

# TESTIMONY

Henry Sopp

before the Committee on the Poor Law Amendment Act

17 March 1837

Q. Are you a parishioner of Petworth?

A. No, of Kirdford.

Q. Is that in the Petworth Union?

A. Yes.

Q. Are you a married man?

A. Yes.

Q. What is your age?

A. Forty-seven.

Q. What is your wife's age?

A. Forty.

Q. How many children have you?

A. Seven.

Q. What is the age of the eldest child?

A. Sixteen.

Q. What is the age of the next?

A. Twelve.

Q. And then the rest are younger?

A. Yes.

Q. How many of those children depend upon you for support?

A. Four at present.

Q. The four youngest?

A. No, the next to the oldest, and the three youngest; the eldest is in service.

Q. What is the third?

A. The other two I had taken from me a week ago last Wednesday, and put into Green poorhouse.

Q. Are you a labouring man?

A. Yes.

Q. You have been a soldier?

A. Yes.

Q. Have you any pension from government?

A. No.

Q. How long were you a soldier?

A. Seven years in the regular army, and 15 months in the West Kent militia.

Q. What wages do you earn?

A. My average wages on 28 November has been 9s 6d a week.

Q In whose employment have you been?

A. I have been at work under the surveyor of the roads.

Q What does he give you?

A. I have had 9s, and I have had 10s. I have earned as much as 9s or 10s.

Q At what?

A. I have earned 9s a week by the day; and he gave me 17 March 1837 10s a week for digging stone.

Q That is the whole of your earnings?

A. It is entirely.

Q Upon those wages, what family can you maintain in tolerable comfort?

A. Upon 10s I can support myself, my wife, and three children in an ordinary circumstance; but not to say that I have the whole necessaries of life as a working man ought to have.

Q In case of sickness, you would be exposed to difficulty?

A. Yes.

Q How long have you worked for the parish?

A. Ever since 28 November last.

Q Whom did you work for before?

A. Mr. Eade, in Kirdford.

Q Is he a farmer?

A. Yes.

Q What wages did you receive from him?

A. Ten shillings a week, the last eight weeks that I worked for him.

Q Any allowance besides?

A. No allowance at all.

Q Any liquor?

A. No.

Q Why did you leave his work?

A. He had no more employment for me.

Q Have you endeavoured to obtain employment from the different farmers?

A. Yes; I went everywhere where I thought I could get employment; I could not get a day's work anywhere.

Q And you then went to the way-warden?

A. I made my application to the relieving officer.

Q What did the relieving officer say to you?

A. He ordered me to attend the board of guardians at Wisborough Green the next meeting day.

Q Did you attend the board of guardians?

A. Yes.

Q Did you state your complaint?

A. Yes.

Q You were heard by the board of guardians?

A. Yes.

Q What answer did you receive from the relieving officer in consequence of making that application?

A. I received no answer from him, merely that he took it to the board of guardians.

Q When did you hear about it again?

A. At the board of guardians.

Q What did they tell you?

A. They asked me what was the reason that I did not go further for work; and I told them that I was not able, that I had got no money to subsist my way anywhere, and I could not get any in the neighbourhood.

Q Were you told that it would be possible to find employment anywhere else?

A. Mr. Hawley asked me what was the reason I did not go to the northward. I asked him what part of the northward, and he said the neighbourhood of Manchester; "There," he says, "you can procure labour."

Q And you expressed your readiness to go, did you not?

A. Yes.

Q How long were you kept before you heard again from Mr. Hawley?

A. From that time to this, from 28 November till now I never had any answer from the guardians of the parish, and from no man.

Q You have since subsisted upon parish work?

A. Yes.

Q Have you ever tried in the meantime to get private employment with the farmers?

A. Yes, I have.

Q Would the private employment with the farmers be more profitable to you than employment by the parish?

A. Yes, it would be 6*d* a week difference; because if I worked for a farmer I should have 10*s*.

Q In no other respect would there be a difference?

