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Response to Vagrancy and the Development of the Tudor Poor Laws
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Honors Thesis
Department of History

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Sturdy Rogues and Wanton Wenches:
Response to Vagrancy and the Development of the Tudor Poor Laws
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ABSTRACT

Tudor England experienced crisis levels of poverty and unemployment which manifested in the form of widespread vagrancy during the sixteenth century. From 1530 to 1597 the central government, often with inspiration from local initiatives, enacted a series of laws which attempted to address the causes of the problems as perceived by the public, in an effort to quell popular fears and anxieties regarding vagrancy.

The focus of this paper is on the response of Tudor society to the problems of poverty and vagrancy. It studies the statutory distinctions drawn between various states of poverty and how these differences disposed society towards categories of the poor. The impact of crime and the sense of economic instability caused by failed harvests and dearth is investigated. The images of social and economic dysfunction formed in the public mind and articulated in the rogue literature of the Elizabethan period are included in discussion of the subject. The bulk of the paper examines the major statutes of the period, the Elizabethan poor laws, to understand the process by which Tudor society made and discarded policies in effort to reach a functional and morally tenable welfare philosophy. The four primary areas of concern examined in the laws are begging, punishment of vagrants, labor and employment, and voluntary and involuntary poor relief. The laws of charitable trusts and the secularization of charitable gifts are also related aspects of the topic.

The paper concludes that the development of the poor laws represented a dramatic change in social values, precipitated both by reasons of compassion and utilitarianism stemming from the rising importance of the Protestant work ethic. This revolution in social outlook caused society to move away from the giving of charity for personal salvation, towards a new role for charity as an instrument to ensure the communal well-being.
Sixteenth-century England witnessed profound economic disturbances which placed the traditional quiescence of both town and countryside in a constant state of peril. The endemic presence of vagrants, beggars, tricksters, and other persons of suspect occupation and character alerted public attention to an immediate and acute source of civil danger. Driven by changes in the rural economy, a diverse rootless population of men, women, and children drifted from various localities to England's urban centers, subsisting on the margins of town life by begging, petty theft, and a host of other illicit practices. These migrant expeditions stemmed from a desperate search for scarce work opportunities, yet they nevertheless represented a considerable disruption in the static fabric of life in English communities. By the 1530s, any notions of an English pastoral arcadia had been forcibly dispelled from the popular imagination. The ranks of idlers and wanderers, chiefly beggars and masterless persons drawn from the servitor and cottager classes, had achieved such proportions as to provoke multiple waves of legislation from the Tudor Crown. Although both central and local government quickly acknowledged the danger to social tranquility posed by the profusion of vagabonds, the pursuit of efficient and productive policies to strike at the causes of Tudor vagrancy extended across nearly the entire sixteenth century.

The history of Tudor vagrancy legislation encapsulates both the moral debate stimulated by poverty and vagrancy and the material concerns of this rapidly changing society. The statutes
vagrancy and poor relief were also acted upon by the coalescing authority of the Protestant ethic of work and industry. The growing distaste for idleness and disorder evinced in the Tudor period, the intensifying fear of crime, and the new insistence on personal and civic responsibility exerted a dynamic influence on Tudor approach to social concerns such as poor relief. Although the tenets of the work ethic did not vitiate the humane compunctions of relief policies, the fervent desire to ensure public safety catalyzed and, in large part, directed the assembly of the Tudor welfare program.

The crystallization of the Protestant social ethos which was to dominate the ideology of Tudor welfare responded in large part to a redefinition of the religious dimension of English social custom and obligation. Religious tradition had conceived of poverty as an ordained state, to be accepted with resignation by the poor and ameliorated by men of means, in order that the latter should win virtue in the eyes of God. The sixteenth century, however, inaugurated an epoch in which the impoverishment of some persons was not credibly attributable to the mysteries of divine will. Poverty was rather recognized to be determined by more terrestrial agents, such as landholders who raised rents in order to maximize profits from wool production. This insight transformed discussion of social welfare problems over the course of the Tudor period, and compelled a new evaluation of poverty and vagrancy, one which measured human misfortune by an economic rather than a moral calculus and no
longer held adverse circumstances to be rooted solely in flawed character. Such a dramatic change in views and values moved society away from an applause of the spiritual benefits of almsgiving towards an extolment of the duty of work, from an indictment of covetousness to a censure of idleness. As Englishmen came to recognize that this idleness was the result of economic failure, their energies and funds were gradually redirected to assail the roots of vagrancy, as an investment in the collective public security rather than as a means of personal salvation. The development of the poor relief laws capitalized on the ingrained charitable impulses of a society long versed in the scriptural mandate of almsgiving, but broke with tradition by dismissal of medieval assumptions regarding personal penury. Tudor England indeed experienced a thorough revolution in social outlook: the rise of a new, secular-based rationale for attending to the impoverished and helpless, to meet the caprice of dangerous, impersonal economic forces which society was itself slow to understand and impotent to control.

Tudor vagrancy arose out of a complex of economic and political conditions which by degrees came to be perceived in the public eye as external to individual character. It is difficult to ascertain an exact number of vagrants at any given point in the sixteenth century, as contemporary accounts tended to rely on imaginative but unscientific means of reckoning.\(^3\) Watches and

\(^3\)William Harrison, *Elizabethan England* (London: Walter Scott Publishing Co., 1876), 127. Printed in or about 1577, this is one of the best known contemporary chronicles of the period.
searches ordered by the Privy Council in 1569 apprehended 13,000 individuals throughout England on suspicion of vagrancy, and this number seems a reasonable representation of the extent of the problem in the early Elizabethan period. The dissolution of monastic institutions by Henry VIII is often cited as contributing to the ranks of the wandering poor, as the numbers of indigent monks and friars increased substantially at this time. Legislation appeared soon after the dissolution specifically drawn to address the anxieties caused by religious mendicants, who were sometimes suspected of spreading sedition. The elimination of the monasteries also aggravated the problem of poor relief to a degree, for although the scant assistance was sporadic, and usually administered on holidays, the indigent could no longer rely on this source of charitable benevolence. The relative importance of religious charity in general plummeted after the 1530s.

Changes in the agricultural economy at the beginning of the century contributed both symbolically and substantively to social unrest. Sheep-farming attained new importance as wool emerged as a growth industry. By the mid-sixteenth century sheep-raising had

Harrison's estimate of 10,000 vagrants wandering the English countryside is significant and interesting for its eye-witness nature.


