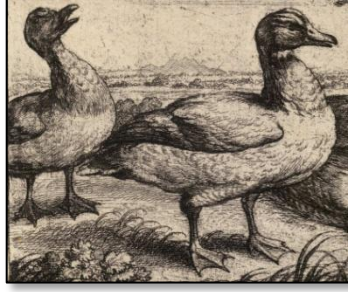
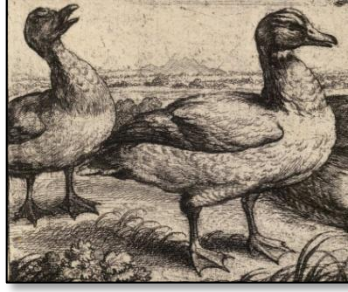


Exclusion, deviance or choice? Pauper burial in Westminster, 1725-1834

Jeremy Boulton, Newcastle University

Social History Society Annual Conference,
University of Northumbria, 8 April, 2014



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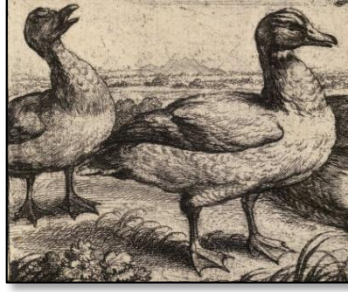


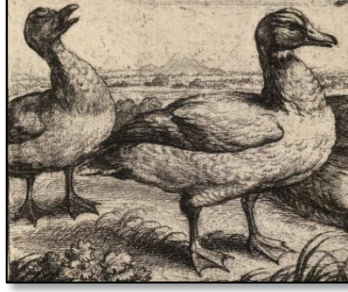
There is thus considerable debate on the meaning of the pauper funeral

There is disagreement even as to its historical incidence

Studies need proper local contextualisation

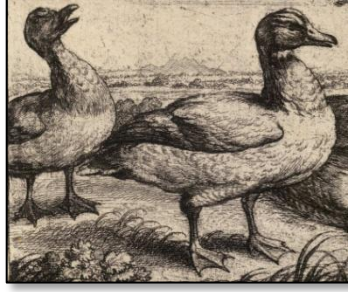
This study aims to return to London: examine pauper funerals *in the place where they are thought to have originated*

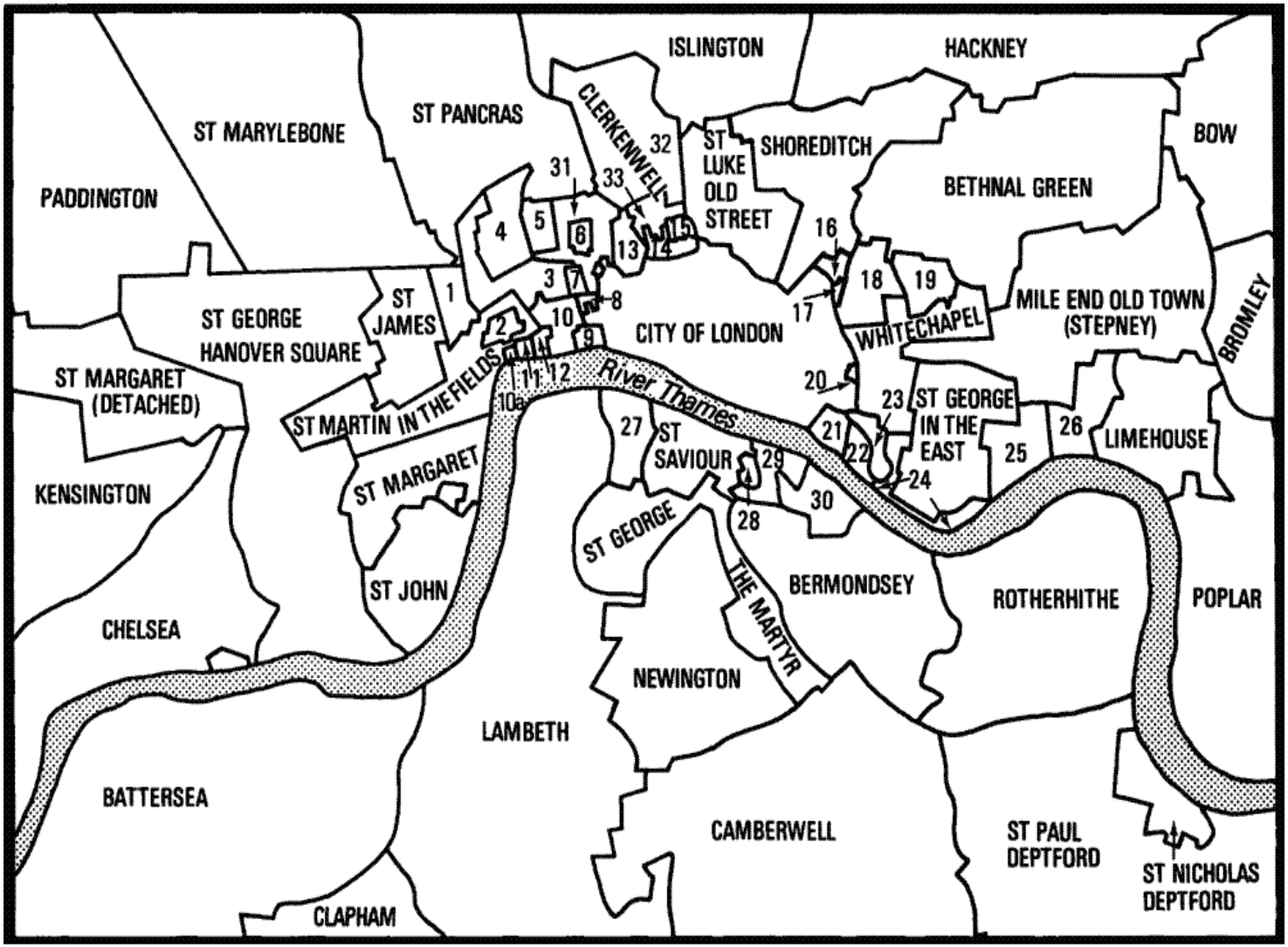
Analysis of pauper funerals in capital's West End sheds new light on these burials in a context of what seems to have been long term decline which continued into nineteenth century



Local context: the parish of St Martin in the Fields

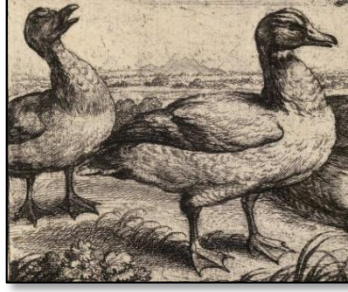
London parishes in the eighteenth century





http://www.british-history.ac.uk/

The Parish of St Martin in the Fields and the Pauper Lives Project

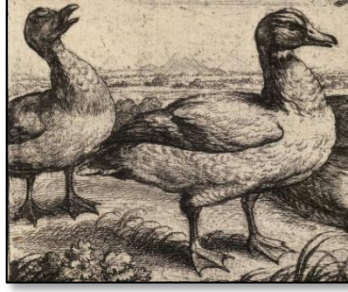


A large (25,000 or so) socially heterogeneous parish in London's West End

Equivalent to roughly 40 'Terlings'...

No population growth to speak of

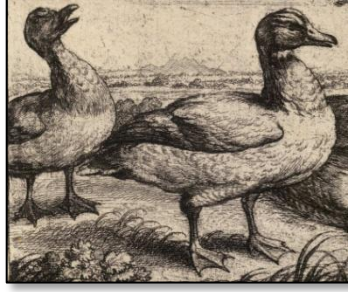
Occupational stability as far as one can measure it

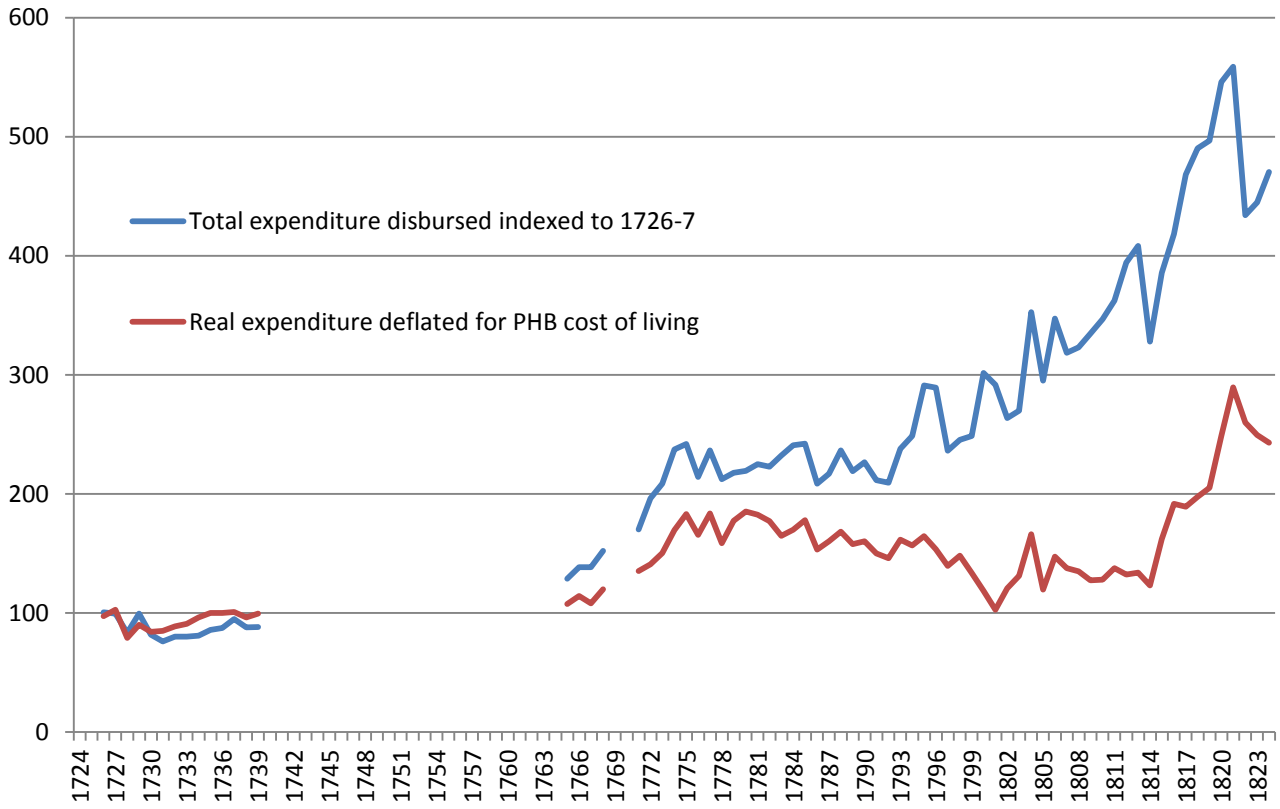


	Fleet marriages 1726-53	1813-20 baptism registers
1. Primary occupations (agriculture)	2%	1%
2. Secondary occupations (manufacturing)	46%	51%
3. Tertiary occupations (dealers)	1%	2%
4. Tertiary occupations (sellers)	3%	8%
5. Tertiary occupations (services and professions)	20%	22%
6. Tertiary occupations (transport and communications)	10%	9%
90. Sectorally unspecific occupations	3%	2%
99. Without occupations or unstated	14%	5%
	100%	100%
Total sample size	**4580**	**6288**

Occupational stability in St Martin in the Fields

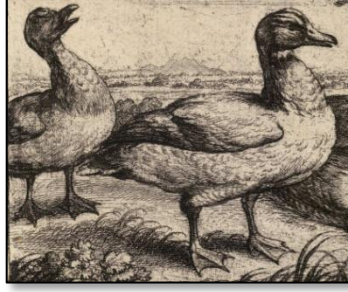
Total and real expenditure by Overseers of the Poor, St Martin in the Fields, 1726-1824, indexed to 1726-7.



