

POOR RELIEF IN ELIZABETHAN ENGLAND: A NEW LOOK AT IPSWICH

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An immediate and pressing concern of both local and national government in England from approximately 1520-1640 was the problem of vagrancy and poverty. Although not a new concern, the situation was getting worse. Attempts to deal with the "problem of the poor" led to various urban experiments, evolution of national legislation culminating in the Elizabethan poor laws of 1597-1598 and 1601, and a substantial increase in private mercantile charity. Efforts in all three areas kept the problem within reasonable bounds and probably set a precedent for the development of today's welfare state. Yet it was the towns, where the poor were most heavily concentrated, who were in the vanguard of innovative poor relief during the sixteenth-century.

This paper will focus on poor relief in one such town, Ipswich in the county of Suffolk. Ipswich has been the subject of some study already. Select municipal records were edited in 1966 by John Webb. At that time, Webb presented a brief description of the Ipswich relief system and an analysis of the sums distributed. Since his study, however, a rich and contentious literature has emerged concerning the history of English pauperism and vagrancy, the early modern town, and the development of poor relief in local communities.¹ This work surveys recent findings and evaluates Ipswich records in terms relevant to present day historiography. Furthermore, it examines the sociological and demographic characteristics of the relief recipients, an issue Webb failed to address.

I

Poverty in sixteenth-century English towns developed gradually. It resulted from a series of urban crises, including trade and cloth depressions, harvest failures, inflation, plague epidemics, and the dissolution of monasteries.² Yet urban poverty was also produced by the failure of city economies to keep up with their rising populations. Indeed, increased population and accelerated immigration presented a major problem for the towns. They aggravated the existing crisis, and produced a wide-range ripple effect. Historian John Pound states that between 1500-1601 England's population "may have risen by as much as forty percent," while Peter Clark and Paul Slack argue that from 1500 to 1700 the population doubled.³ In addition, as population increased, so did the immigration of the rural poor to urban areas. These immigrants were usually paupers or vagrants.

They created acute pressures within the towns, making poverty a "permanent and escalating burden . . . taxing their financial, administrative and political resources to the limit."⁴ Such newcomers aggravated urban unemployment and undermined the position of lesser tradesmen, thereby increasing the amount of poor relief and generating social tension and administrative strain.⁵

English towns and cities were full of the poor, and poverty threatened to overwhelm them by 1600. But who were these indigents and how were they regarded by their contemporaries? One thing is clear - the number of poor people was undeniably large. Although those supported by poor relief rarely exceeded four to five percent of the population, Pound believes that indigents comprised an average of fifty to sixty percent of the population in most urban areas.⁶ The poor were divided into two categories, deserving and undeserving, during the first three-quarters of the sixteenth century. Deserving indigents commonly consisted of the aged, ill, impotent, widows, orphaned children, and those who were considered "unable to work." The undeserving poor included vagrants, rogues, those Elizabethans considered to be unwilling to work, and individuals accused of theft, vandalism, drunkenness, brawling, and recusancy. Historians for years have argued that few Elizabethans recognized unemployed but able indigents as deserving poor.

Recent scholarship has begun to revise the traditional view of the poor. In select towns, some authorities began to realize that they had to recognize and deal with an emerging, new class of able-bodied but marginally indigent people. What should be done with the unemployed who were able and willing to work and those who were employed but did not earn enough to provide a decent standard of living? Their families were not destitute. They often owned their own homes, had jobs, and their children sometimes attended school where they were learning a craft or trade. Such people were able to survive without relief in favorable years, but could be pushed to destitution by the death of a parent, a long illness, a food crisis precipitated by a bad harvest, falling wages, or the loss of a job. For example, after the 1593 plague epidemic at Leicester, 500-600 poor people sold all their possessions to avoid starvation, while during the bad harvest year of 1586-7, there was a "landslide of impoverishment" at Warwick forcing "all groups onto the bread line, desperate for assistance."⁷ Until their eventual inclusion on municipal poor relief roles, the unemployed with no savings had two choices: to beg or to starve. However, town censuses indicate that after 1550 this new group of poor was increasing, and its claim to relief from municipal funds was being recognized.⁸

Controversy exists concerning whether private charity or municipal taxation bore the greater burden in town poor relief. W. K. Jordan, in his history of English philanthropy from 1480-

