

History: Unit 2
Lesson 26 of 30

How well did Elizabeth deal with the problems of the poor?



What were attitudes towards the poor in Elizabethan England?

In Elizabethan England people believed that the poor could be divided into two groups.

The deserving poor

- Also known as the 'impotent poor'.
- These people were believed to be unable to work due to age, sickness or disability.
- These people were poor due to no fault of their own.
- They were seen as deserving of help

The undeserving poor

- Also known as the able bodied or idle poor.
- They were physically able to work but they chose not to or simply could not be bothered.
- These people were poor due to their own fault.
- They were seen as undeserving of help
- This group faced harsh treatment if they were caught begging such as whipping..



The development of poor relief

Before Elizabeth's reign, **poor relief** was available to the very poor but collection and distribution varied between parishes.



The **monasteries** had been an important source of **poor relief** but were closed from the 1530s.



The problem of poverty worsened from the 1560s due to the collapse of cloth trade. Vagrancy became a problem.



It was clear that Elizabeth's government had to develop a more effective system of poor relief.



How did Elizabeth and her government deal with the problem of poverty?

Government act	How did this act deal with the poor?	What were the strengths and limitations of this approach?
1563 Statute of Artificers		
1572 Vagabonds Act		
1576 Poor Relief Act		
1601 Act for the relief of the Poor		



How did Elizabeth and her government deal with the problem of poverty?

Government act	How did this act deal with the poor?	What were the strengths and limitations of this approach?
1563 Statute of Artificers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anyone who was found refusing to pay the poor rates could be imprisoned. • Any officials who failed to organise poor relief in their local areas could be fined up to £20. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strength = Elizabeth's government was adopting a national approach towards the organisation of poor relief. • Strength = Created consequences for those that did not abide by the act. • Limitation = The problem of poverty persisted. • Strength = Poverty recognised as a real problem.
1572 Vagabonds Act	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It aimed reduce the number of vagrants in society. • Harsh punishments were introduced for vagrancy; whippings, hole drilled through their ears as punishment. If they offended for a second time they faced the death penalty. • The act also established a national poor rate. Local communities were responsible for collecting funds for the poor. • Justices of the Peace would distribute funds to the deserving poor. • Local authorities had to find work for the able bodied poor. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strength = Established a national system for helping the deserving poor. • Limitation = Only those classified as deserving could benefit from the national poor rate. • Strength = The able bodied poor were helped in their search for employment. • Limitation = Harsh punishments were introduced for the undeserving poor. • Strength = There was now a national and organised system of poor relief.



How did Elizabeth and her government deal with the problem of poverty?

Government act	How did this act deal with the poor?	What were the strengths and limitations of this approach?
1576 Poor Relief Act	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The aim of the Poor Relief Act was to distinguish between the able-bodied and impotent poor. Justices of the Peace were instructed to provide the able-bodied poor with raw materials. The idle poor were to be sent to Houses of Correction. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strength = The able-bodied poor received support from the Justices of the Peace. Limitation = Harsh attitudes continued to be directed towards those considered the idle poor i.e. being sent to the House of Correction. Limitation = Poverty still continues to be a huge problem in society.
1601 Act for the relief of the Poor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The aim was to bring all previous legislation together in one clear system. The idle poor were still sent to Houses of Correction. Local authorities still had to collect a compulsory poor rate which was distributed amongst the deserving poor. Justices of the Peace had to provide working materials to the able bodied poor. Work and apprenticeships had to be provided for orphaned children. Overseers of the Poor were to be appointed in each parish and collect the poor rate. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strength = It brought all previous legislation together in one clear system. Limitation = Harsh attitudes towards those considered idle continued i.e. being sent to the House of Correction. Strength = The able poor were supported through the poor rate/ Strength = Orphaned children supported through work and apprenticeships. Strength = Established a system that was in place for many years.



Comprehension questions

1. Why did it become clear from the 1560s that Elizabeth's government had to develop a more effective system of **poor relief**?
2. How did Elizabeth's government deal with the problem of the idle poor?
3. How did Elizabeth's government help the deserving and able-bodied poor?
4. Why was the Act for the Relief of the Poor (1601) important?
- 5. Challenge question:** Explain how effective the government was in dealing with the problem of poverty during Elizabeth's reign.

I believe the government was (very, somewhat, not very) effective in dealing with the problem of poverty during Elizabeth's reign.

I believe this because...



The Statute of Artificers (1563)

In Elizabeth's reign, the government introduced a series of acts to deal with the problem of poverty more effectively. In 1563, the government passed the Statute of Artificers.