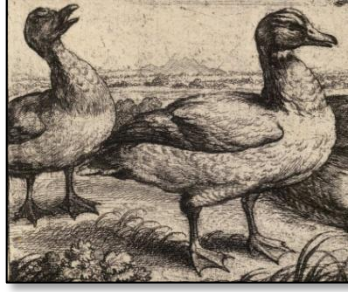


•In 1824/5 the parish spent £21,842 on relieving its poor - more than five times as much as in the late 1720s – but **only a tiny fraction of this money went on pauper funerals**

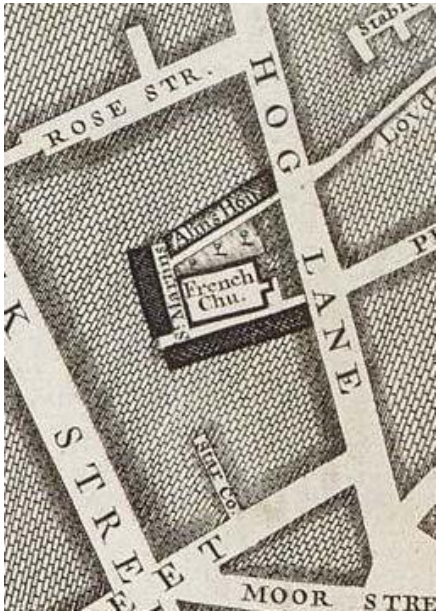
•Real spending (i.e. removing the effects of inflation) increased only between 1765-1776 and after 1815 and may have declined gently between 1776 until 1815.

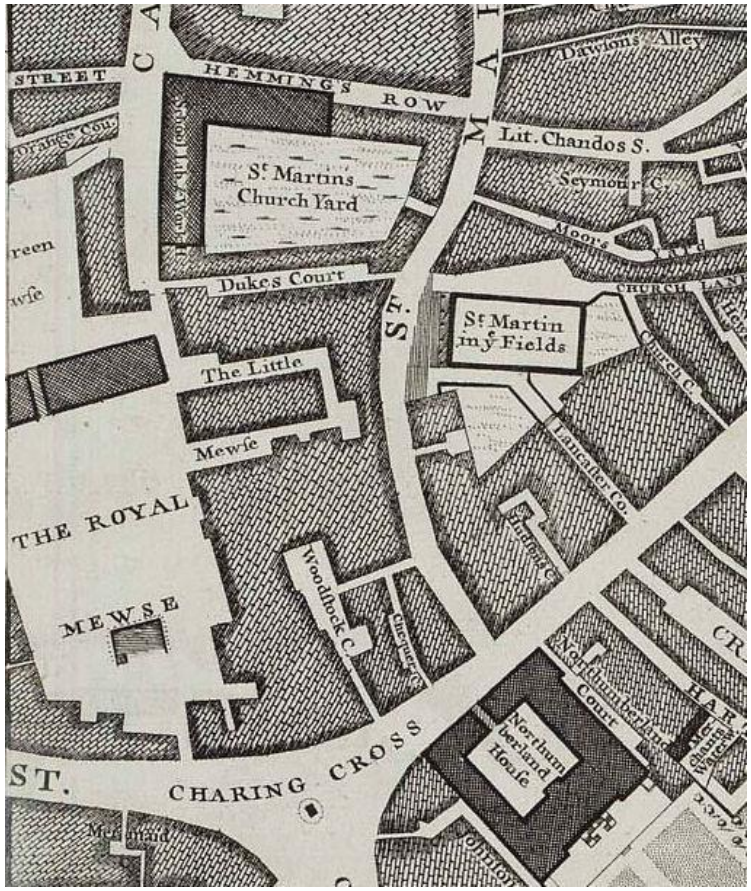


The nature and meanings of pauper burial in St Martin’s

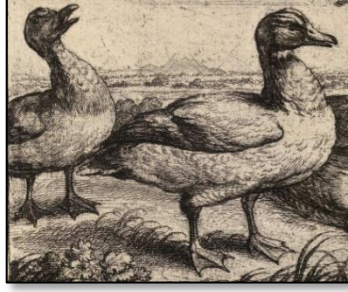


Like most West End parishes St Martin in the Fields was short of burial space...

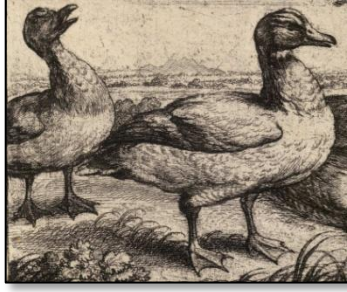


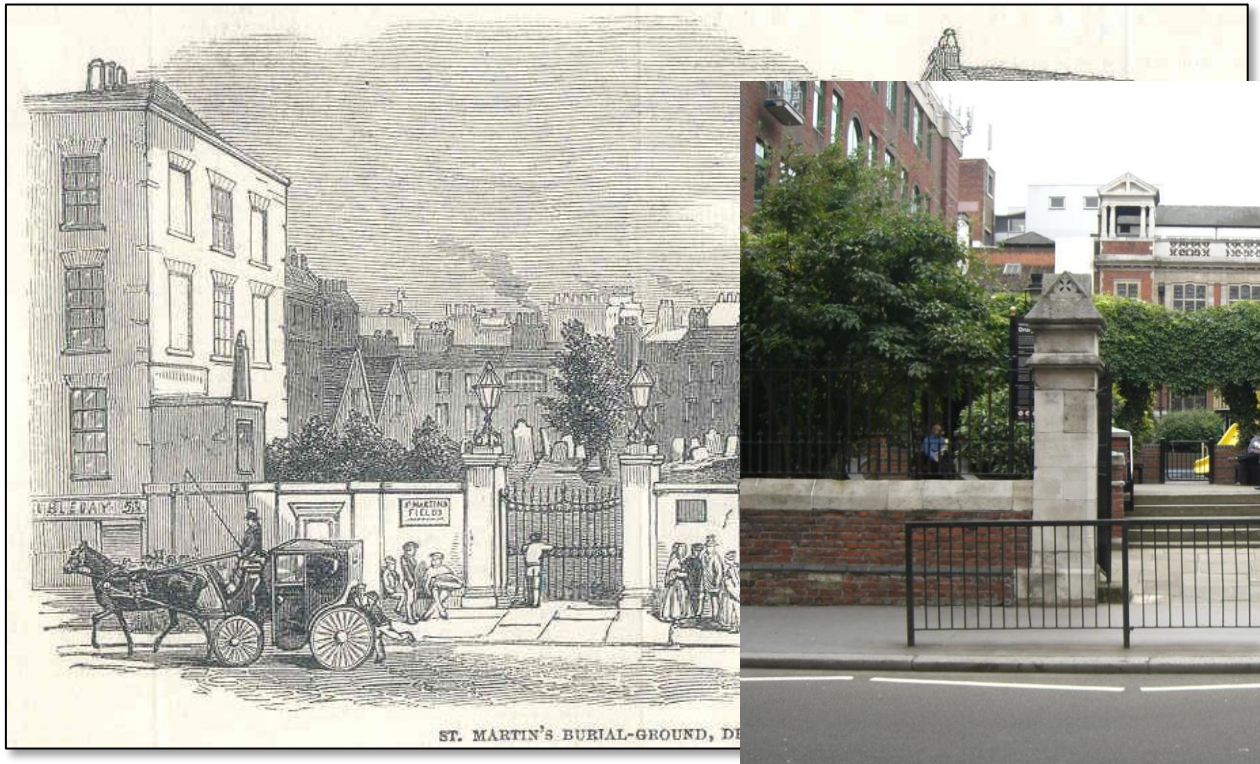


The Workhouse Burial Ground, derelict and empty in 1886



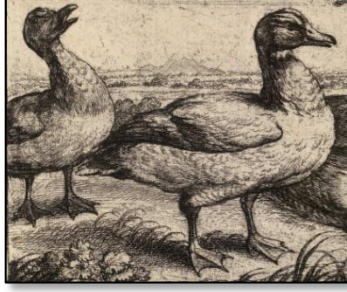
Tavistock Ground (opened 1764), as illustrated in 1849





'the parish officers of St. Martin's in the Fields have divided all their new burying ground by Drury Lane into lots, and numbered the same by figures affixed round the walls: they have also ordered a book to be kept, and the name of every person buried, with the lot or number of each mentioned therein. By this method every person may know the burying ground of his relations' .
Lloyds Evening Post (7th December 1764, issue 1157).

Apart from (limited) ground what else did the parish provide for its deceased paupers – those from the workhouse or who were buried 'by note'?



Cheap coffins and shrouds were provided for all pauper burials.

In 1817 it was 'RESOLVED that all Coffins used after Christmas day must be made in the House; also that they be made of Deal & coloured black'. Before 1817 workhouse paupers were buried in cheap coffins supplied by local undertakers.