A. No.

Q Do you not occasionally get other assistance from the farmer?

A. No.

Q What happens in harvest?

A. In harvest you may get seven days' reaping; the bark-harvest is in general from 14 to 18 days' work.

Q What do you get then?

A. If you are 18 days, perhaps you may get about £3; £1 a week.

Q Are you employed in that way?

A. Yes, I work in that way in the season of the year; then there are my tools to get for this bark-harvest; it will stand, upon the average, every man 8*s*, before he begin his work, for his tools to be in order.

Q To put the tools in order will cost as much as 8*s*?

A. Yes; I shall be obliged to buy an axe, which costs me 3*s* 6*d*, and a spade, which costs me 3*s* 2*d*, and a new stripper, which costs 1*s*.

Q Are you obliged to buy those tools every year?

A. No; but every year I am obliged to have them repaired; to take one year with another it costs 6*s*.

Q You consider the expense that is necessary to renew those tools when they are worn out, and to get them repaired when they are out of order, taking one year with another, comes to about 6*s* a year?

A. Yes.

Q What is the next extra employment?

A. The next extra employ is the hay-harvest.

Q What do you generally make at the hay-harvest?

A. In our neighbourhood you may get from three to four days' mowing, or perhaps it might be a week.

Q What do you earn then?

A. You might earn *2s 6d*, or it may not be more than *2s 3d* a day.

Q Do you do that work by the day or by the piece?

A. Mow grass by the piece.

Q Do you get more or less than a week's work, including the mowing of grass and the making of hay, taking both together?

A. It depends upon where you are; in some places, where the farmers have constant labourers, it lasts longer than it does in others; but to take it generally, it is a mere nothing, not worth mentioning, what you get extra; hay-making is a different thing; you get your regular day's wages, *20d* a day.

Q Do you get, while you are either mowing, or at the bark-harvest, or at hay-making, on either of those three occasions, besides your wages, any assistance in liquor?

A. Yes, in the haying there is generally a quart of beer allowed for a luncheon in the afternoon at four o'clock, and in some places they allow you small beer, and in others none.

Q A quart of ale?

A. Yes.

Q Do they give you any victuals?

A. No.

Q No dinner?

A. No.

Q You have spoken of the bark-harvest and hay-making; then we come to the corn-harvest?

A. You get from six to nine days' reaping, and perhaps not so much.

Q What do you earn at that generally?

A. You might earn *3s 6d* a day or *4s*.

Q Do you get then any liquor?

A. No, not at reaping.

Q During the harvest, how many days do you think that you are generally employed in the whole business of the corn-harvest?

A. It depends upon how the weather is; last year was a long harvest; sometimes we have half a day's harvest and then go for two or three days.

Q Taking one year with another?

A. In general fair weather, we get about three weeks: there will not be above a day or two difference one year with another.

Q Is there any other extra work in the course of the year?

A. No.

Q Do you work at copse-cutting?

A. No, it is out of my line, because I was in a farmer's service till I went into the army, and then I was on the sea coast, where there was no such thing.

Q Are you obliged to provide your tools for mowing and for reaping?

A. Yes.

Q You have estimated the expense per year of having tools for the barking season; what do you suppose to be the cost generally, taking one year with another, of your tools for mowing and reaping?

A. A scythe will cost you 5s now, and if you have the whole of it, the scythe and the handle with it, it will cost you about 8s 6d, but then in such short jobs as that, that will last as much as three years, say three years; those expenses do not come every year, except you have long jobs of mowing.

Q How far do you live from the place where the board of guardians meet?

A. About two miles.

Q Your wife is forty years old?

A. Yes.

Q Is she a healthy woman?

A. No, she is unhealthy.

Q Is she able to assist you at all in your earnings?

A. Nothing, except in gleaning.

Q How much is that worth?

A. She picked up two bushels of wheat in the last harvest.

Q Was last harvest a good season for it?