*Religious alms were mentioned in the poor laws for the last time in 1535, in 27 Henry VIII, c.25. *Statutes of the Realm*, vol.3, 558.*
precipitated many enclosures of land traditionally used as commons or held in copyhold by small tenant farmers. The increased market value of pasture land over arable land caused rents to rise and tenants to suffer eviction. The decline of manorial tenure, the common laborer's ancient relationship with the land and his lord, also jeopardized social harmony. No longer did the cottager have any sense of security in times of dearth, and in the absence of available employment in his lord's household, was often forced into a life of begging or petty crime. The advent of Tudor civil peace generated similar vagrancy problems by inadvertently creating legions of unemployed, masterless men, as households of retainers kept in the days of domestic tension were curtailed. The release of these men, often equipped with weapons, presented an enormous terror to Elizabethan England in the form of highwaymen and bandits. "The rapines of the infinite number of the wicked wandering people of the land", the Somerset justice Edward Hext lamented to the Privy Council in 1596, caused no small havoc in both rural and urban areas.

The extensive balladry of the Tudor period illustrates the economic circumstances of the former retainers' resorts to thievery:

Temporal lords be almost gone,
Households keep they few or none,
Which causes many a goodly man for to beg his bread:
If he steal for necessity,

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There is none other remedy
But the law will shortly hang him all save the head.⁷

This brief excerpt articulates, perhaps unconsciously, the idea that involuntary, structural unemployment caused by economic dislocation comprised the fundamental explanation for descent into vagabondage. This reasoning is reinforced by an examination of the typical person apprehended for the offense of vagrancy during the sixteenth century. The population expansion of the period had created an excess supply of laborers and contributed to a glutted labor market. This demographic change not only manifested itself in additional numbers of poor, but also widened the chasm between the living standards of the laboring but often indigent poor and the more respectable sort of village dweller.⁸

Every English town had at some point punished vagrants of all descriptions and ages, yet by far the most common specimen was the unmarried, able-bodied male between 16 and 30 years of age, unemployed, although often with trade or apprenticeship experience, and masterless.⁹ Unmarried men, travelling alone, accounted for over half the vagrants arrested in one study of the arrest records of various shires.¹⁰ This depiction could

⁷Aydelotte, 15.


reasonably be assumed to match the profile of a typical young man of any era forced from home in search of work, a youth of good character and not part of a community of thieves, but who found his expected economic prospects limited and resorted to the expedient course of vagabondage and minor crime.

Close inspection of the ranks of vagrants reveals the diversity of persons occasionally victim to such destitution, and whose lifestyles fell into or near the category of vagabondage. Clear distinctions in the classification and treatment of the poor formed in the eyes of English society over the course of the Tudor period. Prior to the attainment of a real understanding of the antecedents of the vagrancy problem, however, uniform approaches to the problems of most of the poor oversimplified the situation and posed no satisfactory solution to the throngs of vagrants. Of marginal significance in Tudor society were those individuals afflicted with leprosy, falling sickness, or other incurable, debilitating diseases which clearly precluded work and required a permanent begging career. Statutes even as early as 1496 allow for the upkeep of these unfortunates.11 Others were gradually recognized by the community as temporarily impotent or deserving of charity, the old, sick, or the respectable but down-and-out. These persons were not in the same group as the rogue, or professional vagrant, who wandered from town to town in search of easy targets for minor crimes and con tricks, and considered begging a lucrative source of regular income.

Problems developed in the attempts of English communities to aid the impotent poor without encouraging the sturdy rogue's malfeasance. One common early mechanism which identified distinctions in the ranks of vagrants was parish use of settlement regulations. Settlement regulations used to expel rogue vagrants were not applied to various types of itinerants deemed legitimate, such as those individuals travelling in search of work during the harvest season. Regulations existed to ensure that "foreign" vagrants could not enter a town and become social parasites, a crucial policy as all relief was dependent upon local resources. Although settlement regulations were broad enough to ensure the latitude of official actions, for every vagrant expelled under a parish's settlement rules, several strangers were allowed to reside without harassment.\(^{12}\) It is possible to speculate then that at least to some degree Tudor communities perceived in practice if not in law that most wanderers did not have criminal intentions, and that the stream of immigrants was precipitated more by material motivations than nefarious inclinations. Tudor policy sought to confine responsibility at the vagabonds' origins as its most rudimentary answer to vagrancy, however, and deportation to the home parish remained a frequently used method of keeping out all manner of persons held undesirable for whatever reason. Quarter Sessions records in Wiltshire indicate many violations of a late Elizabethan law against the receiving of foreign lodgers, who 

\(^{12}\) Slack, 377.
might at some stage become vagrant at the expense of the community. This principle of localization of relief was retained as a recurring, indispensable provision of the poor laws throughout the century.

It is difficult to know precisely what proportion of the persons at which the Tudor attention was directed were considered legitimate and deserving poor as distinct from rogues. One survey of the city population of Norwich in 1570 concluded that 25% of inhabitants merited relief, while a similar census of Ipswich in the crisis year of 1597 placed the numbers of deserving poor closer to 10% of city dwellers. Despite this obvious abundance of impotent poor, however, the rogue vagrant undeniably made his or her presence felt, and popular perceptions of vagrancy conditions had in the final analysis as much importance in the formation of the laws as the reality of the situation. The antics of the professional rogue are amply documented in the literature of the day. The chronicles of Thomas Harman and the pamphlets of Robert Greene, two well-known raconteurs of roguery, provide an impressionist look into the illicit lifestyle of this stratum of society. The descriptive observations of Harman proceed from his

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13 Sessions Rolls, County of Wiltshire. In Various Collections, Historical Manuscripts Commission, vol.1. (London: HMSO, 1901), 68. The statute pertaining to lodgers is 31 Elizabeth, c.7.


professional position on the commission of the peace in Kent. The commissioners in the Home Counties of Kent, Essex, Hertfordshire, and Sussex were particularly well-acquainted with the underworld because of the proximity of their jurisdictions to London, and the highway routes which served to lead wanderers directly into these counties.

Harman writes in 1566 of the spectrum of characters who comprised the "uncomely company" of the Elizabethan underworld, and describes in some detail the exploits of, among others, the ruffler and the upright man. The ruffler is one who:

Hath served in the wars, or else hath been a serving-man; and weary of well-doing, shaking off all pain, doth choose him this idle life, and wretchedly wanders about the most shires of this realm.\(^\text{17}\)

Harman vividly recounts an instance where the ruffler and his cohorts waylaid an old man in Kent, following him home from the market in London, and stole from him seven shillings and an angel.\(^\text{18}\) The special attention to the ruffler, distinguished primarily for his idleness, emphasizes Tudor preoccupation with this unattractive tendency, which was thought the root of all malevolent behaviors. It is worth noting that in Harman’s accounts the ruffler was believed to have chosen his state of idleness, an arbitrary disdain of labor most abhorrent to good


\(^{17}\)Ibid., 67.

