

' Combining growth with equity in an agrarian economy: development in England c.1600-1830'

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The Elizabethan or 'Old' Poor Law: created
by two statutes 'For the Relief of the Poor'
1598 and 1601

- every one of England's approximately 10,000 or more parishes was mandated to create a parish fund, financed by a local tax on property, in order to support the local poor all year round if necessary, not just in times of dearth- orphans, widows, the old and disabled and the unemployed were all covered in principle.

Universalist but devolved system

- Strengths: high quality information
- Potential weaknesses:
 - local corruption
 - unlimited liability

Solutions to potential problems

- J.P.s (Justices of the Peace; 'Magistrates')
- The Settlement Laws (1662)

'The Poor Law' c.1660-1830

- Four interlocking institutions of local governance, mandated by central govt
- Poor Laws
- Settlement Laws
- Parish Registers
- Justices of the Peace

Evidence for Poor Law effectiveness

- Cambridge Group for the History of Population 4% sample (404 parishes) found no evidence of national famine crisis mortality after 1623/4, approximately 200 years before any other countries of Western Europe

Economic growth-enhancing properties of English Poor Laws

- enable productivity-raising innovations in agriculture
- capacity to promote labour mobility around the economy
- capacity also to facilitate mobility of capital (parish registers)

British population during the 'long' eighteenth century

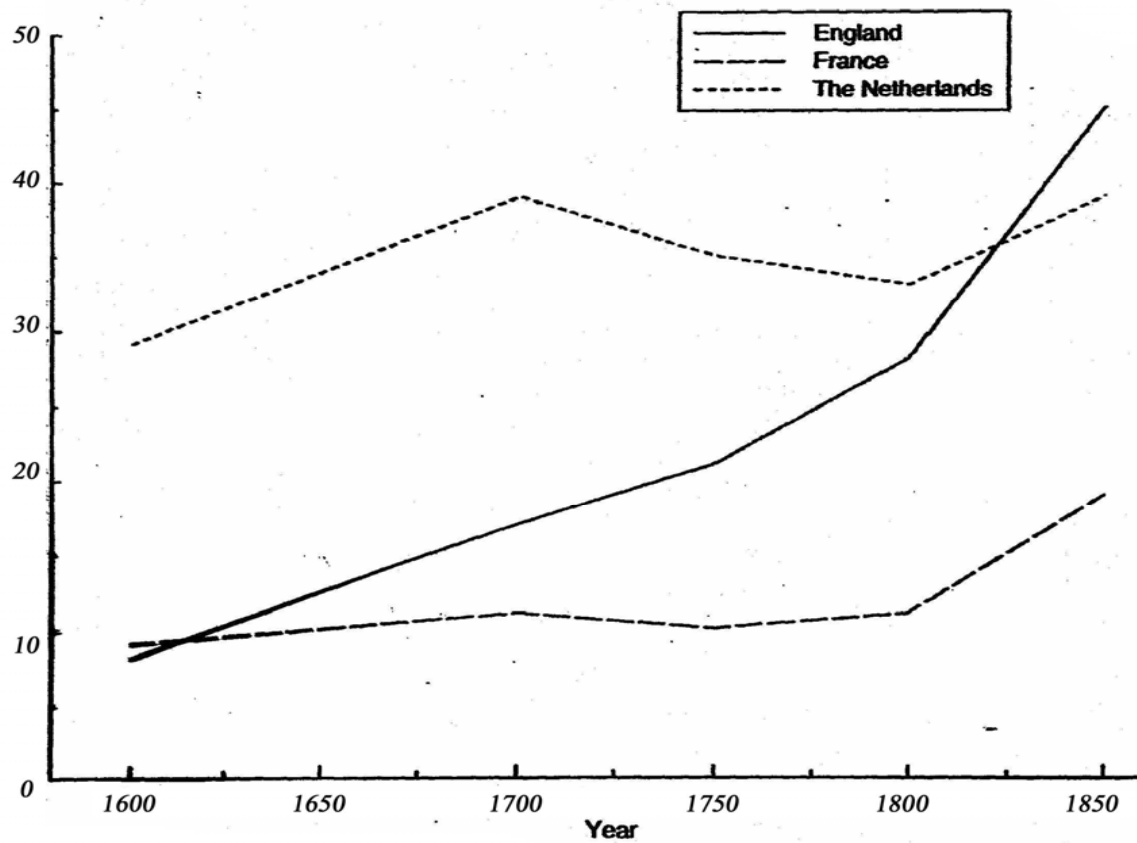


Figure 3.8 Urban growth in England, France and the Netherlands

Notes: The urban proportion was taken as the percentage of the total population living in towns with 5,000 or more inhabitants.

Source: E. A. Wrigley, ch.3 in R. Floud and P. Johnson, eds,
The Cambridge Economic History of Modern Britain 1700-1860 (CUP 2004)

The 1538 system of parish registers

- ‘...for the avoiding of sundry strifes and processes and contentions arising from age, lineal descent , title of inheritance, legitimation of bastardy, and for knowledge, whether any person is our subject or no.’
- (Thomas Cromwell, Henry VIII’s Vicar-general)

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