A. The wheat was not so good the last harvest as the harvest before.

Q How much does she generally pick up?

A. The worst of my misfortune is that she has not been able, because she has had a young child at the breast, or been prevented doing anything.

Q But your children have been able to glean something?

A. Yes.

Q Were two bushels all that the whole of your family got?

A. Yes.

Q How old is your eldest boy?

A. Ten.

Q Is he at home with you?

A. No, in the poorhouse at Green.

Q The girl of 16 is out at place?

A. Yes, at service; and the girl at 12 is at home with me, and the three youngest. The boy of 10 years of age, and the girl eight years of age, are in the workhouse; they went in a week ago last Wednesday.

Q Are they comfortably off?

A. They are much more comfortable than I could make them at home.

Q Are they well-fed?

A. They appeared to me to be very well-fed indeed.

Q And well taken care of?

A. And well taken care of.

Q Are they taught anything?

A. Yes, as the woman told me; I have never been present to see it.

Q. Have you been to see them?

A. Never since I put them in.

Q. Is there any objection to your going to see them when you please?

A. I can see them every Sunday.

Q. You probably are hard at work, and cannot go to see them in the week?

A. No.

Q. But on Sunday you can see them?

A. Yes.

Q. You do not mean that you have not permission to see them on any day in the week, but that you have not time?

A. I do not know the regulations of the house, but the mistress of the house told me that I could see them on any Sunday when I came up.

Q. You state that your family now consists of yourself, wife, and four children, and you are earning 9s 6d a week. How much of your earnings do you expend in bread or flour?

A. It will take me 7s 0d for flour alone.

Q. Does that supply you with as much bread and flour as your family actually require?

A. It is a gallon a head.

Q. Is that all you want?

A. That is what I can do with; that is for four children, my wife, and myself.

Q. Bread and flour cost you 7s?

A. Yes; and there is the yeast to bake it with, that will be 3d more, which will make together 7s 3d.

Q. State in what other ways you expend the remainder of your 9s 6d.

A. I have not had a chance to lay it out; this is for the week, for which I shall receive my money when I go home tomorrow night. Last week I paid for a bushel of flour, which cost me 9s 4d, three pennyworth of yeast, that is 9s 7d out, and then I was a penny in debt.

Q. What have you wherewith to supply your family with tea, cheese, butter, soap, firing, candles, clothes, beer?

A. Nothing.

Q. Then, in fact, do you and your family go without those things?

A. We went without it, and have been without it, for the last three months, and are without it at this time.

Q. Have you any fuel?

A. Yes; we can pick up the wood that falls off the trees on waste ground, and that is the way we procure fuel.

Q. Have you no candles?

A. We are obligated, if we can get a few pence; but we have had none till a friend that I fell in with a short time ago gave me, or rather my wife, 6d to get candles and sugar for the child, and that is the only extra 6d that I have had within the last month, till my children were put into the workhouse.

Q. When you say that you expend 7s 3d in bread and flour, is that for the family that you have now to support?

A. It is.

Q. Before the children were taken to the workhouse it cost you 9s?

A. Yes, I was obliged to have eight gallons of flour instead of six.

Q. Now you have the difference between *7s 3d* and *9s 6d* wherewith to buy the different things that I have enumerated?

A. Yes.

Q. You are employed at the present time by the way-warden?

A. Yes.

Q. How many hours in the day do you work?

A. I work from seven till five, 10 hours in the day.

Q. Have you any time allowed for meals?

A. An hour at dinner-time.

Q. Are you allowed any beer, or aught else than the *9s 6d*?

A. Nothing.

Q. Do you feel from your labour the want of the nourishment of beer and meat?

A. I do.

Q. Then do you and your family, especially yourself as a working man, have that support which you feel you require to carry out your daily labour?