\(^{18}\)Ibid., 68.
Englishmen. This anecdote is also particularly revealing of the perils posed by the wanderers attracted to the city of London, the epicenter of vagabond activity. Vagrants apprehended in the city of London and the surrounding shires often cited a sojourn of remarkable distance. One examination of arrest records for various shires revealed that one-fifth of vagrants arrested in the Midlands claimed to have travelled over a hundred miles from their home parish, while of those found in the South-East, over a third of hailed from regions over a hundred miles away.¹⁹ These data suggest a very strong urban magnetism, and afford a glimpse of the relative severity in vagrancy trouble between more urban and rural counties.

The ruffler, although a danger to property and a nuisance, was nevertheless a peripheral figure in the society of the underworld. The upright man was the recognized pillar of the criminal community. The upright man maintained the prerogative to assert his authority over all other rogues by demanding, upon meeting them, by whom they had been inducted into roguery, or in vagabond parlance, "stalled". If the upright man was not satisfied with the stranger's answer, the code of the underworld allowed him to rob and beat the newcomer. Harman notes: "The upright man is of great authority. For all sorts of beggars are obedient to his hests, and surmounteth all others in pilfering and stealing."²⁰ The upright man is more representative of the

¹⁹ Beier, 19.
²⁰ Judges, 72.
violent element of roguery which petrified denizens of the English countryside. He was not only a thief, but possessed the ability to organize vagrants, possibly into roving bands of brigands. Although it has been pointed out that in actuality most vagrants travelled alone, it is clear from Harman's writings that the terrifying specter of armed gangs aggressively asserted its place in the many images of social dysfunction which existed in the public mind at this time.

Possibly one of the most interesting aspects of the upright man's position was his relationship with vagabond women. Women, although not as likely to resort to violent crime as men, were a particularly troublesome type of vagabond because of their propensity to try to settle in an unfamiliar parish with a bastard child. A pregnant vagabond woman, often a serving woman dismissed after the fruit of her indiscretion became apparent, would often attempt to settle in a convenient parish before giving birth. Her child would then become the responsibility of that unfortunate community. Quarter sessions records from Essex in the late sixteenth century reveal multiple instances where female vagabonds, sometimes pregnant, travelling without a male companion, were expelled from a parish with their child or children in tow.21 Harman is quite severe on the subject of vagabond women, often termed "morts": "They be as chaste as a cow I have, that goeth to bull every moon, with what bull she careth

21Sessions Rolls, County of Essex. Reprinted in Relief of the Poor in Essex (Essex: Essex Record Office 58, 1971), 36.
Not only was the mort occasionally accomplice to the upright man's villainies, but the children of their lecherous companionship also became an additional burden for the communities on which they preyed. Prosecution of these bastardy cases resulted not only from parish paranoia and distress over the transgression of Christian sexual morality inherent in these instances, but also because of the economic ramifications attached to the presence of a new member of the parish not supported inside a traditional family structure.

The pamphlets of Robert Greene rely heavily on stories heard by the author, a self-proclaimed vagabond chronicler, and so the authenticity of content is perhaps less certain than Harman's first-hand accounts. Of most interest among the tales related by Greene are the cony-catching stories, wherein ingenious rogues outwit hapless victims through a variety of con-tricks, such as rigged card games and wagers. Among the most popular rogue occupations recounted by Greene is the cutpurse, nip, or foist, the petty thief common on the streets of all major English towns and the source of endless anecdotes. Greene acknowledges that his information is not from immediate exposure to the cutpurse's activities:

I have not practiced their deceits, yet conversing by fortune and talking on purpose with such copesmates, hath given me

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22 Judges, 99.

23 Wrightson and Levine, 127.
light into their conceits, and I can decipher their qualities.\textsuperscript{24}

Greene's accounts have a Dickensian flair, conjuring up the image of city streets teeming with Fagins and Artful Dodgers. Multiple citations exist in the Tudor legislation pertaining to vagrancy which condemn the playing of unlawful games, so it is clear that these minor forms of roguery did pose a considerable nuisance.\textsuperscript{25}

Unfortunately, from reading Green's cony tales one receives the impression that there was not an honest wager anywhere in England during the sixteenth century. It is entirely likely that Greene has romanticized some of his celebrated tricksters to dramatize the underworld and more effectively enlighten the readers of his pamphlets, an objective he sets for himself in the preface to "A Notable Discovery of Cozenage."

Examination of the actual incidence of vagrant crime in England is the best method of evaluating the credibility of Greene's accounts and of validating the anxieties of the populace on the subject of vagrancy. Crime, particularly crimes against property, general idleness, and sedition clearly stimulated the interest the Tudor government took in vagrancy and poverty and


precipitated the great corpus of social legislation. It is important to note that vagrancy as a crime in itself was not prosecuted at Assizes before 1572, when the law officially defined the vagrant, rogue, and sturdy beggar. Even with this statutory attention, it remained a notoriously difficult offense to convict for, so it is questionable whether records fully impart the extent of the problem.

The history of crime in Essex exemplifies the conditions in a locality struggling with the dual burden of its proximity to London and the capital's vagrant overspill and the problems caused by its own densely populated areas, especially in the southwest parishes and the major towns of Chelmsford and Colchester. Historians of criminal activity in Essex have characterized the county as particularly closely governed during the final decades of the sixteenth century. Essex Assize and Quarter Sessions records are thus likely to reproduce a more valid picture of vagrancy conditions than those of shires with lax government. Indictment records for Essex existing from 1559 onward document a steep rise in serious crime, including larceny, highway robbery, homicide, and in later years, vagrancy. In the 1560s Essex experienced a rate of 38 persons convicted for these crimes per year on average, 72 per year in the 1570s, 89 per year

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26 14 Elizabeth, c.5. Statutes of the Realm, vol.4, 590.

