parishioners. Those who offend in a calculated and corrupt way are condemned regardless of status.

While Woodroffe was required to record the factual details of events in order to inform the rector, the personalised contributions in his accounts support the suggestion that there was important additional value for him in the act of writing the journals. These rhetorical and comedic flourishes enlivened Woodroffe's reports, and indicate an enjoyment of the creative act of writing and also of the dialogue in which he engaged with Hansard through the journals.⁷⁰ His many allusions to current affairs and the popular press, and the (very Victorian) sense

⁶⁸ WJ, 20 January 1891. The quote is from Virgil's *Aeneid*, III, 56–7.

⁶⁹ WJ, 4 Nov 1889.

⁷⁰ They were absent in the reports of his predecessor as journal writer, Lamplugh, who as an Oxford graduate would not have lacked literacy or intellectual skills but equally clearly did not use the journals as an outlet for personal creativity.

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of humour with which many matters described in the journals are conveyed, suggest the importance of these elements in the relationship between the two men. It is clear from some of the journal entries made by Hansard during periods of Woodroffe's absence that the rector, too, included mockery and humour in his attitude towards parish life. The series of entries written in July 1891 in which Hansard recorded episodes in an imaginary encounter with a fictionalised 'Miss Hansard' who wished to 'start a cats'-meat walk' satirises the preoccupations of the parish.⁷¹ Thus the journals can be seen to provide for both men a space for creation and recreation, and to permit a release from the earnestness of everyday routine. Complementing the physical freedom from the demands of his daily life as a working curate that being an urban clergyman living outside the parish facilitated for Woodroffe, the journals were a space of intellectual freedom. The degree of freedom and detachment – the 'developed privacy of modern town life'⁷² – that Woodroffe realised in the journals was important in structuring his relationships with his parishioners.

For all his detachment, Woodroffe had not reached the extreme blasé outlook of the metropolitan individual described in Georg Simmel's 'The Metropolis and Mental Life'⁷³ – he was clearly not indifferent to the behaviour of the clergy, for instance, or to the insidious 'cadging system' employed by some of his parishioners – but his resigned and sardonic attitude to much of life around him

⁷¹ WJ, 12 July 1889 and 15 July 1889. These entries alluded humorously to Hansard's real-life daughter Gwendolin, who sometimes helped him with parish work. He reported that the fictionalised Miss Hansard went on to use 'abusive language' when she was refused help. These entries have been crossed through, and in places completely obscured, presumably by the perpetrators subsequently thinking better of their frivolity.

⁷² Haig, *The Victorian Clergy*, p. 295.

⁷³ Simmel, 'The metropolis and mental life', p. 41.

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suggests if not a full protective carapace of the type Simmel conceived then a thickening of the skin.⁷⁴ In addition, the fastidiousness betrayed in Woodroffe's comments on the physical presence of some of his parishioners, particularly women whom he considers to be unclean or malodorous, corresponds to the 'aversion' Simmel sees as characteristic of the metropolitan response,⁷⁵ and indicates both discomfort he feels at bodily closeness and correspondingly suggests the value to him of the twin escapes to Gore Road and to the pages of the journal. Simmel refers to the paradox of the metropolitan's life, which though lived at close quarters does not end with the limits of the body but may transcend physical space: 'the inner life is extended [...] over a broader national or international area'.⁷⁶ The breadth of reference and allusion included in the journals that act as a space of interaction between two men living some distance apart but engaged in discussion within its pages represents a small-scale example of this possibility.

Linda Nead describes how the constituency of the public on the streets of London, in its dense and infinite variety, forced a constant reappraisal of personal and social identity and how the proximity presented by public spaces demanded a continual process of redefinition and negotiation of the self.⁷⁷ This dense and varied press would have been Woodroffe's experience in the streets of St Matthew's while he was making home visits and also while receiving parishioners in the public space of the church. The journal was a space within

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

⁷⁷ Linda Nead, 'Mapping the self', in Roy Porter, *Rewriting the Self: Histories from the Renaissance to the Present* (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 184.