A. I have not got it, and I could not have it.

Q. What day in the week did you first apply to the relieving officer?

A. Monday.

Q. And he then stated that he would bring your case before the board of guardians on the Thursday?

A. Yes.

Q. Were you out of employ at that time?

A. I was.

Q. Then from the Monday to the Thursday how did you subsist?

A. I subsisted as well as I could; I had two loaves of bread on the Monday, and when Thursday came I had nothing.

Q. On Thursday you attended the board of guardians?

A. Yes.

Q. Did they give you any relief then?

A. Yes, *4s* and five gallons of flour for that week.

Q. From that time, did you go into the employment of the way-warden?

A. Yes.

Q. And the money that you received and the flour is the only assistance that you received from the Poor Law guardians?

A. Yes.

Q. How much do you pay for your rent?

A. Four pounds, six shillings, and eight-pence—*1s 8d* a week.

Q. How do you get your means of paying that?

A. I have done that from what was allowed me for relief for my children under the old system of the law.

Q. Under the old system, you were allowed sufficient to pay your rent; how do you pay your rent now?

A. My rent is lying back.

Q. You pay it as you can?

A. I cannot raise a large portion of it; I have not that to do it with.

Q. Do you consider the extra wages that you receive at the times that you have stated to amount to between £2 and £3?

A. That is quite as much as I think it is, to take one year with another, of the extra work in the run of the summer.

Q. Are there any benefit clubs in your parish?

A. Yes, there is.

Q. Do you belong to it?

A. No, I was never in any club in my life.

Q. Are there any charities in which you participate at all?

A. No.

Q. If you or either of your family were ill, what distance would you have to go for a doctor?

A. If I had to go to Petworth, I should have to go four miles.

Q. Have you any garden attached to your cottage?

A. Yes, I have a small piece.

Q. Does that produce you vegetables and potatoes?

A. It produces enough for about four months in the year; there are five roods<sup>1</sup> of ground.

Q. How are you supplied during the rest of the year with vegetables?

A. I am obliged to buy when I can, or go without.

Q. Then, by your statement, you must go without the greater part of the year?

A. Yes, all the winter part of the year I am out of vegetables entirely.

Q. Is all the ground annexed to the cottage cultivated; do you plant it all?

A. Yes.

Q. That does not supply you with vegetables throughout the year?

A. For not above four months, or between four and five months on the outside.

Q. Then the five roods which you have are not enough to supply you with vegetables?

A. No.

Q. How do you purchase your clothes for yourself and family?

A. I cannot tell how I purchase my clothes.

Q. How long does a frock of that kind which you have on serve you?

A. It might serve a twelve-month.

Q. What does it cost?

A. I cannot tell, not exactly; from 4s to 5s, I should say; it is a thing that I never purchased in my life at a shop.

Q. How do you get generally for your family their apparel?

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<sup>1</sup> 5 roods = 1.25 acres



A. At harvest or in any extra time like that, I have been obligated, and we send the people to look out for such things; but when you are depending upon your daily labour, you can purchase nothing, not a bit of clothes, if you have any family.

Q. Are there any charities in the parish at all that you belong to?

A. No, not of any account; I may say that I have had nothing of the kind.

Q. Do any others in the same situation as yourself receive anything from charities?

A. Not as I know of.

Q. Are all the other labourers in the same situation as you are?

A. A constant labourer at a farm house may have the little privileges of milk or broth or anything that is made at the house.

Q. How do you supply your family with milk?

A. I have none, except in summer time I may have two-penny-worth a week.

Q. What is the mode in which you use that flour which you buy?

A. I convert it into bread.

Q. Is that the only way in which you use it?

A. Yes.

Q. How is it baked; have you an oven of your own?

A. We have an oven of our own in the cottage that I live in.

Q. Then, unless you can pick up the wood, you would not be able to obtain fuel?

A. No.

Q. How do you manage in winter; what fuel have you?

A. It is rotten wood that falls off the trees in waste ground.

Q. When did you first marry?

A. I was married in 1821; I was discharged in 1820 from the army, and married the next year.

Q. What wages did you get in 1821?

A. Twelve shillings a week.

Q. What did you pay for a bushel of flour then?

A. I do not know, because I did not buy any; I bought my bread for some years after I was married.

Q. In the year 1821, when you married, it was dearer than it is now?

A. Yes, it was; I should say that flour was *1s 8d* a gallon, and now it is *1s 2d*.

Q. Your wages then were less, in comparison with the price of flour, than they are now?

A. Yes.

Q. Is the New Poor Law much discussed among the labourers?

A. There are some who speak against it, and others say very little about it; as for my own part, I have nothing to say about it, neither one way nor the other; no further than if I could get my living by my labour, I should be satisfied.