27 Wrightson and Levine, 113.
in the 1580s, and 116 per year in the 1590s.\textsuperscript{28} The data for Sussex and Hertfordshire are similar, and demonstrate that at least in the Home Counties, crimes closely related to vagrancy were substantially more frequent over the course of the century. The records of the Quarter Sessions in Essex, which dealt with less serious offenses and sanctions than the Assizes, reveal a comparable tendency towards rising vagrant-related crime.\textsuperscript{29} J.S. Cockburn has also noted a correlation between bad harvest years, rising prices, and crimes against property. Home County data tracking indictments for property crime and price levels of wheat show very strong correlation from the mid-sixteenth century to 1600.\textsuperscript{30} This suggests that economic necessity provided substantial motivation for theft during this period. In number terms, 111 thefts were noted in Essex in 1596. These increased to 258 in 1597, and fell, after the most severe part of the 1596 dearth was over, to 165 in 1598.\textsuperscript{31}

Episodes of famine which reduced normally upstanding families to poverty can also be seen in Warwick. A survey in St. Mary's Parish in 1587 produced 245 poor persons, an increase of


\textsuperscript{29}Sessions Rolls, County of Essex. Reprinted in \textit{Relief of the Poor in Essex} (Essex: Essex Record Office 58, 1971), 36.

\textsuperscript{30}Cockburn, 69.

84% from a comparable survey commissioned in 1582. Of the new additions to the ranks of the poor, 17 were recent migrants immediately expelled by the parish authorities, while 91 were locals who had lapsed into poverty and begging from previous respectability. The spectacle of one’s neighbors reduced to base circumstances doubtless had a profound psychological impact on the collective village mind, a powerful inducement to reconsider treatment of the poor. On a more expansive scale, many periods of high prices and scarcity such as in 1571 and 1595 occurred in time periods just prior to when Parliament considered major pieces of social legislation. Whether Greene’s colorful pamphlets were entirely factual or not, the impact of crime and disorder in the localities during this period, and the nature and origin of that crime, was sufficient to convince Parliament that both the impotent poor and the idle and unemployed vagrant warranted critical and immediate focus.

This omnipresence of danger and economic instability urged the passage of the vagrancy legislation developed in Parliament from 1530 to 1597. This period demarcates the first appearance of a substantial law addressing the vagrancy aggravated by the economic problems of the sixteenth century to a culmination of efforts in the Elizabethan Poor Law. The Poor Law synthesized the piecemeal legislative undertakings of the previous sixty years,

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and survived in more or less the same form until 1834. The major areas targeted by the Tudor legislation included begging and almsgiving, prosecution and punishment of vagrants, labor and employment, and voluntary and involuntary poor relief. The development of the vagrancy and poor laws illustrate an increasing frustration with idleness, unconstructive acts of charity, unproductive punishments, and individual reluctance to make sacrifices for the greater community. The laws also indicate a change from an unconscious awareness of the roots of vagrancy in the early years of the century to a carefully articulated understanding of the various facets of the problem by the passage of the Elizabethan Poor Law. It is evident from analysis of the laws that the central government's experimentation with policies in these four primary areas of concern reflected the changes very gradually but distinctly emerging in social attitudes towards the impotent poor and the vagrant. However, Tudor society clearly required time to sort out the Gordian confusion of crime and poverty, of the nuances of morality and charitable necessity. Ample forms of experimentation and reversals of action therefore needed to be undertaken in the effort to hammer together a functional, enduring, and morally tenable welfare philosophy in these spheres of concern.

At the turn of the sixteenth century, begging constituted the standard means for the impotent poor, the aged, weak, or sick to procure their livelihood. The function of charitable donations for this purpose arose from the tradition of almsgiving, and of casual alms given out by individuals to the poor on an ad hoc basis. However, such indiscriminate, unorganized charity provoked difficulties, as the existence of this source of income seemed to encourage indolence and inactivity. To reduce this propensity to shiftlessness, local governments adopted measures very early in the sixteenth century to curb illegitimate begging. Ideas included a licensing system or issuing identification to impotent beggars deemed worthy of receiving charity. London was perpetually the pioneer in new approaches to administration of the poor. In 1517, the aldermen of London devised a system of issuing tin badges or tokens to beggars who had been examined and given a stamp of approval. Potential abuses were guarded against; the badge was not transferable and upon the death of the beggar was collected by the city officials. Badges were restricted to the poor of London, and alien poor or vagabonds were treated according to the statutes pertaining to vagrants. This practice is indicative of both the desire to limit the numbers of beggars in the city, and the strong belief in local responsibility, of each parish's need to control and care for its resident indigent.

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Early Tudor policy regulating begging centered on this local mandate. Transportation to the home parish, if it did nothing to solve the problems related to begging, at least banished the individual beggar from the community he or she had unlawfully entered. Early Henrician legislation ordered both impotent and able-bodied beggars to be sent to their parish of birth, those able to work after three days in the stocks.\textsuperscript{35} However, within twenty-five years of the passage of these statutes the sheer pressure of numbers of beggars induced government officials to reduce the latitude of this policy. Licensing systems were ordered on a country-wide scale for impotent beggars within certain geographic limits. Begging out of limits, usually outside the specified hundred, led to the stocks and whipping. The year 1530 also beheld the distinction between the impotent poor and the sturdy beggar codified into law. Sturdy beggars were never to be licensed or relieved in any way, but immediately whipped and sent to the parish of their birth. The idea of fining parishes for neglecting to punish their vagrants also took root at this time, indicating the emergence of a theory of collective responsibility for social ills.\textsuperscript{36}

The failure of the licensing system for begging was apparent shortly after its adoption. The problem of beggar traffic remained intractable; numbers of beggars increased in urban


areas, with no feasible means of supporting such a large population on alms alone. Common doles, given to licensed beggars, had not proved adequate nor prevented the sturdy beggar from begging anyway. Licenses were routinely forged, and special action was necessitated in response to the spread of this practice.\textsuperscript{37} The law then sought to reverse itself, prohibiting the distribution of alms in general, and instead encouraging charity to be directed to "common boxes and common gatherings in every City, Town, Hundred, Parish, and Hamlet".\textsuperscript{38} Bestowing common alms in 1530 provoked a penalty of tenfold the amount given. This outlaw of indiscriminate alms accorded with the idea gradually being accepted that giving alms could not save a man's soul, a rejection of traditional religious practice. The common box also became a repository for gifts given in wills. An original will in the Essex Record Office left by Agnes Abbott in 1564 provides an example of such directions: "[This sum] I give unto the use and relief of the poor and to be put into the poor Folks' chest."\textsuperscript{39} The use of the common box is particularly interesting as it represented the start of organized, community collection for the poor. The skeleton of local administration for relief was also arranged by the statute cited, which prevailed


\textsuperscript{39}Relief of the Poor in Essex (Essex: Essex Record Office 58, 1971), 37.
upon parish officials and churchwardens to accept the duties of poor relief.