A burial service of sorts was read over paupers. Until 1806 this was a duty of the workhouse chaplain who was paid *a flat rate fee*

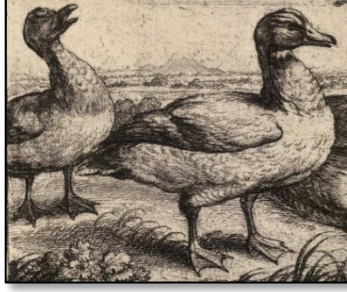
There was no church service as part of a pauper burial (probably like most burials)

From 1793 there seem to have been moves to improve the supervision of the parish burial grounds and efforts were made to improve the interment of the poor

Only **very rarely** were other funeral costs paid by the parish, and then only for previous office holders such as bearers, sextons and grave diggers

There is no sign of payment whatsoever for any form of wake for the thousands of paupers buried in the eighteenth century: no payments for a gallon of beer of the sort found by Tomkins for Oxford and Shrewsbury at the same date

Pauper interments:



Paupers were interred either in the Almshouse ground (almswomen *only*) or the Workhouse ground until 1778

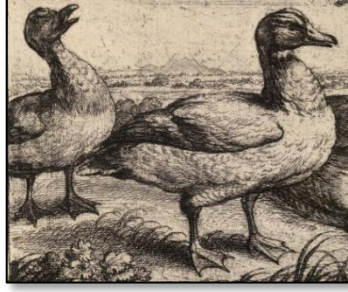
After 1778 the workhouse ground was closed and all paupers were carried to the new burial ground at Drury Lane

This caused gross overcrowding at Drury Lane:

> In 1800 the churchwardens paid £1 5s 6d as an ‘allowance to Workhouse men for procuring Earth to raise Tavistock Burial Ground’

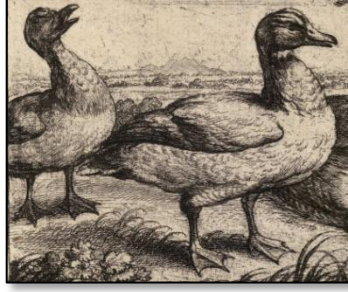
After 1806 *almost all parish paupers were interred at a new parish burial ground in Camden Town*

The nature of pauper burial in St Martin in the Fields



It is well known, that several Out-Parishes of this City and Liberties **are very much straiten'd for Room to bury their Dead**; and that to remedy in part that Inconvenience they dig in their Church-yards, or other annexed Burial-Places, large Holes or Pits, in which they put many of the Bodies of those, whose Friends are not able to pay for better Graves; and then those Pits or Holes (called the Poor's Holes) once opened, are not cover'd, till fill'd with such dead Bodies: Thus it is in St. *Martin's*, St. *James's*, and St. *Giles's* in the Fields, and other Places.

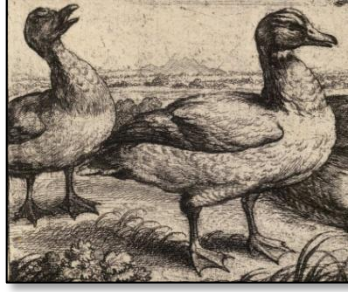
Some Customs consider'd Whether Prejudical to the Health of this City; And if they are, Whether we may not hope to them Reformed, London (1721), 7-8.



There is something so barbarous and shocking to Human Nature in this Custom, that one would wonder how it ever came to be taken up at the first, and much more that it should be so long continued. **The treating of those Bodies in such a different way from all the rest that lie in those Burying-Places, looks like a branding and stigmatizing of them with Ignominy and Disgrace at their Deaths, for some Crimes they had been guilty of in their Lives; and as tho they had been Sinners and Criminals above all the rest of the Parish; which Treatment of them, is as grievous and cutting to their surviving Relations, as their very Death itself.**

WHEREAS in Reality there is no other Reason for their being thus distinguished from others in their Burials, but that they died poor, tho perhaps part of their Time they lived plentifully, and served several Parish Offices reputably, and to Satisfaction.

Some Customs consider'd, 10-11.



Stream of pauper burials into Drury Lane provoked complaints...

These led to renewed searches for a new burial ground, better supervision of local graveyards and the eventual purchase of a new ground at Camden Town

That is, the new burial ground was intended as an improvement not an attack on local burial practices and customs

Mr Groves'. Letter

Sir... As I understand a Vestry will be held to Morrow Morning I beg leave to trouble you on a Subject which Demands every Attention from those who have the Management of the Parish Affairs, & as I think it of a very serious concern, I trust you will Officially lay this Letter before the Vestry.

THE Burial Ground belonging to the Parish which is in Drury Lane has long been and still remains so shocking a Nuisance that to Discribe it is beyond my Power. My back Windows commanding a View of it I have Occular demonstration – the poor are Tumbled into one Common Hole & there lay exposed day and night uncovered, A sight which is not only shocking to human nature but render every House round it perfectly disagreeable, And the smells horridly Offensive. I should not, Sir, be in the least surprised if in the hot Weather, a Plague Ariseing from the Putrifaction of human Bodys should communicate itself to the Surrounding Neighbourhood And then Spread Generally thro' the Metropolis. That an indecency so inconsistant with Religion & which ought not to be suffered in a Christian Country should be permitted to exist in the Parish of St Martin in the Fields is to me a matter of very great Surprize.

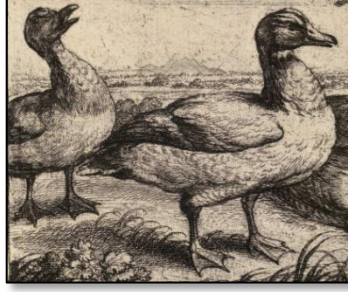
I have seen Dogs and Rats and Ducks gnawing the half Putrifyed flesh of the deceased Poor who are buried, I am sorry to observe, without the least Funeral Ceremony, - but this observation I do not reduce into a Complaint

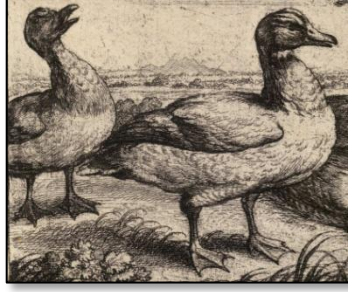
There is, Sir, a kind of Wooden covering which the man lays on when he pleases but if it is on for 24 hours it is off for a week and when on, is not of the least efficacy in confining the stench, so that I am Obliged to keep my Window down – And with regard to Speaking to the Fellow about it, I might as well Address myself to the dead in the Church yard – He either laughs or is impudent.

It is not my Province, Sir, to point out what Steps ought to be taken to remove so truly a horrid and filthy a Nusance, but I flatter myself when the Gentlemen of the Vestry are told of it, they will feel for the Situation of their living fellow Creatures & Speedily redress it, I have the honor to be Sir,

Your most respectfull And Obedient honourable Servant, J. Groves

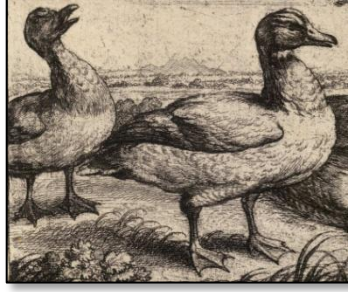
No. 21 Crown Court, Russell Street, Covent Garden





The economics of pauper burial

For paupers

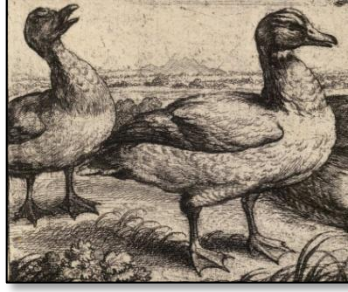


The fixed costs of a funeral fell *particularly* heavily on the poor

Parish burial fees were a non trivial burden at a time of personal financial and emotional crisis: this explains why parishes charging low fees to outsiders *could attract floods of corpses from other parishes* – the 'Soho' effect...

Generally it cost far less to inter a child than an adult, both in terms of burial fees and other costs

I argue below that local movements in fees might explain changing local incidence of pauper burial



For the parish:

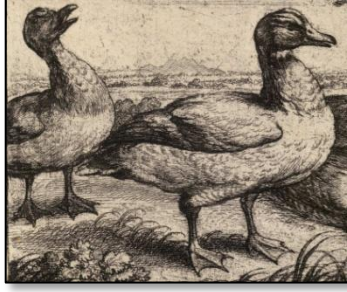
Two types of cost to the parish of burying an individual as a pauper

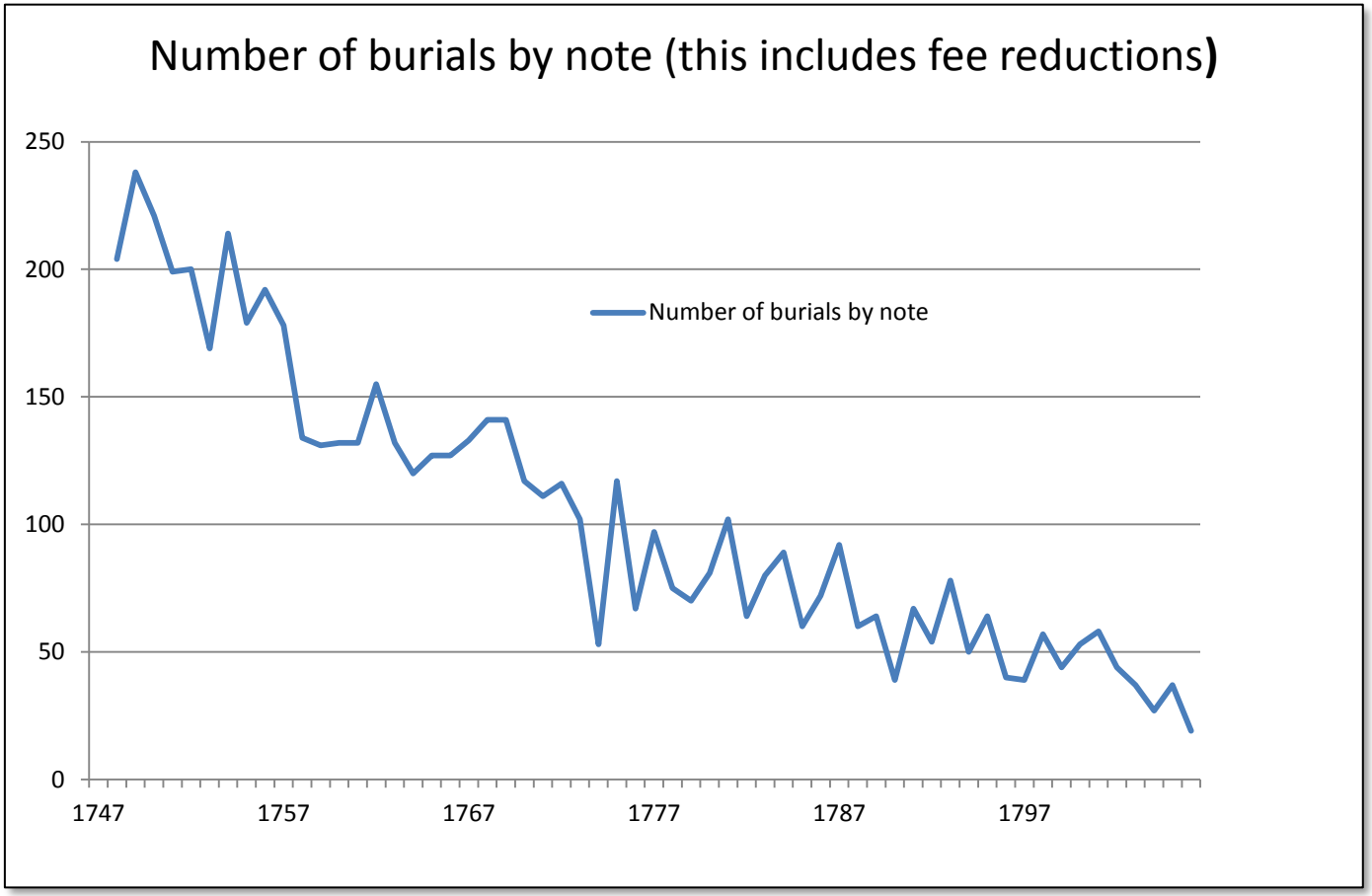
Costs of interment (coffin, shroud, prayers over the corpse, bearers, grave digging and burial ground purchase and maintenance)

'Opportunity costs': loss of parish fees

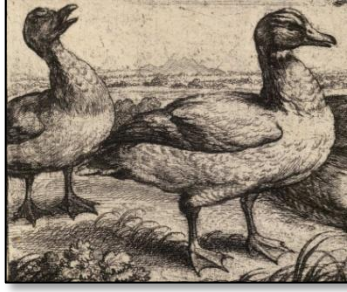
> For this reason – and something that has not been appreciated by most historians – there was *always considerable local downward pressure on the 'granting' of a pauper burial from parish officers*
>
> A count of pauper burials was made by the local vicar Revd Anthony Hamilton in 1793 as part of a dispute over whether or not he was liable to pay the poor rate.
>
> > He showed that the burial of 4,544 paupers between 1776 and 1792 had cost him (alone) c. £852 in lost fees.