1660, states that "in no year prior to 1660 was more than seven percent of all the vast sums expended on the care of the poor derived from taxation," and that "the sums available for the needs of the poor from charitable endowments exceeded by slightly more than three times the amounts gathered by taxation for distribution by the overseers." Indeed, he believes that legislation was only invoked in "those areas in which private charity, for a variety of reasons, had failed to bring communities level with the realm at large in their social resources."⁹ Most historians do not agree with Jordan's figures, since he failed to consider inflation and since subsequent studies of parish relief have added new knowledge. At the same time, it should be noted that John Pound seems to agree that it was the "great outpouring of mercantile charity which, more than anything else, kept the problem within reasonable bounds."¹⁰ A. L. Bier directly refutes Pound and Jordan. Using the city of Warwick as an example, he argues that "post-Reformation philanthropy to the local poor hardly surpassed public rates." He finds that in a good harvest year, tax monies aiding the poor almost equalled the amount derived from charity, while in a bad harvest year, the sum raised by taxation was over fifty percent greater than that received from private donors. He concludes that "such evidence contradicts the argument that the great volume of charitable relief made rates insignificant except in periods of crisis."¹¹ Paul Slack states that a similar situation existed in Salisbury, where the "poor rate brought in was almost twice the amount available to the town from charitable benefactions for general poor relief."¹² Wallact T. MacCaffrey discovers the same thing in Exeter during the years between 1540 and 1640. Public poor relief was supplemented by private aid.¹⁴ Probably both poor relief rates and charity combined with cooperation between public and private institutions helped most English towns deal successfully with poverty. As Samuel Bird, minister of St. Peter's in Ipswich, indicated in 1598: "For let men never give so large legacies, yet if there be failing in the execution all comes to nothing."¹⁵ Thus, the ultimate responsibility always lay with the town government.

Significantly, Parliamentary laws passed during the second half of the century were based on innovative and creative experiments carried out by towns. The cities of London and Norwich took the lead, but were hardly unique. Other municipalities and even small towns throughout England were making strides in poor relief. The town of Northill in Bedfordshire began to levy taxes in 1563 for the relief of the sick, aged, impotent, widows, and even "strangers." In another Bedfordshire town, Eaton Socon, records from the years 1591-1598 indicate that tax revenues were used for subsidizing the aged and impotent, caring for the sick, supplying children with clothes, housing the aged and the young, and employing the idle.¹⁶ The 1580s found Warwick authorities forbidding begging, conducting censuses of the poor, and instigating taxes for poor relief.¹⁷

One of the earliest workhouses was established at Winchester in 1579. It employed 80 men and women, mainly "rogues," but with some paupers included, to make gloves, stockings, hats, and nails.¹⁸ Salisbury's main concern was employing the able-bodied poor and apprenticing their children. To accomplish this, the town began planning a workhouse in 1564, although it was not finally established until 1602.¹⁹ Exeter began levying poor relief taxes around 1560, and opened its correctional house by 1579. From 1588 on, city funds were used to buy bread and meat for the indigent at Easter and Christmas, and in 1591 special poor rates were raised for the sick during plague epidemic. The town also purchased grain and coal for the less fortunate.²⁰

It is not surprising, however, that poor relief experimentation began in London, where the problem of poverty was most acute.²¹ The city attempted to help the poor by providing permanent storehouses of grain and corn during the reign of Richard II, but it was not until 1520, when London was inundated with vagrants and beggars, that an effort was made to obtain funds for regular grain purchases by taxing city craftsmen.²² About the same time, legislation which anticipated the national law of 1531 allowed the impotent poor to beg within certain areas of the city, while forbidding the able-bodied from soliciting at all. Vagrants were branded with a "V" and whipped.²³ In 1533, the city became responsible for collecting funds through arranging for parishioners' poor relief contributions to be distributed weekly at the church door.²⁴ The dissolution of the monasteries in 1536, during which at least eight of London's hospitals were threatened, made public poor relief more urgent. In 1538, city authorities tried to save the hospitals by appealing directly to King Henry VIII to "re-found" St. Bartholomew's and St. Thomas' for the sick and impotent and Christ's Hospital for children. The petition was granted in 1544, but officials discovered that the sums raised at the churches was insufficient to support even one hospital. In 1547, the Common Council resolved to stop the Sunday collection. Instead, "the citizens and inhabitants of the said Citie shall furthur contrybute and paye towards the sustentacon and maynteyning and fynding of the said poore personages. . . ." ²⁵ Thus, London became the first English town to levy compulsory taxes for poor relief and it did so twenty-five years before the national statute of 1572 established such a policy. London's system was completed in 1557 with the establishment of Bridewell which was founded to train and reform the unemployed. Bridewell became the forerunner of other "houses of correction" throughout the country.²⁶ Unfortunately the great town's difficulties in organizing funds, failure to forbid begging completely, and the attraction of numerous beggars to its hospitals from other areas determined that its efforts to aid indigents was only partially successful.²⁷