The practice of begging was obviously never either painlessly or completely eliminated from English towns. Beggars continued to populate parishes all over England to various extents despite the legislation cited, and statutes throughout the sixteenth century continued to address the issue. However, Tudor determination to phase out this malignant practice certainly existed by 1530. Laws throughout the course of the Elizabethan period allowed begging only if the impotent poor had proved too numerous to be relieved by parish resources, and the statutes clearly identify licensed begging as an expedient of last resort. This clause in a statute in 1572 delineates the extreme status accorded to begging by this time:

If shall chance any city or town corporate have in it more poor folks that the inhabitants therof shall be able to relieve them in such case upon certificate therein made...the Justices may by their discretions in the same Sessions take order appoint and cause the poor folk to be certified...by giving license to beg. 40

Legislation after 1535 touching begging elaborated on the principles laid out in the early laws without substantial shifts in philosophy. The involvement of local officials increased; after 1535 Justices were regularly charged with examining any beggar who entered their jurisdiction, relieving the impotent, setting the sturdy to work, and repatriating all alien beggars to

40 14 Elizabeth c.5. Statutes of the Realm, vol.4, 590. See also 5 Elizabeth c.3. Statutes of the Realm, vol.4, 411 for a similar earlier provision.
Although fines and punishments had to grow increasingly severe, Tudor policy continued to adhere to the inefficiency of allowing begging. The major exception to the law was in the exemption of soldiers and mariners injured in the Queen’s service. However, this anomaly in policy confirmed results obtained from the era of allowed general begging, since the trouble caused by the special treatment of this subgroup of vagabonds elicited considerable additional legislation and a spate of royal proclamations, particularly concerning false credentials. By the middle of the century not only had the inefficiency of begging as an answer to vagrancy impressed itself upon Tudor society, but the practice had grown morally distasteful to community values which demanded labor and scoffed at the spiritual reciprocity theory of almsgiving. After the 1540’s, innovative attacks on vagrancy ceased to lie in the treatment of beggars and begging, but focused rather on the manner of punishing the sturdy rogue, in procuring employment for him or her, and in establishing methods of funding for the relief of the poor.

Punishment of vagrants generated creative experimentation similar to the strategies implemented to reduce begging. Vagrancy was perceived by early Tudor authorities as a behavior engendered by a moral flaw in the individual vagrant rather than as a purely

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42 14 Elizabeth c.5. Statutes of the Realm, vol.4, 590.
economic condition. The laws which ordered a spell in the stocks and a good whipping should reasonably have rectified this character defect. However, such methods proved miserably ineffective in discouraging potential vagrancy or in causing existing vagrants to quit their trade. The end of the Henrician period witnessed vagrants not only whipped, but for the second offense pierced through the gristle of the ear. Vagrants became felons with the benefit of clergy after the third offense. It is unclear how well these laws were actually executed, as presumably a parish in Durham would have no way of knowing whether a vagrant had been punished for a first offense in Essex, although a second offense would obviously leave tell-tale physical scars. The short reign of Edward VI observed the use of some of the harshest physical punishments for vagrancy, as masterless or unemployed persons risked being branded across the chest with the letter "V".

Contributions to criminal justice for much of the Tudor period consisted of measures of mere brutal retribution. It is interesting that Tudor sanctions against vagrancy did not grow less unsparing even as mechanisms to attack the problem became more sophisticated. Recidivism continued to provoke successively harsher penalties over the course of the century, as a convicted rogue beggar suffered far more under Elizabeth than under any of her royal predecessors. Not only did vagrants become felons with

clergy after the second offense of vagrancy, but those who managed to escape their fate, through such means as finding a willing master, became felons without benefit of clergy if discovered begging again. The additional severity of punishment can be possibly attributed to social anxiety over the increasing crime rates attending the many episodes of dearth and famine during the Elizabethan period. The experience of such volatile, frightening times clearly influenced Elizabethan England to be increasingly intolerant of indolence in the most parasitic and troublesome members of society.

The discovery which effectively revolutionized treatment of vagrancy by Tudor policy-makers was the gradual recognition that vagabondage was intimately tied to unemployment, that idlers roamed the English countryside not out of an irrepressible wanderlust but because of the geography and feasibility of work prospects. Arrested vagabonds consistently claimed to be in search of work and often cited proficiency in a trade or profession. Vagabonds examined in Warwick and Essex in the 1580's maintained that they were unemployed cloth-workers, leather-workers, and clock-makers. The need to make some provision for the employment of vagrants was articulated in the law as early as 1547, although in an unpracticable form, as slavery. Under the administration of the Protector Somerset during the reign of

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44 Elizabeth c.5. Statutes of the Realm, vol.4, 590.

Edward VI, the notorious Act of 1547 in theory enslaved everyone who refused to work for any wages. In other words, all persons unemployed were simply assumed to be vagrants unless they offered evidence to dispute the charge. Potential slaves were identified by the very broad specifications of the clause:

Whosoever...man or woman being sound of body and not possessed of a private income shall either like a serving man wanting a master or like a beggar...idly wander by the highwayside or in streets...not applying themself to some honest art.  

The severity of this Act extended to children also. Faulty morals, left uncorrected in a vagabond child, could only incubate another sturdy rogue or wanton wench. Vagabond children could be apprenticed without parental consent to any master until the age of twenty-four, and an apprentice who fled his master became a slave for the duration of his indenture. The implications of this law illustrate the belief of the early Tudor period that inferior character explained the adoption of a vagrant lifestyle. The Act delineated no additional penalties for career vagrants; deterrence by the threat of enslavement was not the paramount purpose of the statute. Rather, it was hoped that as slaves vagrants would be cured of their predilection for laziness, that the work ethic would be forcibly instilled in them. The vagabond demanded discipline in order to avoid acting as a drain on the physical and moral fiber of the community, and a slave in the context of this Act assumed the attributes of an ideal productive asset to society.