The parish was increasingly reluctant to issue ‘notes’ for pauper burials or fee reductions - or fewer were requested - in a pretty clear linear decline over time

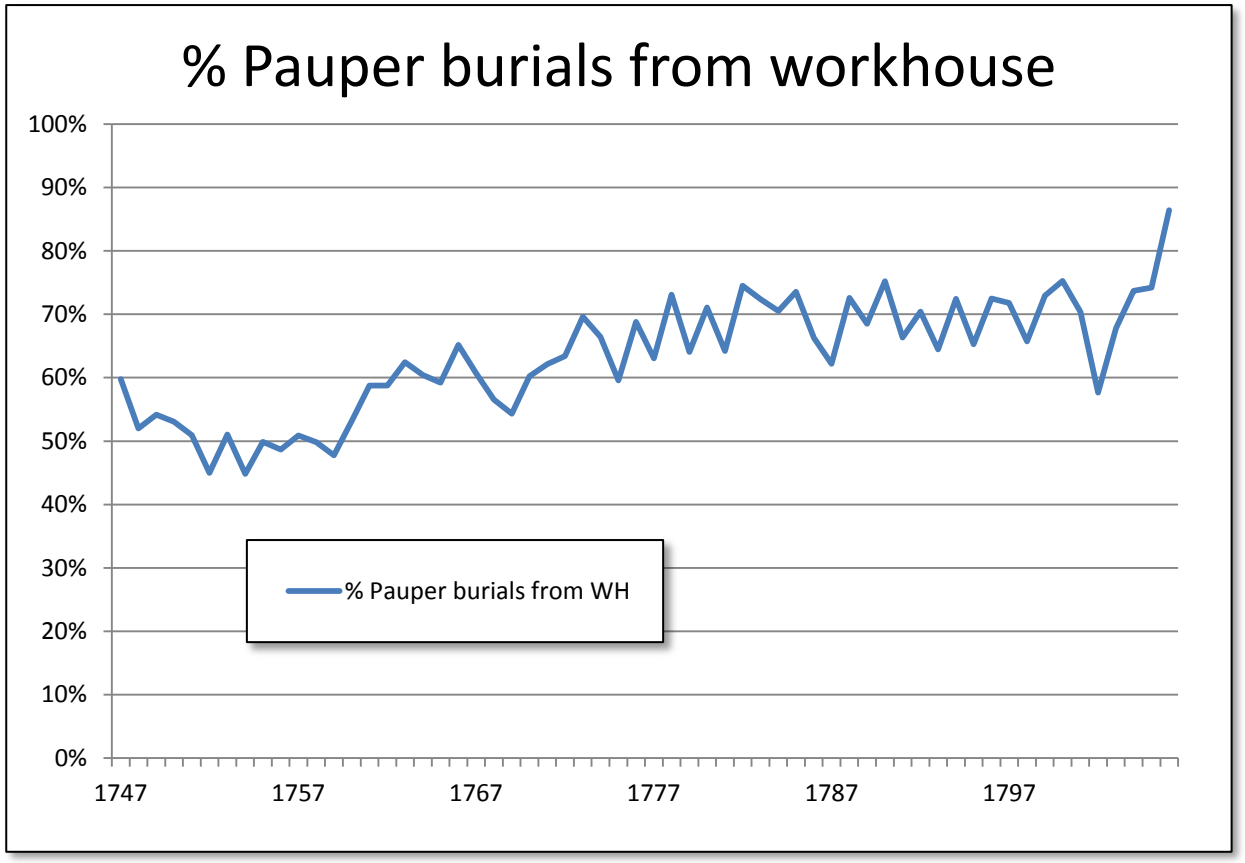


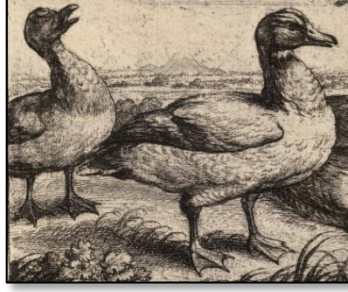


That it be recommended to the Churchwardens **to be carefull in giving notes to excuse Funeral fees**, and on no pretence whatever to give such notes for Burials under any part of the Ground that is paved (**2nd May 1785**, F2008)

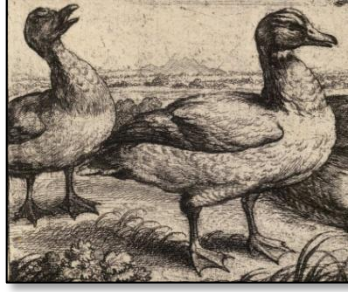


Resistance to issuing ‘notes’ contributed to the increasing proportion of pauper burials from the parish workhouse rather than the outdoor poor





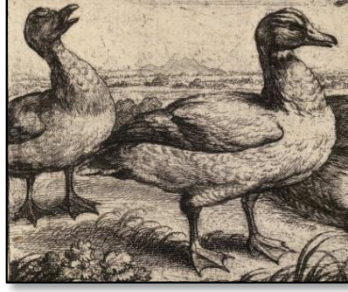
Never on Sundays: The timing of pauper burials

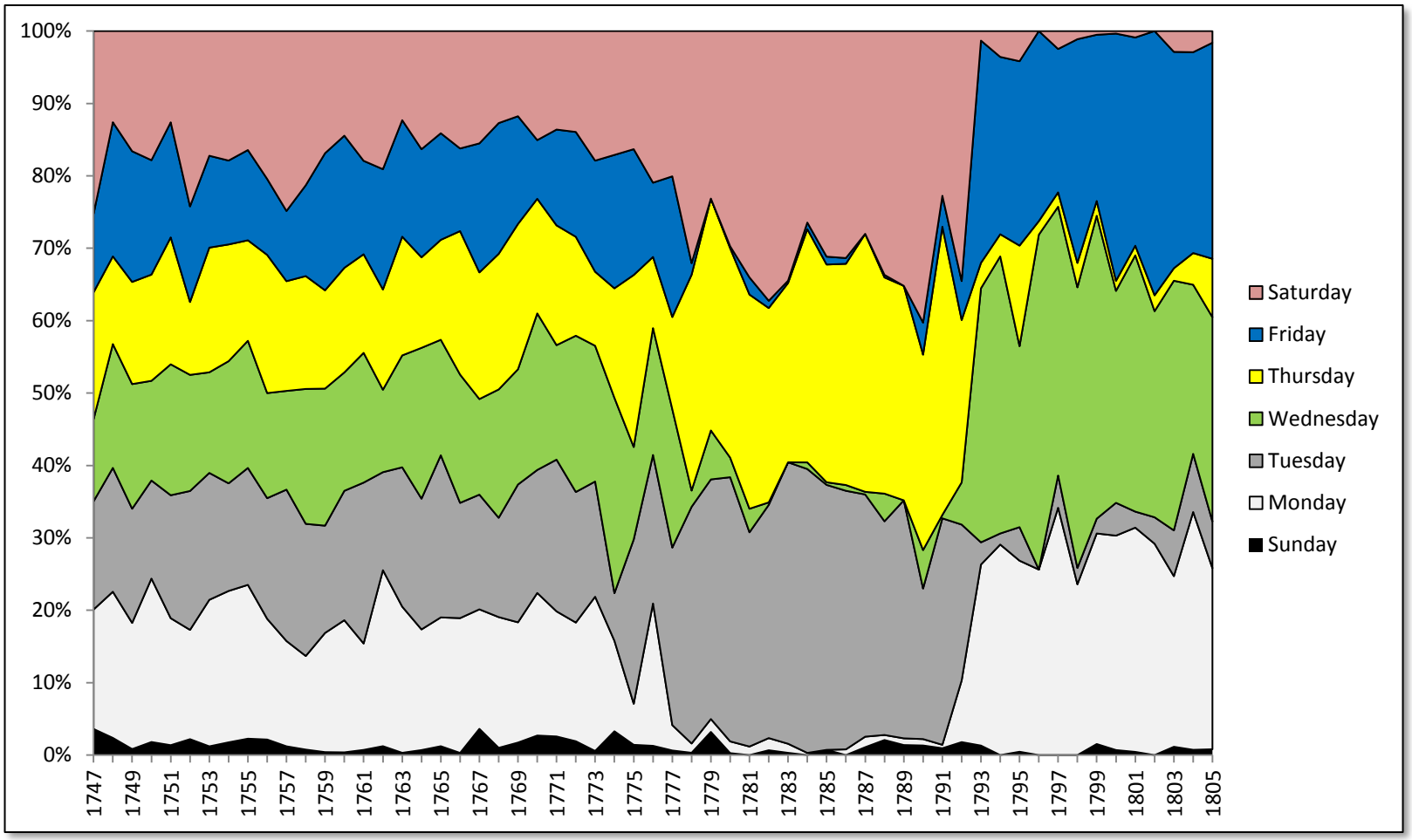


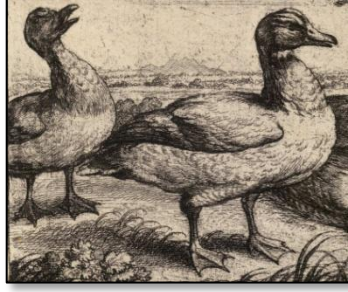
This represents a demographic approach: using the timing of burial we can examine quantitatively whether the burials of the poor were in any way distinctive to those who paid burial fees at their interments

Over time, for non paupers, there was an increasing tendency to bury on Sundays - but no other day of the week was favoured

Pauper burials St Martin in the Fields, 1747-1805 (minus exported burials)





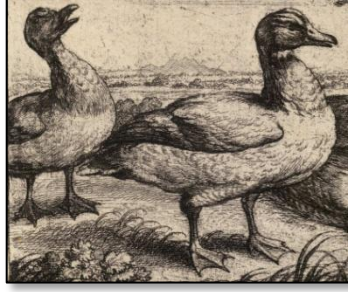


The Sextons informed this Board that great difficulties and inconvenience arose from the **uncertainty of the time**, of the deceased Poor of this parish, being brought to the Burial Ground for interment, and also **the very short Notice frequently given for preparing proper Graves of other Funerals**

ORDERED that **Monday, Wednesday** and **Friday** in every Week be the days appointed for the burial of the deceased Poor of this Parish and that an Order for the Ground signed by one of the Churchwardens be brought to the Sexton's Office on or before 12 o'clock at Noon of the preceeding day of Interment And that **all Corpse to be buried as Poor shall be carried to the Burial Ground and put into the Shed erected for that purpose before 12 o'clock at Noon of the day of interment.**

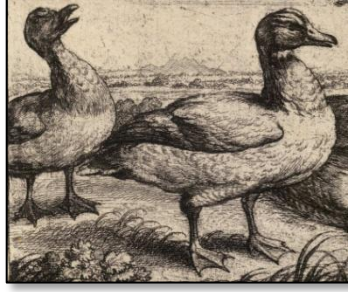
And also Ordered that all Funerals intended at either of the burial Grounds of this Parish shall be entered and paid for at the Sexton's Office before 12 o'clock at Noon the day preceeding the Corpse is to be interred from the 1st of October to the 1st of April.