Q. Did you ever get any relief from the parish before this new law?

A. Yes.

Q. To what extent did you get it before?

A. A gallon of flour was the last relief I had for three children.

Q Three gallons?

A. No; a gallon of flour for three; and if I had four children, I had another gallon, and if I had five children, I had another gallon.

Q Up to what time did you receive that additional relief?

A. Up to June last.

Q Did you never receive any private charity; is nothing ever given to you at Christmas by your richer neighbours?

A. No.

Q None of your richer neighbours give you anything?

A. No.

Q Is there no penny club in your neighbourhood?

A. No.

Q You say your desire is to live by your labour; do you consider that to be the general feeling and wish of the labouring community?

A. I can state it for myself, that it is all I require; if I can live by my labour, I should willingly do it, and support all my family without putting them into the workhouse, or being a burden to the parish.

Q Are the Committee to understand that you have never bacon or meat of any kind in the house?

A. I have no meat, no butter, and no cheese, and no tea, nor any sugar; I left my wife, last Wednesday with nothing but bread in the house.

Q What do you drink?

A. Water.

Q Is that your only drink?

A. That has been the case for some weeks, and tomorrow night I shall take my pay and procure rather better necessaries of life, because I shall have a few pence to spare after I have paid for my flour; my flour this week will stand me in *7s 3d*.

Q Is there a garden to your house?

A. Yes.

Q What rent do you pay?

A. Four pounds, six shillings, and eight-pence a year, which is *1s 8d* a week.

Q Has that rent been reduced lately?

A. My landlord told me, just after last Michaelmas that this year he would reduce the rent; but I have not paid it up to 26 October last.

Q For how long has that cottage and garden been let for *£4 6s 8d* per year?

A. I cannot say, because I have not been resident in Kirdford more than four years.

Q Then you cannot say whether the rent has been reduced?

A. No.

Q Did the landlord tell you how much he was ready to reduce the rent?

A. I took the house from his uncle, and his uncle is dead, and it has come to him, and I had never any agreement with him about the rent; when I told him that I could not pay the whole rent, that I would pay him what I could towards it, that it was too much money, he said, "Well, I will lower the rent for this year," but how much he means to lower it I cannot say.

Q What does your cottage consist of?

A. Four small rooms, two upstairs and two down.

Q Is it a stone cottage?

A. No.

Q Wood or brick?

A. Bricked.

Q Thatched?

A. No, tile.

Q In good repair?

A. No, it is not in good repair at present.

Q Are the windows sound?

A. Yes, I keep the windows sound.

Q Is your garden of assistance to you; are you able to work in it?

A. Yes, I work in it at nights, after I have done my day's work—that is the mode; I have tilled my garden ever since I have been there.

Q It is a help to you?

A. Yes; in summer I can get potatoes from it, and that might last me a month after the cabbage is gone.

Q Have you a pig?

A. No.

Q You are not able out of that small garden to keep a pig?

A. No, and I could not keep it, because I cannot get enough to support my family; I have been heavily pressed with my family for some time; I could not procure necessaries for the children.

Q Would a larger garden be of use to you, or have you quite as much as you can spare time to cultivate?

A. All the time that I am at work as much again of ground would answer.

Q If you were to work every day, and are only able to work in your spare time in your garden, have you as much as you could cultivate?

A. No, as much again I could cultivate in my leisure time.

Q If you had 10 roods you could cultivate it?