The provenance of the Act of 1547 is obscure, and as it was repealed in 1549, it remains the shortest-lived of all statutes pertaining to English vagrancy. However, the Slavery Act should not be viewed as a statutory anomaly in any way. Precedent for enslavement or at least forced employment existed in English law, and the practice continued through the end of the reign of Elizabeth in the use of vagabonds for galley-slaves. Moreover, the Act was repealed not because it was considered excessively harsh but rather because it was ineffectual and unenforceable. The government was simply unable to find enough suitable private masters for all the vagabonds eligible for penal servitude. A vagrant, a convicted criminal with a lackluster reputation for labor, did not hold sufficient appeal for prospective masters to assume the responsibility of ownership. Even in 1558, however, one committee of the Privy Council suggested that the Act of 1547 be revived, despite its limited success. The law had proved unworkable, but it was by no means philosophically untenable in Tudor society. Regardless, the utilitarian experiment was ill-conceived, and the measures of relief undertaken in 1552 for the London poor under the auspices of Edward VI and Bishop Ridley recognized the need to include a realistic form of labor for the able-bodied poor. The failure of the Slavery Act clearly tested

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the prevailing theory of voluntary idleness, and caused new interpretations of the vagrancy problem to emerge. Bishop Ridley's comments on the London vagrancy reforms embodied this idea:

The greatest numbers of beggars fallen to misery...have so utterly lost their credit, that though they would show themselves willing to labour, yet are they so suspected and feared of all men, that few or none dare or will receive them to work: wherefore we saw that there could be no means to amend this miserable sort, but by making some general provision of work, wherewith the willing poor may be exercised; and whereby the froward, strong and sturdy vagabond may be compelled to live profitably by the Commonwealth.\textsuperscript{49}

The provision of some form of voluntary employment for the poor marked substantive progress in the vagrancy measures of the period. The need was answered in an Act of Parliament passed in 1575, a short time after the celebrated Vagrancy Act of 1572 had almost entirely neglected this essentiality. The Act of 1572 had cautiously approached the question of employment by noting that provision should be made for victims of structural unemployment, such as seasonal harvest workers. Justices were also vaguely instructed to use the surplus from poor collections to provide employment for vagrants, but the statute left this to the Justices' discretion.\textsuperscript{50} These deficiencies were aggressively attacked in the legislation of 1575. Stocks of materials, such as wool, hemp, flax, and iron, were to be provided in every town or city for the poor to work on. A House of Correction was to be

\textsuperscript{49}Quoted in Leonard, 32-33.

\textsuperscript{50}14 Elizabeth, c.5. Statutes of the Realm, vol.4, 590.
established in every county for the accommodation, rehabilitation, and productive employment of vagabonds who had once been set to work and afterwards discovered idle and begging again. Of particular interest in the statute is the effort directed to training the young in disciplined and industrious ways:

Also to the intent youth may be accustomed and brought up in labor and work, and then not like to grow to be idle, and to the intent also that such as be already grown up in idleness and so rogues at this present, may not have any excuse in saying they cannot get service or work.51

The second part of this clause yields strong evidence that a lucid understanding of the real situation of the unemployed had at last been reached by the Tudor government. In 1575 the central government was for the first time amenable, albeit with considerable reluctance, to give some degree of credibility to the existence of involuntary idleness.

Once the Tudor government had resolved that employment constituted a salient aspect of the vagrancy and poverty problems, existing endeavors to set the poor to work were rapidly augmented. At the time of the framing of the Elizabethan Poor Law, Parliament also passed a statute to facilitate establishment of the Hospitals for the poor and the Houses of Correction, the latter key to the employment of vagrants.52 The law dispensed with obstacles which existed to private citizens who intended to found such an institution, namely the need to secure a license

51 18 Elizabeth, c.3. Statutes of the Realm, vol.4, 611.
from the Crown. Parliament’s concern for and faith in correctional institutions during Elizabeth’s reign is expressed in innumerable instances in the Domestic State Papers. The involvement of Parliament included voicing indignation over Hospitals’ entanglements with pensions and fees which prevented the poor from being relieved.\(^5\) Parliament evaluated schemes for creating work opportunities for the poor, such as a staple in London for making woolen clothing and drapery.\(^4\) Parliament also redirected revenues from fines on usury and corn engrossing to the Houses of Correction.\(^5\) Although it was hoped that the lion’s share of the upkeep of these establishments could be financed with private support, the central government was prepared and willing to intercede in revenue matters, such as in encouraging donations for the London Hospitals by royal proclamation.\(^6\)

Nowhere was the impact of new social attitudes regarding civic responsibility for public welfare more evident than in the actions of individual charitable donors. Records of private gifts made in bequests at this time indicate a dramatic departure from religious gift-giving tradition. Charity was secularized, with a greater proportion of donations channelled to poor relief and


\(^4\)Ibid., 439.

\(^5\)Ibid., 22.

public works such as the repair and construction of roads and bridges. In the city of Worcester, for example, 43% of charitable bequests in 1529 had been made for the purpose of poor relief; by 1610, the proportion had risen to 71% of all bequests. The weakest aspect of this vital feature of Tudor benevolence lay in the mechanism utilized to employ charitable gifts in the establishment of institutions, the charitable trust. Parliament had intended in 1572 to encourage the giving of gifts by insuring that the validity of gifts in wills could not be threatened. The statute cited three Hospitals founded by Edward VI, including the famous Christ's Hospital, but applied to any gifts for the support of other existing or future such operations:

And where diverse and well-disposed and charitable persons have given lands tenements and hereditaments to the relief and sustenacion of the poor, not only in the said Hospitals but also in other Hospitals...it is hoped many more hereafter will likewise charitably give.57

Insecurity nevertheless continued to strain the functioning of the charitable trusts. The charitable trust statute enacted at the time of the Elizabethan Poor Law in 1597 intended to shore up any weak areas in the earlier law, to provide for the fulfillment of the "true intent and meaning of the givers and disposers"58 of charitable gifts. However, the misapplication and mismanagement of revenues for these institutions had not only obstructed the relief and employment of the poor, but also discouraged potential patrons. Parliament sought to regain the confidence of

benefactors by mandating the issuance of commissions to Bishops and other trustworthy figures in whose jurisdictions trusts were supervised. Appointed individuals were bound to investigate the trusts and, if necessary, order the correction of any abuses. Parliament thus by proxy took upon the role of ensuring the integrity of charitable gifts, a significant advance in the process of transformation to public administration of and responsibility for social welfare and relief.

The endowment of correctional institutions in the Tudor period relied on the benevolence of charitable men, who made specific provision for this type of gift in their wills. Rates and assessments were also a common source of financial support for the Houses and for general relief in the last decades of the sixteenth century, however, and the relative roles of public doles and private charities have been debated.\(^59\) The concept of private donations for the poor had its origin in the system of religious gifts administered through the parish churches. The Parliamentary Rolls from 1425 indicate the existence of a tripartite system in which one-third of tithes were to go to the

church, one-third to the parson, and one-third to the poor.  