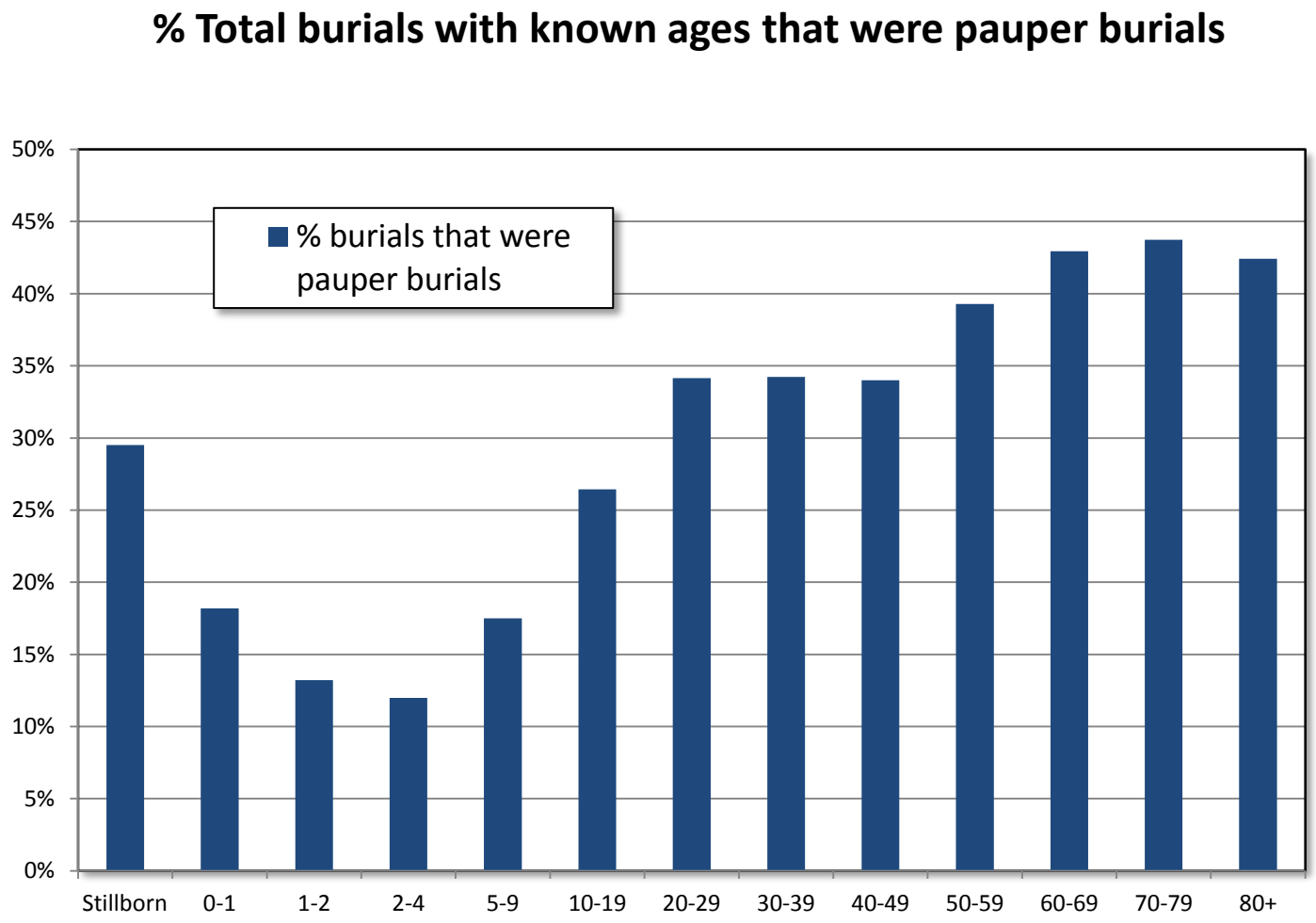
(St Martin in the Fields, Vestry Minutes, **5/11/1802**, WAC F2009. This order effectively sanctioned a practice started ten years earlier).



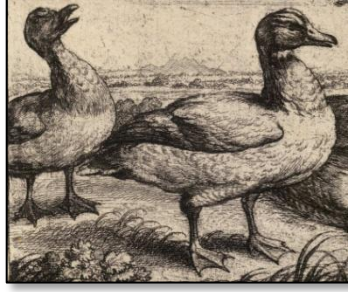
The demographic incidence of pauper burial

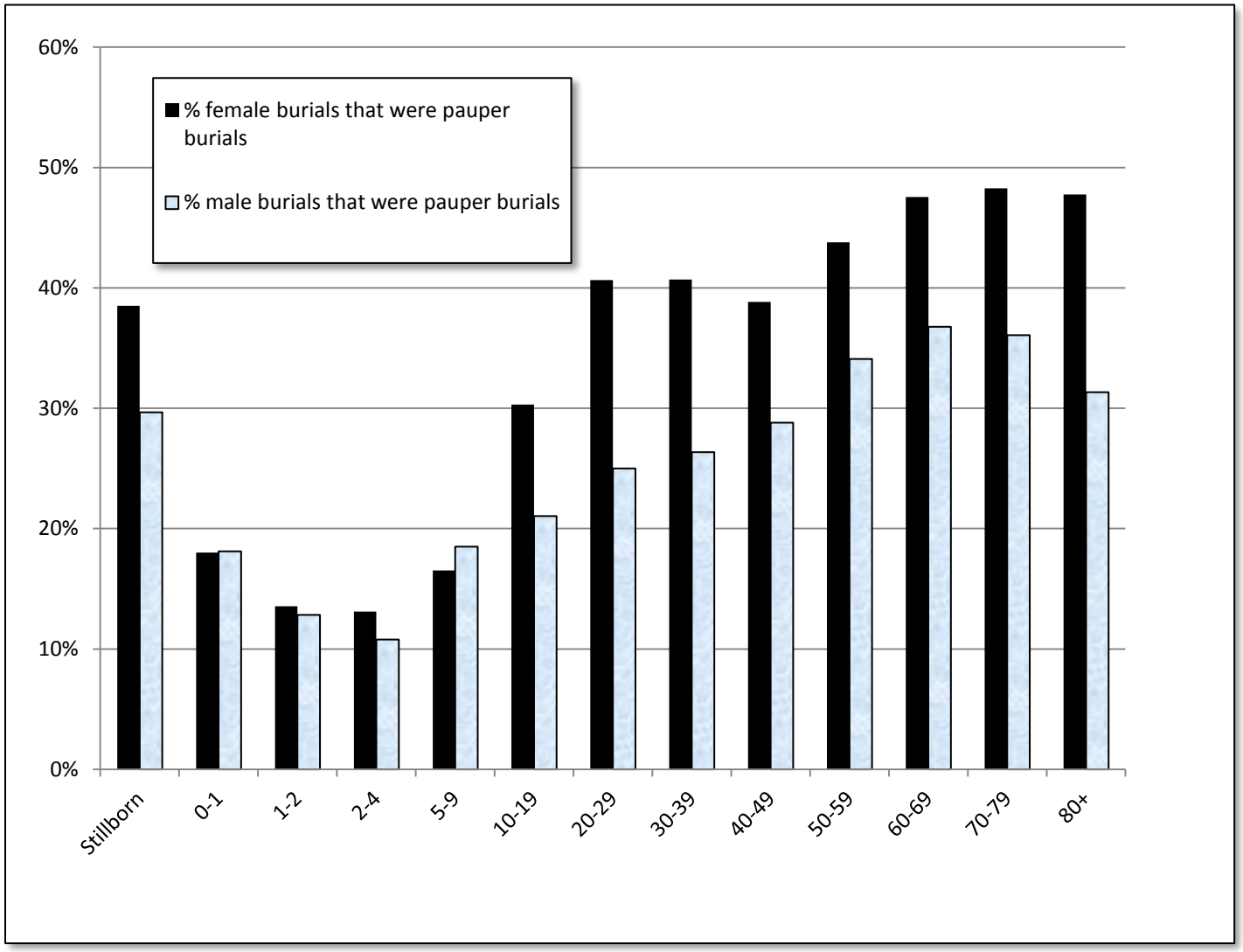
Percentage of each age group buried as paupers in St Martin in the Fields

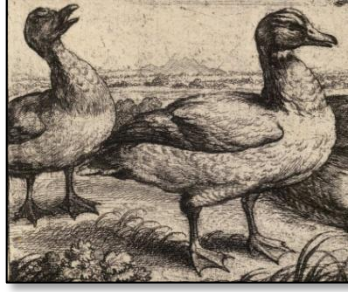




Adult females were more likely to be buried as paupers than males at all ages (stillbirths distorted by relatively small number distinguished by gender). This graph measures the percentage of each age group buried as paupers







So the age-specific incidence of pauper burial reflects:

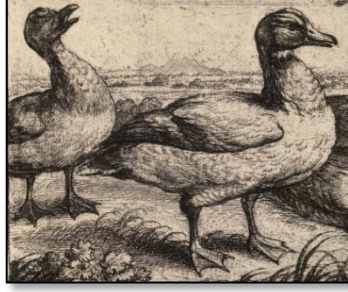
1) Life-cycle nature of poverty: elderly more likely to be buried as paupers.

2) Poor earning prospects for females in metropolitan economy

3) Possible that might also reflect marital status: unmarried and widowed less likely to have close relative to pay for burial

4) Infants and young children very unlikely to be buried as paupers ‘The death of a child might come at a time when some of the cost could be borne by the family’ (Tomkins)

What about change in the incidence of pauper burial *over time*?