Aim

The aim of the Statute of Artificers was to ensure that **poor relief** (money given to help the poor from each parish) was collected and distributed more effectively.

Features of the Act

The act stated that anyone who was found refusing to pay the **poor rates** could be imprisoned. It also stated that any officials (people in local government) who failed to organise **poor relief** in their local areas could be fined up to £20. This represented an important change in approaches towards the problem of poverty as in this act, Elizabeth I's government was adopting a national approach towards the organisation of **poor relief** rather than a local one and creating consequences for those that did not abide by the act.



The Vagabonds Act (1572)

Aim

By the 1570s, poverty was seen as an increasingly serious problem. Cities such as Norwich had already introduced various measures to deal with the problem of poverty by 1569 such as establishing a school for poor children and a prison for the idle poor. Elizabeth's government introduced the Vagabonds Act in 1572 to try and tackle the problem of poverty and **vagrancy** on a national level and reduce the number **vagrants** in society.

Features of the act

To do so, the act introduced harsh punishments for **vagrancy**. Firstly, anyone considered guilty of vagrancy was to be whipped and a hole was to be drilled through their ears as punishment. Secondly, they were also to be imprisoned and if arrested a second time for vagrancy, face the **death penalty**. However, the act also established a national **poor rate**. This meant that for the first time, local communities would have the responsibility of collecting funds for the poor from the local inhabitants, rather than the church. **Justices of the Peace** would then identify those deserving poor in the parish and distribute funds to help them. The Act also stated that local authorities had the responsibility of finding work for the **able bodied poor**.



The Poor Relief Act (1576)

In Elizabethan England, there was a view that amongst the growing number of unemployed in society, there were two types of poor person. The **impotent poor** who were physically unable to work, and the **able-bodied poor** who were physically able to work but for various reasons could not find employment.

Aim

The aim of the Poor Relief Act which was introduced in 1576 was to distinguish more clearly between these two groups and assist the able-bodied poor find employment as poverty continued to be a growing problem in Elizabethan society.

Features of the Act

To help the able-bodied poor find employment, **Justices of the Peace** were instructed to provide these people with **raw materials** to enable them to manufacture things that they could sell. To punish the idle poor who were able bodied who refused to find employment, were to be sent to **Houses of Correction**. **Houses of Correction** were a new type of establishment in the 16th century which were intended to reform the idle poor and punish them for their behaviour. One of the first **Houses of Correction** to be established was **Bridewell** in London.



The Act for the Relief of the Poor (1601)

Aim

In 1601, the government introduced the Act for the Relief of the Poor. This act was important because it brought all of the previous acts that the government had introduced over the decades together so that there was one clear system for dealing with the poor.

Features of the act

The act was very similar to those that the government had previously introduced. The idle poor were still sent to Houses of Correction and local authorities still had to collect a compulsory poor rate which was distributed amongst the 'deserving poor' and **Justices of the Peace** had to provide working materials to the able bodied poor.

The act went further than some of the previous legislation. It also stated that work and apprenticeships had to be provided for orphaned children and that **Overseers of the Poor** were to be appointed in each parish. **Overseers** would have the responsibility of collecting the poor rate in each parish. The Act remained in place for 200 years.



Glossary: Page 1

The deserving poor - People who were believed to be deserving of poor relief as they were unable to work due to sickness, age or disability

The undeserving poor - People who were believed to be undeserving of poor relief as they were physically able to work but chose not to or simply could not be bothered.

Poor relief - Assistance that is given to help the poor at a national and local level.

The monasteries - Religious houses that had once provided alms and care for the poor and the sick but had been dissolved in the 1530s by Henry VIII.

Vagrancy / Vagrant - In Elizabethan England a vagrant was someone who was seen as being a nuisance for being homeless and often begging on the streets.



Glossary: Page 2

Raw materials - A material from which it is possible to make a product or manufacture something, i.e. wood.

Houses of Correction - A place where people considered guilty of vagrancy were sent to be put to work and reformed from the 16th century.

Overseers of the Poor - These positions were created in the 1601 Act for the relief of the Poor. These officials would collect and distribute poor relief in each parish

Bridewell - One of the first Houses of Correction to be established in the 16th century. It later became a prison.

Poor rates - A tax which is collected in each parish to create funds to help the poor.

Death penalty - When execution is the punishment for a crime.

Justices of the Peace - An official within towns and cities that collected and distributed the poor rate.