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which Woodroffe was able to redefine himself not as an oppressed resource for the needy but as an intellectually free individual, and to negotiate his selfhood. In contrast, his parishioners had neither the physical nor the intellectual freedom Woodroffe enjoyed in the metropolis, and little time or opportunity reflect on their experiences or organise past events into meaningful narrative as he does in the journals. His freedom to withdraw and to modulate experiences through the medium of the intellect, while his parishioners are more fully constrained by their environment, is an important aspect of the relationships between the curate and his parishioners.

The journals thus have a role for Woodroffe in the creation of what Paul Ricoeur terms a 'narrative identity[...] the identity to which a human being has access thanks to the mediation of the narrative function'.⁷⁸ Narrative identity is identity not as sameness but as 'self' (Latin *ipse*).⁷⁹ The self, Ricoeur argues, does not simply belong to the category of events and facts, but is characterised by its capacity to interrogate its own mode of being.⁸⁰ Within the journals, this is a capacity that Woodroffe employed as he interpreted, replayed and cross-referred events according to narrative models through which he then communicated them to Hansard. The lives of the parishioners became 'readable' (glossed by Ricoeur as '*lisibles*') to Woodroffe, and also to Hansard, through a narrative of past events,⁸¹ in a way they might not have been to the parishioners themselves. This factor is a further consideration in Woodroffe's relationships

⁷⁸ Paul Ricoeur, 'Narrative identity', *Philosophy Today*, 35 (1991), p. 73.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

with his parishioners. Foucault describes writing that is done as a 'personal exercise [...] for oneself' as 'a purposeful way of combining the traditional authority of the already-said with the singularity of the truth that is affirmed therein'.⁸² The act of writing itself gives authority to that which is recalled. This also is an aspect of the journals that is important in structuring Woodroffe's relationships with his parishioners. Inevitably, the journal entries themselves – as edited and annotated by Woodroffe – are in most cases all that remain to preserve these stories of the parishioners' lives.

This chapter has looked at Woodroffe's biographical background, drawing on archival sources such as census returns and electoral rolls. It has considered reasons that might have drawn him to work as a curate in the East End of London. Being a working document rather than a personal diary, the journals do not contain explicit discussion of Woodroffe's spiritual life though the way in which he recorded that his parishioners wanted always temporal support rather than spiritual consolation from him suggests disappointment. Examples were discussed, as were reasons that the working classes tended not to engage with the church except on practical matters. That the parishioners' social condition meant they prioritised temporal assistance over spiritual – and most probably failed to attend church for reasons beyond issues of religious belief – shows why Bishops Blomfield's plan for Bethnal Green, discussed in Chapter 1, could not prosper.

⁸² Paul Ricoeur, 'Self writing' [L'écriture de soi], in *Dits et écrits*, 4 (1983) <<http://foucault.info/doc/documents/foucault-hypomnemata-en.html>> [accessed 28 September 2016].

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Woodroffe's writing style uses a wide range of allusions, from biblical and classical quotations to references to the popular press, and the way that these function in the journals was considered. The ironic and detached tone he adopts was seen as a perhaps self-protective response to the stresses of daily life. The further function of the journals as a space where events could be recreated in a meaningful narrative and thus become 'readable' to him in a way that they were not either in the moment or perhaps to the parishioners involved was seen to be significant. In addition to understanding Woodroffe's relationships with his parishioners through dominant discourses of gender and class as in Chapter 2 and social ideologies as in Chapter 3, this chapter therefore shows the importance of interrogating individual subjectivity to further complicate and enrich historical explanation.

Conclusions

The journals kept by the Reverend James Woodroffe during his time as curate of St Matthew's, Bethnal Green, have been largely overlooked by historical researchers to date. While Hugh McLeod considered Woodroffe's journals merely a 'pathetic document', the research for this dissertation has found them to be an extremely rich source of detailed information not only on the lives of the poor of the parish in the late nineteenth century but also on the relationships between them and the curate. Extracts from these and later volumes of the journals have been used in a small archival exhibition on parish life and a book of Victorian diary extracts, in both cases as examples of their genre. This dissertation has addressed the journals as a unique and important source for investigating the relationships between the curate and his parishioners. During the research, it was found that the journals gave insight into Woodroffe's attitudes not only towards the parishioners who visited him in search of assistance but also towards his fellow clergymen. These insights have indicated that the failings of the latter drew harsher condemnation from the Woodroffe than those of his fallible parishioners. Overall, the research has confirmed the importance of considering the subjectivity of the individuals involved when looking at interactions between working-class parishioners and clergy rather than simply assessing them within frameworks of class and gender.