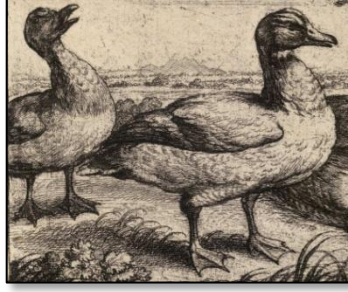


Although pauper burial is said to be a potent symbol of status, exclusion and ‘failure’

There is virtually no hard data on this subject before 1827

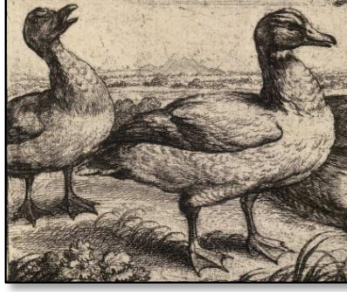
There is a *lot* of data on this from St Martin in the Fields.

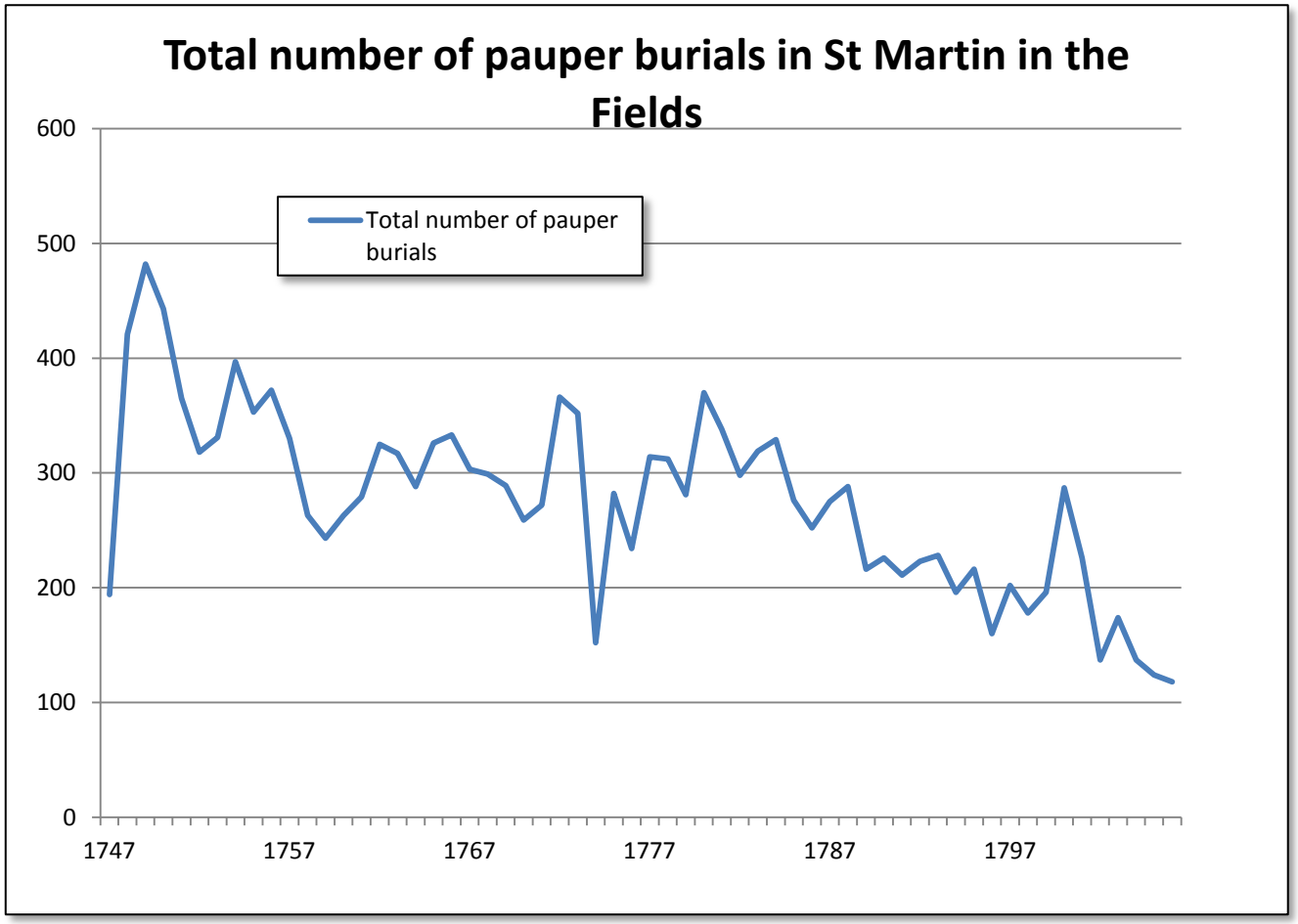
This data actually corresponds closely to an independent count of pauper burials made by Rev. Anthony Hamilton, vicar of St Martin’s in the 1790s.



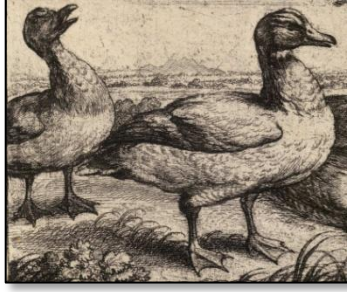
The chronology of pauper burial

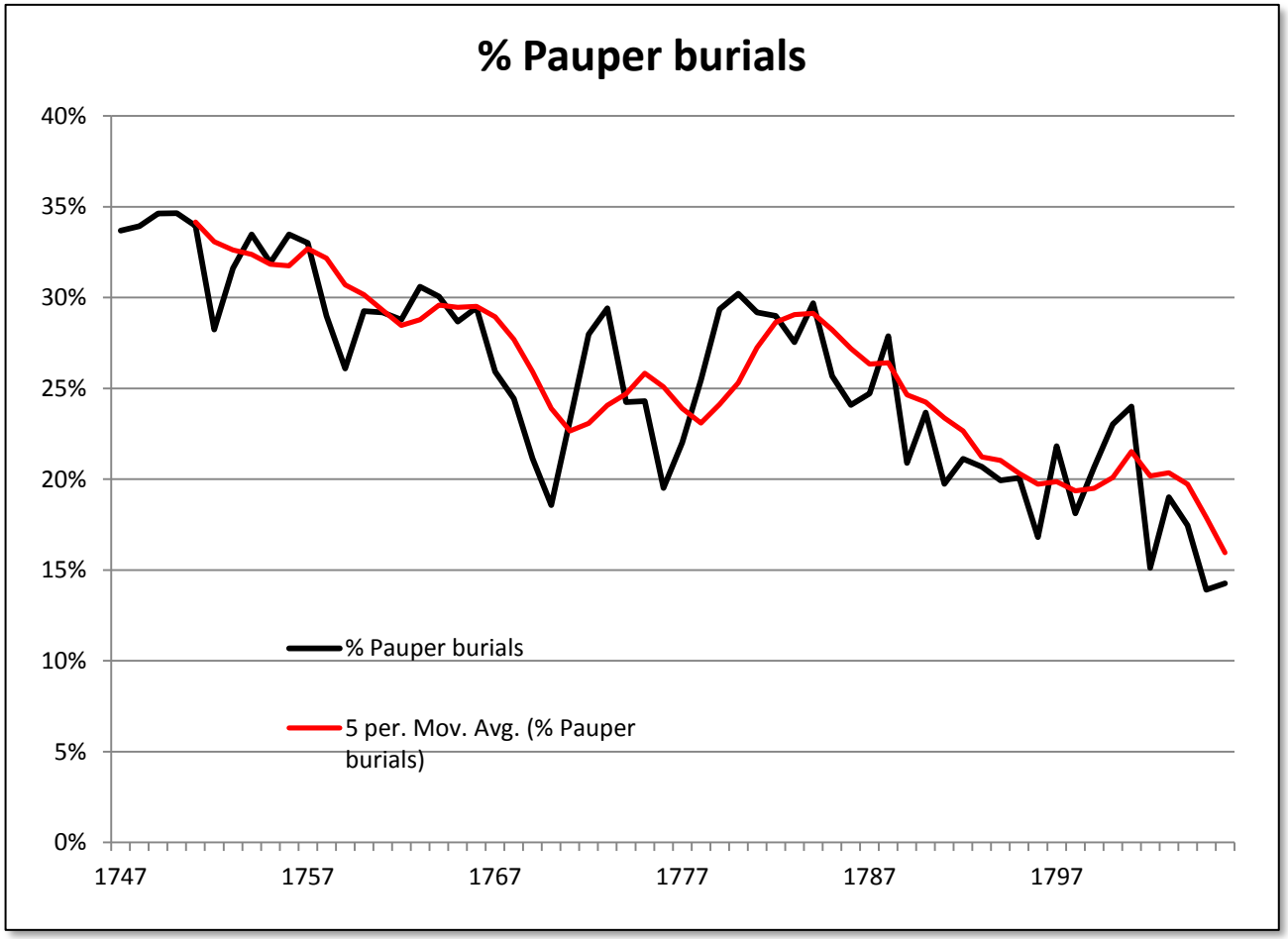
The number and proportion of pauper burials in St Martin's is relatively easy to document with some precision – what this might *mean*, however, is more contentious



