

# 19th century welfare provision history essay



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In what ways was 19th century welfare provision shaped by the socially constructed distinction between the deserving and undeserving poor and with what consequences for these different groups in terms of the type of welfare assistance available to them?.

The origins of the Welfare State in the United Kingdom go back to Elizabethan times. The introduction of the Poor Laws was the first legislative attempt to ensure that the poor had the means to live. This method continued until the Industrial Revolution, when provision for the poor changed.

The Welfare State in its modern form began with the introduction of reforms between 1906 and 1914 by the Liberal Government. These reforms included the introduction of National Insurance, Old Age Pensions and Free School Meals.

In the increasingly complex society that emerged in the 19th century industrialised Britain, there was , and has continued t be, a need to support people who are unable to cope without state social welfare provision and bring order to social life.

The Second World War then led to the development of welfare legislation designed to ensure that everybody in the United Kingdom had access to quality healthcare.

This resulted in the introduction of the National Health Service and a range of health education and disease prevention measures being introduced in post war Britain.

In the period between the fall of the Roman Empire and the enactment of the first Elizabethan Poor Law in 1601 philanthropy was characterized by various hierarchical relationships within the feudal structure.

Help for others was pre-eminently a matter of royal contributions, but was also greatly supplemented by personal charity on the part of the wealthy. Religion and concerns about life after death drove many to charitable works.

Churches continually increased their position in society and began to take a prominent role in philanthropic endeavours.

Over time the church's role evolved, becoming one of the main instruments of charitable actions.

A historical perspective is important in understanding british social policy development. Looking at the influence of 19th century social, economic and political change, particularly the

A wide range of personal motivations contributed to philanthropic participation, as helping others was seen as emotionally and socially stimulating. While much was accomplished in this period, charity was often erratic and did not always fully meet the needs of the recipients. Robert Morris (1986)

Philanthropy can be defined as the provision of financial, material, and ideal resources for cultural, social, and educational institutions.

During the course the 19th century these aims increasingly came to fruition through foundations, limited dividend companies, membership organizations,

or by bequests and donations, and were generally facilitated by middle to upper class people.

Thomas Adam (2001) Charity organization movements were one of the key characteristics of Victorian era philanthropists.

With the emergence of nation states prior to and during this period, poverty and social welfare gradually became embodied in law.

State advocated reform was often frenzied, highly bureaucratic, and humiliating to the poor who received aid.

However, as the duties of governments increased, aid societies and philanthropists also expanded their organizational efforts.

Civil and religious structures for taking care of the poor began to mix, resulting in a more bureaucratic and regimented approach to philanthropy.

Robert Morris (1986)

Social sciences began to be consulted more as philanthropists and the state sought to identify and subdivide social problems, and to obtain information on specific needs that would remedy the identified problems.

The inclusion of social science in social welfare organizations helped to make philanthropic endeavours more efficient. F. K Prochaska (1980)

Philanthropy in the 19th century was based on religious tradition that was centuries in the making.

Historically, wealthy people in society gave to the poor as a Christian duty. Charity was seen as a way of saving one's own soul while also helping those in need. Protestants, especially those with strong evangelical leanings, believed that social conscience demanded social action.

They held that by coming into contact with human nature, particularly with those in need that they were able to come in contact with Christ. Henry B. Washburn (1931) Religious philanthropists believed that by helping the needy, they were helping their own kin because everyone was a child of God.

Good works were, and are part of the foundation of Christianity, and pave the way to salvation.

Through the 19th century, the church increasingly became the vehicle of private and public social work.

However, it should be noted that though philanthropy was rooted in religious and church tradition, it also spread outside the church. Philanthropy and religion are intertwined throughout history, but are not necessarily dependent on each other.

The growth of the middle classes in the 18th and 19th centuries gave rise to increased public participation on the part of women.

Work in charitable groups and institutions became an avenue for entry into elite society for women and gave them a sense of place and direction outside the home.

By the 19th century women were increasingly better educated, and viewed by some aspects of society as an underutilized resource.

Philanthropic work was seen as the ideal situation for the inclusion of women because charity work seemed to be a natural extension of their maternal qualities into wider society.

A distinctive feature of women's philanthropic work in the 19th century is the degree to which they applied their domestic experience and education outside the home.

The saying "charity begins at home" had wider meaning than its originator suspected for it was believed that it was in the home where women developed the sympathies and skills necessary to perform good works in a wider sphere.

As the family received more and more attention as the paramount social unit in society, women, believed to be the natural guardians of the household, gained new confidence. F. K. Prochaska, (1980)

The rise of evangelism in the 19th century also contributed greatly to women's expanding roles in institutional philanthropy.

As a religion of duty which placed service above doctrine, evangelism particularly appealed to women as religious sensibility and social pity stood much higher in their minds than abstract arid theology. F. K. Prochaska, (1980)

Women's industriousness in household management also proved to be beneficial for the often cash-strapped organizations.

In addition to fundraising through bazaars, dinner parties, banquets, and collection boxes women took on extra household work, and sold handiworks to earn extra cash for their organizations.

Women brought a caring and industrious influence to institutional and private philanthropy that may have been lacking had philanthropic work been left solely to their male counterparts.

Before 1834, the cost of looking after the poor was growing more expensive year by year.

This cost was paid for by the middle and upper classes in each town through their local taxes.

There was a real suspicion amongst the middle and upper classes that they were paying the poor to be lazy and avoid work.

After years of complaint, a new Poor Law was introduced in 1834.

The new Poor Law was meant to reduce the cost of looking after the poor, prevent scroungers and impose a system which would be the same all over the country.

Under the new Poor Law, parishes were grouped into unions and each union had to build a workhouse if they did not already have one.

Except in special circumstances, poor people could now only get help if they were prepared to leave their homes and go into a workhouse.

Conditions inside the workhouse were deliberately harsh, so that only those who desperately needed help would ask for it.

Families were split up and housed in different parts of the workhouse.

The poor were made to wear a uniform and the diet was monotonous. There were also strict rules and regulations to follow.

Inmates, male and female, young and old were made to work hard, often doing unpleasant jobs such as picking oakum or breaking stones.

Children could also find themselves hired out to work in factories or mines.

Shortly after the new Poor Law was introduced, a number of scandals hit the headlines.

The most famous was Andover Workhouse, where it was reported that half-starved inmates were found eating the rotting flesh from bones.

In response to these scandals the government introduced stricter rules for those who ran the workhouses and they also set up a system of regular inspections.

However, inmates were still at the mercy of unscrupulous masters and matrons who treated the poor with contempt and abused the rules.

Although most people did not have to go to the workhouse, it was always threatening if a worker became unemployed, sick or old.

Increasingly, workhouses contained only orphans, the old, the sick and the insane. Not surprisingly the new Poor Law was very unpopular.

It seemed to punish people who were poor through no fault of their own.