During the first half of the nineteenth century, when the population of Bethnal Green had reached 70,000, the Bishop of London formed a plan to build ten new

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churches so that there would be room for all to attend. However, despite the creation between 1839 and 1850 of no fewer than ten new churches – which meant that churches in Bethnal Green were sometimes only a few hundred yards apart – the people failed to attend. The accounts Woodroffe gives in the journals of people coming to St Matthew's for assistance when in fact they were resident in another of the many small, interlocking parishes that Bethnal Green by that time comprised, not to mention those who treated the many churches rather like a high street of special offers and followed rumours of charitable hand-outs around the district, are evidence of reasons for this failure. The Bishop had referred to Bethnal Green as 'the spot where it is said that we have sown our seed in vain', and Woodroffe's journals suggest that this may have been not necessarily because of the irreligiousness of the people but because the community did not respond to the imposition of a grand plan from above. As a means of social control, the church-building programme was a failure. It probably made no sense to people of Bethnal Green that they might live further from their own parish church than from that of another parish or not live in the same parish as a close neighbour; several times in the journals Woodroffe needs to ascertain at which end of a local road a parishioner lives before he is able to decide whether they are his or another clergyman's responsibility. At the same time, the many examples of family and neighbourhood networks that sustained the poor in times of distress show the contrasting robustness of structures formed from within.

While roaming from parish church to parish church in pursuit of possible hand-outs, such as the woman described by the Congregationalist Andrew Mearns who

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'attended three different places of worship on the Sunday and some others during the week, because she obtained charitable help from all', might be considered – and was by Woodroffe – an example of reprehensible 'cadging', it also represents an example of the agency of the poor finding means to support themselves and their families where they could. Less controversial, though still troublesome to Woodroffe whose working life they complicated, were the parishioners who had particular ambitions as to which school their young family members should attend or at which hospital they wished to be treated. In these cases too the journals reveal that the poor, though largely dependent on charitable giving to provide or subsidise such essentials as education and health care, were not merely passive recipients but discriminating consumers of what was available.

The shift in focus in the later nineteenth century from the poor as a social problem to poverty itself being the cause of social distress parallels the decline in the parish system as a viable means of support for the poor. An important theoretical point here is the deformation of the gift. No longer was an individual giving to an individual: the relationship was broken, and with it the gift's ability to maintain the social structure. The gift no longer functioned as a means of social control, which had been an important part of its usefulness in the past. In the journals, however, can be seen small and particular instances of the rector giving personal gifts to members of the congregation or the wider parish, and receiving their reciprocated 'return' of thanks. These examples of personal gifts, because they are few and selective and not necessarily given to those in most need but according to the interest of the rector, draw attention to the

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arbitrariness of the waning gift system and the necessity for something conceptually fairer, if less satisfying for the giver. In this way, they foreshadow the coming of the flawed but theoretically grounded welfare state.

As well as the details of parish life that they describe, the journals used in this research have provided a rich source for considering the function of this kind of factually communicative but personally inflected writing for the creator of the document. Woodroffe's predecessor as journal writer put down the essential facts each day, but seemed to have little interest in the neatness of his hand or the elegance of his expression. Woodroffe, on the other hand, clearly put effort into both and thus, as the effort was apparently not demanded by his role, would appear to have derived personal enjoyment from it. With his daily contacts with the working-class parishioners while the rector was only briefly present, and his explicit disdain for many of his nearby fellow clergy, the journals provided a space of discourse in which he could demonstrate not only his professional ability and judgement but also his eloquence, wit and humour. Unlike personal diaries that could be a space for introspection, soul-searching and self-analysis, these were working journals, intended not for publication but for a very specific reader who appreciated his daily concerns. This suggests a further important way to consider the journals, not merely as documents of record but rather as documents of performance of the self in relation to another. In doing so, we recover not only the vagaries of the life of the poor in the East End of London in the closing years of the nineteenth century but also the complex subjectivity of a clergyman who defies simplistic categorisation.

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