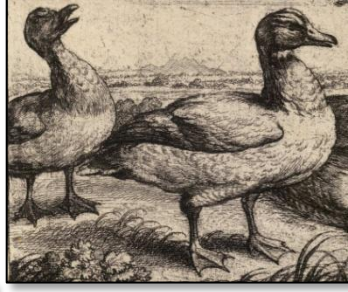


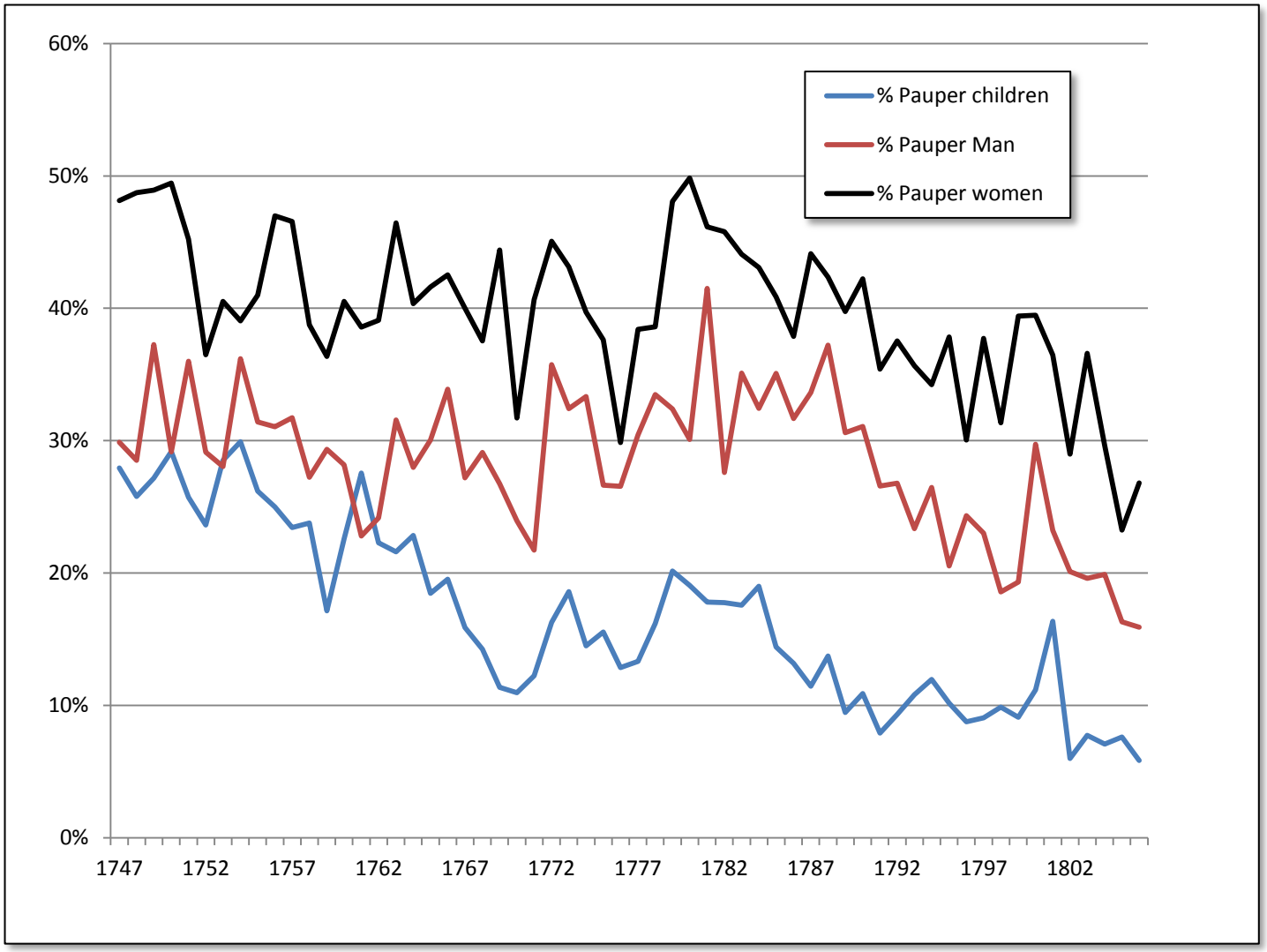
The absolute figures prove to be a reasonable guide to the trend over time
The *percentage* of burials at parish expense fell from around one third in the late 1740s, oscillated between 20 and 30% until around 1780, and then began to fall fairly steadily.
This is, on the face of it, solid evidence that the proportion of people experiencing a pauper burial *fell* in the later eighteenth century
This is counter-intuitive, **since real wages are known to have fallen in London form 1750**

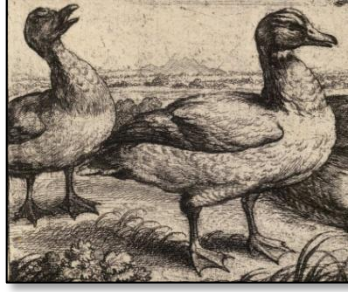




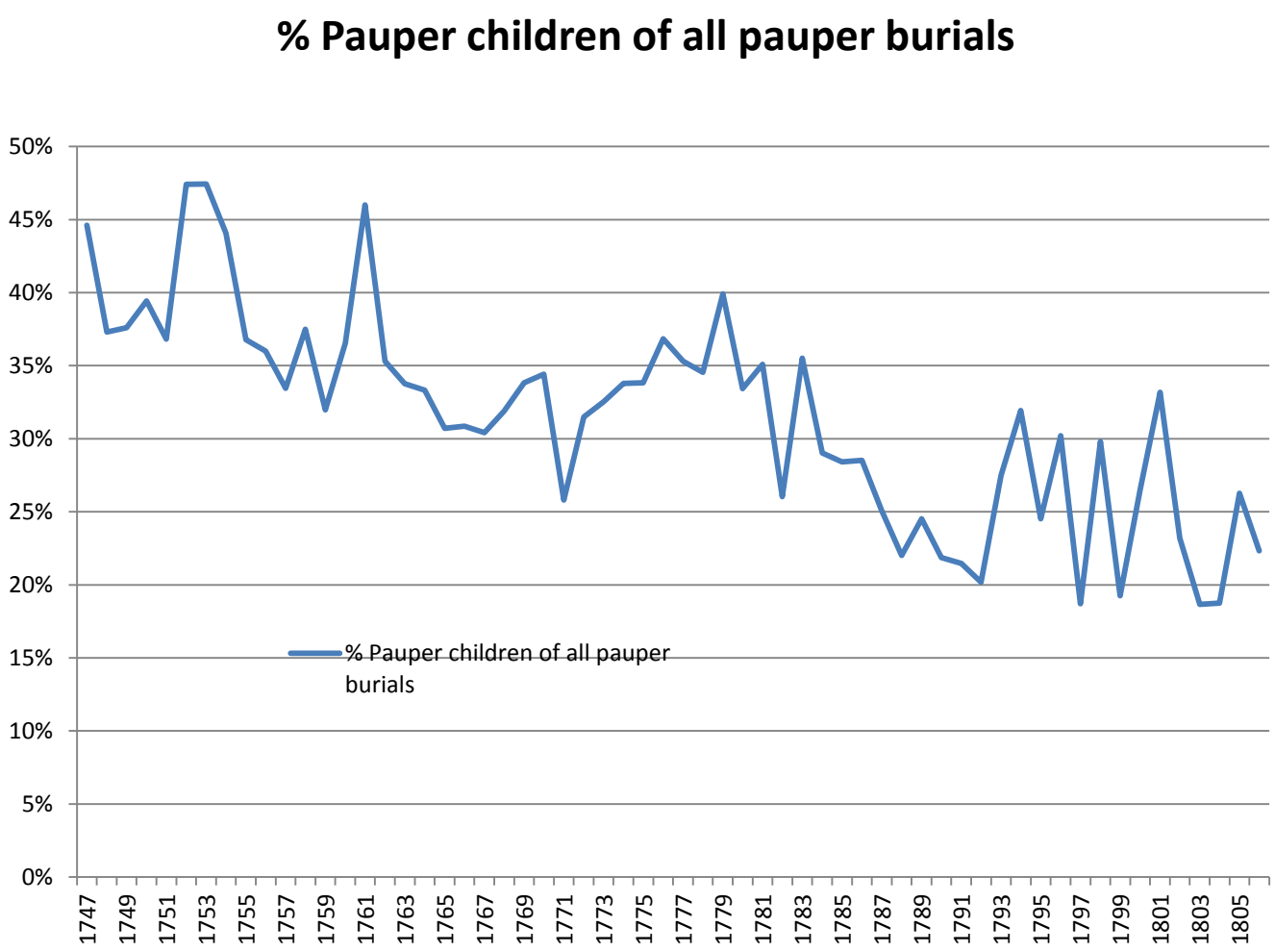
Breaking the figures down by ‘burial description’ (Man, Woman, Child) shows the same decline, although the proportion of children buried as paupers seems to fall earlier. Now proportions of pauper men and women fall only from the late 1780s.

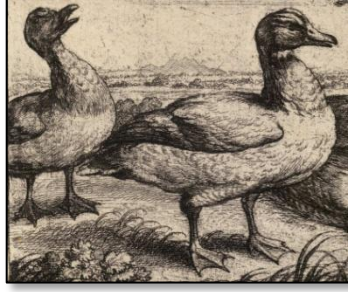






The early peak in pauper burials was partly generated by relatively large numbers of dead pauper children

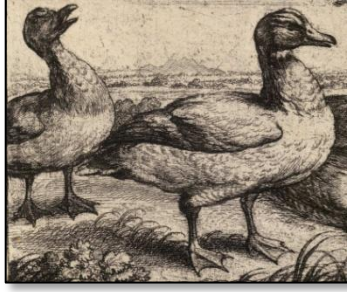




Explaining chronology, volume and proportion of pauper burials is a bit trickier than previous historians have assumed

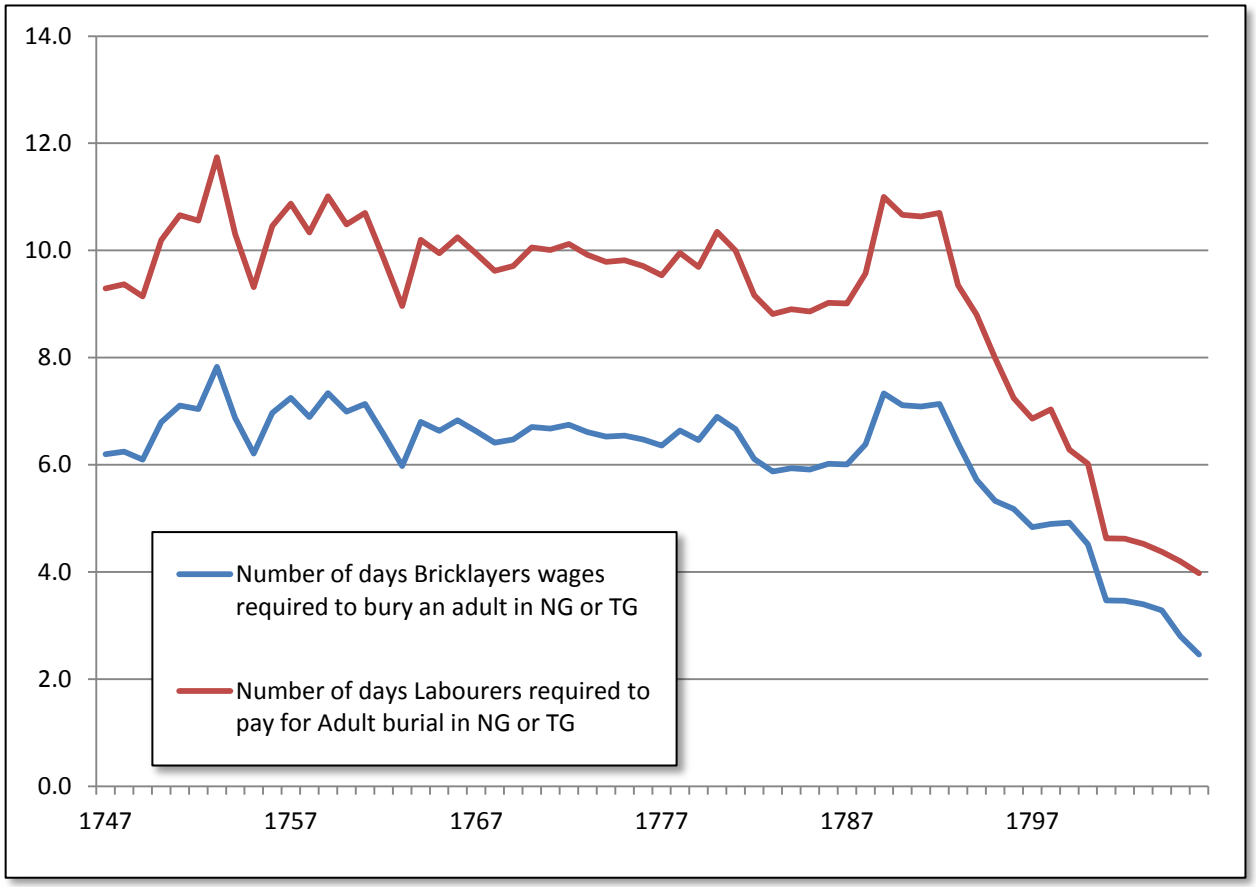
Even a few minutes thought suggests that whether or not a person was buried at the expense of any particular parish depends on:

1) **Ability and willingness of parish to fund a pauper burial**: an equation based on *absolute demand for pauper burials*, and available parochial income/funds. Since the poverty line is a relative concept, it follows that *those who were given pauper burials in some parishes might not be comparable to those given pauper burials in other parishes*.
2) **Ability and willingness of relatives and friends to pay burial costs**: this depending on family and financial circumstances of the deceased; level of disposable income of relatives; and the minimum cost of a standard burial in the parish
3) **Local availability of acceptable *alternative* means of burying the dead poor.** If there were cheaper extra parochial alternatives which provided reasonable conditions this would depress the volume of pauper burials.