A. Yes.

Q You said that you had not enough to sustain you with the work you did?

A. I have not.

Q You said that your children were well taken care of in the workhouse?

A. Yes.

Q Would you not be taken better care of in the workhouse, and better fed?

A. I would sooner work for my living than be in the workhouse.

Q If you were to be better fed and better taken care of in the workhouse, would you not be better off than working hard and not having enough?

A. I would sooner labour for my bread than go into the workhouse; I do not like the confinement; if I can support my family, I would sooner be out of the workhouse.

Q Would the guardians refuse to take more of your children into the workhouse?

A. I am sure I do not know.

Q. You have no reason to believe that they would?

A. I have no reason.

Q. If your children were taken into the workhouse, would you not have more to spend upon yourself?

A. Yes, it would lessen my family.

Q. And you would be able to procure some of those comforts which you say you cannot get now?

A. Yes.

Q. Do you ever go to any of those places where they sell beer in the parish beer-shops?

A. Yes, I have been once the last five months, and had two-penny-worth of beer.

Q. You have been only once in five months?

A. Yes.

Q. Did you use to go oftener before two years ago?

A. No, at least I never frequented the houses a good deal, for before I went to that part of the country I used to brew a little fresh beer.

Q. Do you know whether the labourers in your parish go more to the beerhouses than they used to do?

A. I cannot say anything about it, but I should say that they do not go so much as they used to do.

Q. When did you first receive assistance from the parish towards paying your rent, how soon after you married?

A. Six years.

Q. How many children had you then?

A. Three.

Q. Then when you had three children, the parish helped to pay your rent

A. Yes, they allowed me an allowance for one child.

Q. How much?

A. One shilling and six-pence.

Q. And that went towards the rent?

A. Yes.

Q. Did they give to you at Michaelmas, either then or at any subsequent time, any considerable sum at once towards paying your rent?

A. No.

Q. Did you ever get as much as 10s in a lump towards paying your rent?

A. Yes, what they called relief.

Q. Did they give you 10s at Michaelmas?

A. Yes, they have given me as much as 20s at Michaelmas for to help me to pay my rent.

Q. And that continued till about a year ago?

A. No, till about four years ago.

Q. Have you received nothing from the parish in that shape since?

A. No more than is allowed to my children.

Q. You said that your eldest daughter was 16 years of age; what are her wages?

A. Forty shillings a year she has for this year.

Q She is not able out of that to send you anything?

A. No, it is not more than enough to buy her clothes.

Q Would you sooner look for work out of your parish than go into the workhouse?

A. I would sooner go to any part of the United Kingdom than I would go to the workhouse, or His Majesty's dominions abroad.

Q If the wages in your parish were somewhat higher than 10s, you would prefer it a good deal, getting higher wages and maintaining your family to having your children maintained in the workhouse?

A. If I had half-a-crown a head, taking it round, that is 17s 6d a week, I would support my wife, myself, and six children out of the workhouse.

Q But, generally, you and your neighbours, who live by your labour, would prefer to have higher wages, which would enable you to sustain your families without parish assistance, to having low wages with parish allowance?

A. Certainly, one and all would prefer having high wages and no assistance.

Q If the young men were to beat out and look for work out of their own parish, would not the farmers be obliged to give higher wages to the remaining hands?

A. I think it is likely the scarcer the hands the more wages they will give.

Q But if it is held out to them by the parish that they will have 18d a head for every child they can get, they are not likely to beat out of the parish; they are likely to remain there?

A. A man is likely to travel out for work sooner than he would remain at home and be hampered up in the parish.

Q If you were a young man and were not married, and knew that the parish would leave you to maintain your family at the wages you could get, you would be apt to look for wages in another part of the country?

A. Yes, I would never stay in the Kingdom if I could not do better than the young men in our parish now do.

Q And you would look out for another part of the Kingdom?

A. Yes, and if I could not get it in this Kingdom, I might in another.