This scheme was strictly according to custom and bound in religious beliefs, rather than by legal obligation. Almsgiving passed through various incarnations during the sixteenth century, first as the "voluntary and charitable alms" encouraged by Parliament in 1535. More forceful exhortation to alms emerged in 1549; reluctant givers were intimidated by the parish officers, minister, or even by the bishop. However, the vital element of coercion which precipitated the transformation to a secularly administered and mandated system was not introduced until 1562, when Justices of the Peace were instructed to tax parishioners at their discretion, and if the givers were not so charitably inclined, to commit them to prison. Assessments, in which Justices were ordered to set a weekly rate for each parishioner based on holdings of goods and land, were initiated at last in 1572, and remained an integral component of the relief system arranged in the Elizabethan Poor Law.

Statutes enacted in Parliament related to local rating were inspired to a great degree from municipal organization of poor relief by localities over the course of the century, in


5 Elizabeth, c.5. Statutes of the Realm, vol.4, 411.
particular from relief initiatives undertaken by cities such as London and Norwich. Although the statutory authority for compulsory poor rates did not come into existence until 1572, boroughs did make levies much earlier in the century. A compulsory payment for the poor in the form of a fifteenth was levied in London in 1547, possibly the first of the energetic City Council’s many similar such endeavors. The mayor of Norwich also led the way in 1570 to compel assessments for the relief of the poor when voluntary contributions failed to meet the charitable needs of the poor of the city. The considerable enterprise of local government in years prior to the passage of national legislation reinforces the notion of the long-term familiarity of the citizenry with the economic distress of the poor by the final quarter of the century. The authorization of taxation for the purpose of poor relief, as a means of succor for the poor when employment and private funding proved inadequate, owes in considerable part to the animation of public opinion, sentiment which arose from continuous close contact with the poor and observation of poverty conditions.

The system of rates and assessments in place at the end of the sixteenth century represented the logical culmination of the progression of reform initiatives undertaken during the Tudor period. The existence of the municipal rate schemes demonstrates that long-held assumptions regarding poverty, vestiges of the

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64 Leonard, 116.

65 Ibid., 117.
medieval past, had changed dramatically by the end of the century. The enactment of the Elizabethan Poor Law, the last of a series of energetic, systematic attempts to attack a source of great weakness to the communal health, formed the vertex in the area of charity between medieval and secular modern society in England. The Poor Law rejected obsolete religious interpretations of poverty, dictating compulsory rates to provide for secular public purposes. All capable members of society were required to contribute to poor relief, and failed to win divine or earthly accolades for their compliance. The implementation of poor rates marked the definitive achievement of a difficult victory, of man's awareness of his social obligation over his baser, more selfish, and introverted nature. Although as a paradigm for a social welfare policy the historical model of the Tudor period left only a few mechanisms contemporary societies would wish to emulate, this principle of social obligation embodied in the Poor Law formed an enduring legacy. The Tudor period disavowed those anachronistic views which would allow the suffering of some to weaken the health of the community, as relics of the medieval past. Even if this conclusion was not representative of a Tudor juggernaut of compassion, by its broadening and secularization of social vision the creation of the Tudor poor relief system proclaimed the real eclipse of medieval society, and provoked a new and inspiring means to assert concern for the safeguard of the community peace.
Calendar of Domestic State Papers, Domestic Series, of the Reigns of Edward VI, Mary, Elizabeth, and James I.

The Domestic State Papers contain the notes, investigations, and general proceedings of the state. Although these volumes are poorly edited and the content disorganized, the especial concern of the central authority during the reign of Elizabeth regarding the administration of Houses of Correction, Hospitals, the regulation of wages and prices, and other facets of the poor relief system is well illustrated.


This is a diverse collection of primary source documents relating to the local efforts for poor relief in Essex in the sixteenth century. Included are records from the Parish Registers, Quarter Sessions rolls, and samples of wills and testaments. This work is extremely useful in obtaining an understanding of the treatment of vagabonds and associated poverty problems at the local parish level.

Greene, Robert. "A Notable Discovery of Cozenage."

An example of the literature of roguery of the Elizabethan period, Greene's contemporary accounts detail the activities of cutpurses, pickpockets, and assorted other shady characters of the vagabond underworld. The credibility of this source is not impeccable as the author's admiration of the exploits of these rogues is transparent, but Greene's narrative vivifies the problems posed by petty criminals in English towns.

Harman, Thomas. "A Caveat or Warning for Common Cursitors Vulgarly Called Vagabonds." In The Elizabethan
Harman chronicles his personal encounters with members of Elizabethan vagabond circles. Harman, a member of Justice of the Peace in Kent in 1576, is perhaps more credible a source than Greene. His descriptions of the various figures of the underworld do much to explain the fears inspired by vagabonds and idlers in the late sixteenth century, and especially the attraction of vagrants to urban areas.


These are transcriptions from select years of the Parliamentary Journals, with a sketchy commentary, and are really too general to be very useful for the subject of poor relief.


This is a first-hand, contemporary chronicle of life in Elizabethan England, written in or about 1577. Harrison’s observations and impressions, although not uncorroborated facts, are interesting and useful in understanding how the vagrancy problem was perceived by the public at the time Tudor social legislation was enacted.


The three volumes of Proclamations span the period studied; they are integral to any work related to vagrancy and poor relief during the Tudor years. The Proclamations are invaluable in identifying the crime spawned by vagrancy as the area of the central government’s main concern during the reigns of Henry VIII, Edward VI, Philip and Mary, and Elizabeth.


This book is composed of contemporary tracts detailing the conditions of poor relief in various countries on the Continent; one tract describes the
situation in England in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. Useful for a general perspective on poor relief and for purposes of comparison between conditions in England and Europe.

Sessions Rolls, County of Somerset. Main Series (1561-1889), vol. XXIII. Somerset Record Society: 1907.

This volume contains excerpts from the records of the Justices of the Peace at the Quarter Sessions in Somerset, commencing in 1561. Of great use in identifying the response of the local Justices to various vagrant-related problems including crime and immigration in the relatively wealthy Somerset county.

Sessions Rolls, County of Wiltshire. In Various Collections, i. Historical Manuscripts Commission: 1901.

This volume contains excerpts from the records of the Justices of the Peace at the Quarter Sessions in Wiltshire, commencing in 1561; these are sporadic until 1590. The Wiltshire records are useful in understanding how actively certain laws which attacked the vagrancy problem in Wiltshire were enforced, and therefore which problems were of most concern to English communities; for example, many citations exist which address the maintaining of illegal lodgers in Wiltshire.