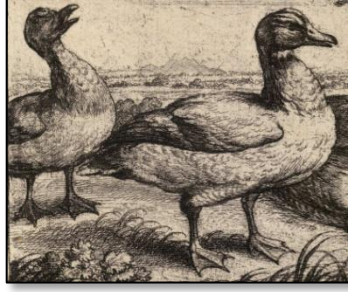


Since there was wage inflation towards the end of the eighteenth century, the costs of paying for a burial almost certainly fell in real terms.

Real burial costs of all adults 1747-1806. Days worked to afford average burial cost at lowest class of burial site



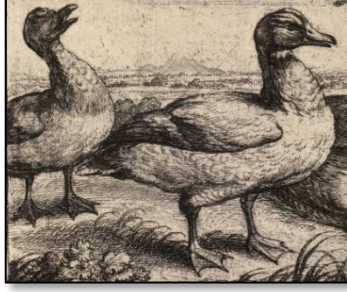
Money wages taken from Schwarz, 1985.



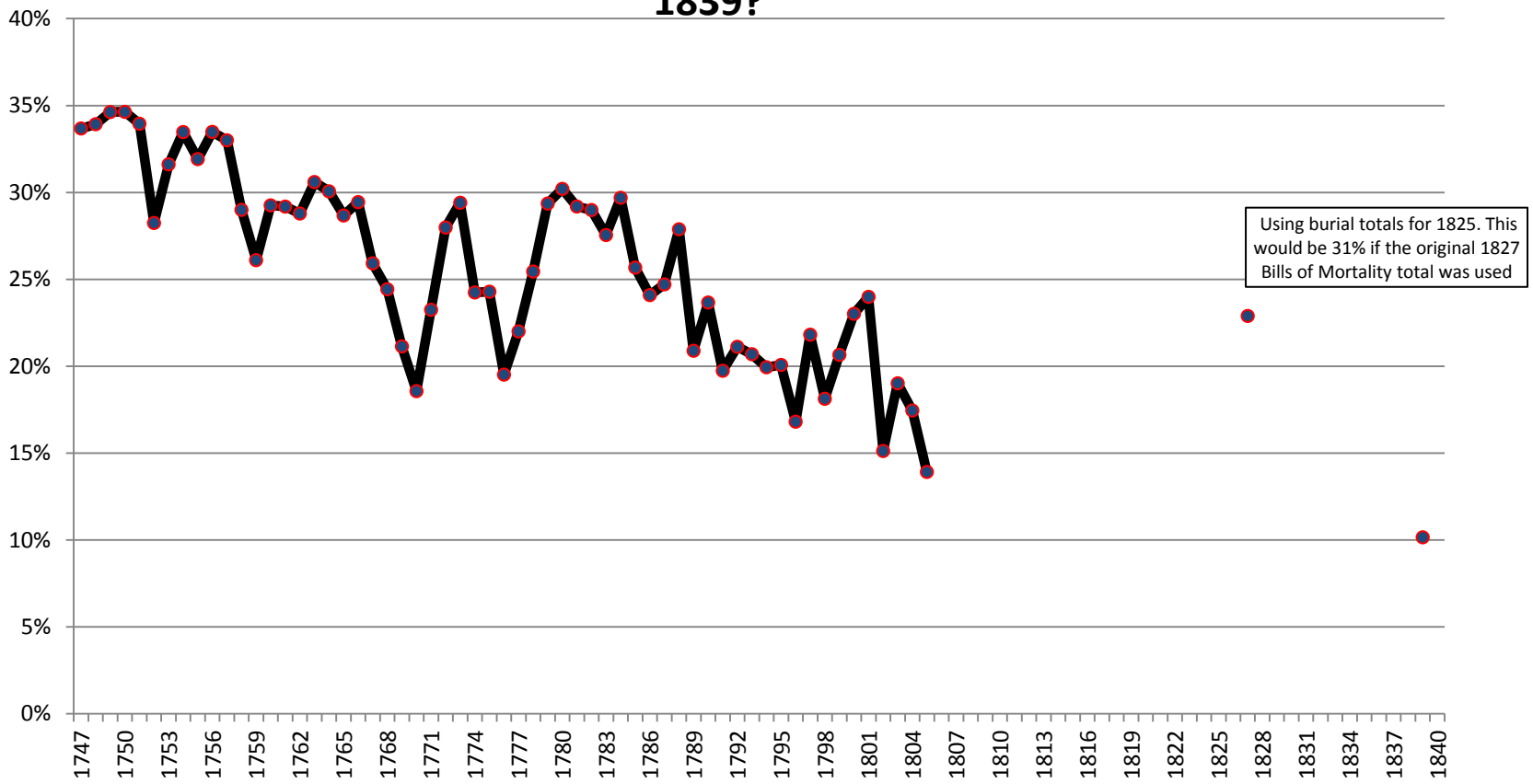
It would be fair to say, therefore, that the proportion of people dying as paupers fell in the late eighteenth century because:

1) Fall in the real cost of burial locally
2) *Possible* availability of cheaper alternative burial sites (such as Soho) or even alternative interment strategies
3) *Possible* – although no direct evidence for this – growth in membership of burial clubs might explain fall in incidence although they are rarely mentioned in the WH discharge registers

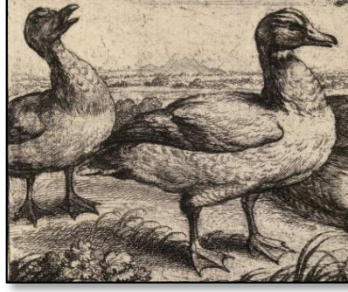
Worth noting that there seems to have been a *rise* in the incidence of pauper burial possibly due to a hike in church fees in 1817 this may explain the leap in pauper burials found in 1827.



% Long term decline in pauper burial in St Martin in the Fields 1747-1839?

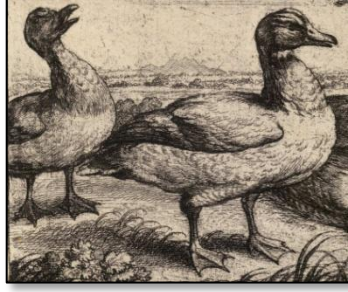


Source: 1747-1805, Sextons' burial books; 1827 Parliamentary Committee; 1839 Chadwick Select Committee



Some conclusions..

Conclusions:



Pauper burials in this West End parish were not ‘generous’ and did not provide a respectable interment even before the NPL. The conditions of pauper burial may have been objectively poorer in the eighteenth century than in the nineteenth.

The timing of pauper burials demonstrates long term discrimination over day of interment, which *hardened from 177*8.

Pauper burials – their age incidence and chronology – prove to be closely related to movements in the ‘micro economy’ of the poor, their family circumstances at death etc..

Both age structure and changes over time suggest deployment of money to avoid pauper burials of particular family members - particularly for children

Falling real costs may also explain fall in pauper burials (in all age groups) towards end of eighteenth century

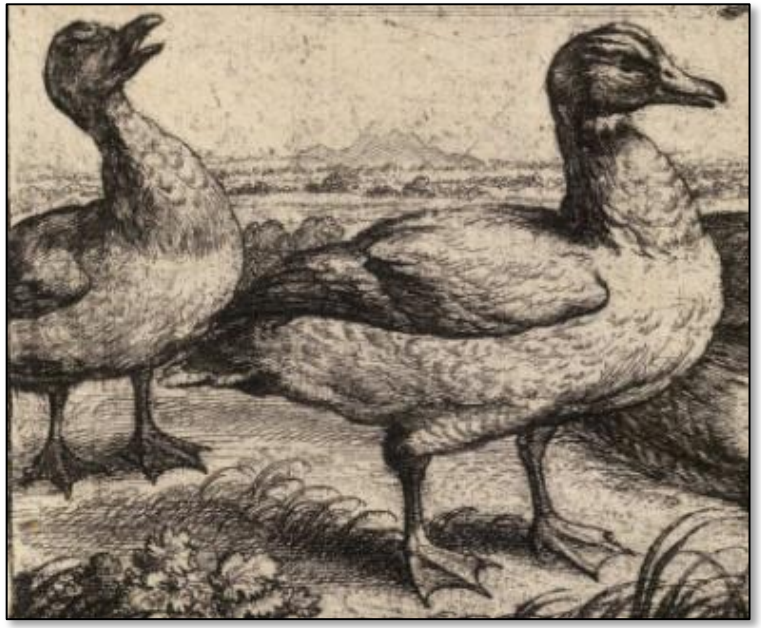
Local fee regimes determined level and even incidence of pauper burials on the parish

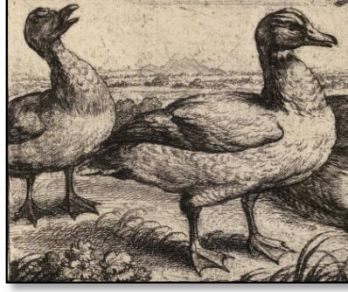
This suggests that **if the poor could afford to, they avoided pauper burial. They certainly did not seek it**.

The proportion of pauper burials from the workhouse rose over time, partly due to parish reluctance to excuse fees for those dying outside it but also greater willingness or ability to pay for a private interment

Greater financial constraints might thus cause a ‘fall’ in the proportion of the population subject to pauper burial not merely a restriction in ‘generosity’ of provision

There seems to have a been a long term decline – not an increase – in pauper burial over time: It would follow that ‘fear’ of pauper burial was not related closely to the statistical risk of undergoing it.





The End...