The Statutes of the Realm in their entirety, indexed and with margin notations referencing important parts of the statute. Essential for any analysis of the developments in Tudor treatment of poverty and vagrancy over the course of the sixteenth century.


This is a diverse collection of primary sources, including among other documents Presentments, Acts of Parliament, county surveys, and Privy Council inquiries. Very useful in understanding contemporary opinions of and reactions to vagrancy and poverty,
especially those of individuals in position to make policy.

Works Cited - Secondary Sources


Appleby describes the occurence and consequences of dearth, disease, and famine during the Tudor and Stuart periods, topics peripheral to poor relief but related as being the conditions which on occasion gave rise to vagrancy and poverty. This work is essential for obtaining background information on such issues as the harvest failure of 1596 which set poor relief efforts in historical context.


One of the first modern attempts to treat the subject of Elizabethan vagabondage, this book provides an excellent discussion of the economic situation in Tudor England, synopsizes the vagrancy laws, and examines the literature of roguery at length. It also includes useful appendices of Privy Council letters and articles by the Justices of the Peace.


Beier analyzes censuses of the poor in various cities and parishes to differentiate between the various socioeconomic levels of poverty and destitution among Elizabethan vagrants. He attempts to prove that the poor were not very badly off, but neglects any exploration of the state of the poor before the 16th century, and so fails to rebut the real decline in the living standards of the poor. There is some interesting and useful statistical analysis, although Beier's belief that low wages were a more important economic determinant than unemployment is speculative.
Beier uses arrest records to draw conclusions about the characteristics of those persons classified as vagrant in the Elizabethan period, and to explore whether the fear and loathing manifested towards vagrants was justified. The article gives a very useful profile of vagrancy, the lifestyles of vagrants and their treatment during the Elizabethan period.


Chandler's book sets the work of Harman and Greene in the context of the larger canon of rogue literature. He considers the process of fictionalization in some of these efforts, concluding that Greene's work develops into the "frankly fictional." Useful to evaluate the credibility of the rogue literature.


This work includes several articles relevant to poverty issues, focusing on the criminal records related to vagrancy in the Home Counties. Particularly helpful are statistics relating indictments and economic trouble in Essex, and there is a detailed account of crime in an Essex parish.


Davies discusses the motivation for and execution of the 1547 law, concluding that practicality, not moral objectionality, caused the law to be rescinded. Very useful for a view of the Slavery Law which places the Act in an accurate historical light and thereby exposes real attitudes toward labor and idleness at the time.


Dowell's nineteenth century work surveys the development of local taxing authority in England. A very useful discussion of the evolution of the poor rates from medieval religious origins.

An examination of the social and economic conditions and political organization of Worcester in the sixteenth century. There is some very useful information on the methods of municipal poor relief; of especial use are the figures Dyer has collected concerning charitable bequests to poor relief which demonstrate secularization.


This work notes the change in charitable giving and in the direction of gifts from the early to late Tudor period, the secularization of charitable relief in the sixteenth century. However, as in his earlier work, Jordan continues to ignore the erosion of purchasing power due to inflation, a significant problem which jeopardizes his conclusions regarding the weight of private charity. An invaluable work to consult for the secularization trend, however.


Jordan uses many thousands of wills left in the Prerogative Courts of Canterbury and York to analyze the importance of the charitable benevolence of wealthy men in English social relief. Jordan very likely has overemphasized the massiveness of such charity by failing to take account of the effects of price inflation.


Judges has compiled an impressive collection of examples of rogue literature, and prefaces the work with an interesting and insightful general foreword on the conditions of vagrancy in the early part of the sixteenth century.

This is the seminal work on poor relief in the period. It is still extremely useful for a perspective on the roles of the Parliament and Privy Council in the formation of relief policy, and on the municipal organization of poor relief efforts which gave rise to the passage of national legislation, focusing on London in the sixteenth century.


This work serves as an excellent point of departure for study of the topics of poor relief and vagrancy. Manning explores in depth the changes attending the transformation from an economy of subsistence to one of commercial agriculture. His synopsis of the vagrancy legislation provides a useful introduction to the subject.


This book surveys the economic conditions and social changes in Tudor England and provides a summary of agricultural problems and inflation. Palliser’s figures for the wages of laborers and the incomes of various classes are useful in illustrating the unequal wealth distribution in Tudor society as it grappled with the poverty dilemma. His charts indicating wealth by county through analysis of the Subsidy Rolls are particularly helpful in this regard.


This pioneering book on poor relief gives a general overview of all the statutes related to poor relief and vagrancy. Perhaps too general to be useful.


This book describes the conditions of poverty and vagrancy through uncritical use of the literature of roguery, particularly Robert Greene’s "cony-catching" pamphlets. Many of Greene’s accounts are unsubstantiated, and Salgado’s conclusions about the life of the underworld should be viewed cautiously.

Slack discusses the elements of tradition and innovation in poor relief policy during the reigns of Edward and Mary, emphasizing how early legislation set the stage for Elizabethan efforts culminating in the Poor Law of 1597. An essential writer to consult in the field, although this essay does not extend so far to address the major changes in poor relief which developed under the reign of Elizabeth.


Slack enumerates the characteristics of a vagrant, illustrating how the definition evolved over the course of the Tudor period. He also provides a helpful explanation of the limitations of the historical record in relation to the examination of vagrancy and criminality in sixteenth century England.


Tawney's study of the changes in the rural economy provide an excellent elaboration of the problems facing the peasantry in the sixteenth century, including the weakening of copyhold tenures, enclosures, and rising rents.


The authors explain the significance of dearth and the government's attempts to maintain values and relationships which ordered society in late sixteenth and early seventeenth century England. Useful for incorporating the topic of dearth into the subject of poor relief.

The authors examine the microsphere of Terling, Essex in the areas of the rural economy, demographics, and the social system. Their treatment of the association of poverty and disorder by the local community is very salient to the topic of vagrancy as experienced on the local level.

Youngs, F.A. The Proclamations of the Tudor Queens.

This study of the Tudor Proclamations is useful for gauging the importance and impact of various Elizabethan Proclamations pertaining to the punishment of vagrants, which often anticipated later action by Parliament. Appendix I provides a compilation of all titles of Marian and Elizabethan Proclamations including reference page numbers to help locate the full Proclamation in Hughes and Larkin. Useful to supplement Hughes and Larkin.