The first provincial town to enforce compulsory rates for the poor was Norwich. It did so in 1549; two years after London initiated such action. Both John F. Pound and E. M. Leonard assert that the Norwich system was the most remarkable and successful of its kind. Also like London, Norwich established a permanent grain stock. The Norwich plan became fully operative in 1570 after the city undertook an ambitious census of the poor which revealed that there were over 2,300 destitute men, women, and children in the city of whom approximately eighty percent were employed.²⁸ The census listed the name, age, and occupation of each person, indicated whether they received relief or not, and designated those sent to the house of correction. It also classified individuals as to whether they were able or unable to work, or indifferent. The Norwich plan's poor relief measures resembled those of other towns. Specifically, it provided for a house of corrections and child education. At the same time, Norwich's program contained unique provisions. For example, begging was forbidden, assistance was provided for all categories of poor, including the able-bodied, and the plan was applied for at least ten years. Norwich residents reflected pride in their efforts, but were not content to rest on their laurels. They added to the plan. In 1573, a municipal bonesetter was appointed. A law passed in 1574 required all unemployed men to assemble at the Market Cross daily at 5 a.m. with their tools to wait at least an hour for some type of work. Later legislation prohibited newcomers admittance to the city and paid twopence each to artisans serving on juries.²⁹

Civic authorities developed poor relief in response to pressing social problems. Indiscriminate charity was discouraged. The Norwich orders criticized "Foolish pity moving many to make provision at their doors."³⁰ Historians frequently see the motivation for poor relief in terms of the Elizabethan desire to prevent disorder, revolt, and rebellion, and maintain the social hierarchy. In the words of Lawrence Stone:

. . . the English propertied classes realized very early on that the financial cost of poor relief was a small price to pay for the domestic tranquility and social deference which resulted. The welfare system was the only viable alternative to a local bureaucracy and a standing army as an instrument for social control.³¹

II

Elizabethan Ipswich, with its population of approximately 5,000, was not half the size of Norwich. One of the oldest incorporated towns in England, it had received its charter from King John. Although not a "leading" industrial town, Ipswich could boast of prominent woolen textile manufacturing, plus canvas and sailcloth industries. Situated on the banks of the

fresh-water river Gipping at the point where it joins the saltwater Orwell, the town became an important commercial and export center. Its main economic activity involved shipping woolen cloth to France, Spain, the Baltic, and the Low Countries, although coastal trade was also important. Not surprisingly, many people in Ipswich held jobs connected with the sea and shipbuilding. There were, for example, sailors, shipwrights, ropemakers, and anchorsmiths. Since few citizens engaged in farming, the town's inhabitants were dependent on wages and commercial profits for a living. Merchants occupied the top layer of the social pyramid since the town possessed no large leisure class.³²

Ipswich, like other English towns, became concerned about the growth of poverty during the sixteenth century. Although its poor relief measures more closely resemble London's than those of other towns, it retained a distinct character. Ipswich represents an interesting case study because its system is illustrative of the close-kit cooperation that existed between public and private charity. Furthermore, the town reflected a growing awareness and acknowledgement of the new class of marginal and able-bodied poor. An examination of its poor relief records reveals that the municipal authorities developed a comprehensive, efficient, and consistent program that protected the town against social and economic pressures, especially those existing during the crisis years of the 1590s.

Ipswich officials began to pass poor relief laws as early as 1551. In that year, two people were nominated by the bailiffs to "inquire into the poor of every parish and thereof to make certificate to the Bayliffs."³³ The following year the burgesses suggested increasing voluntary alms through the guild festival. By 1556, eight burgesses were appointed to frame measures "for the ordering of the maintenance of the poore and impotent people, for providing them work, for suppressing of vagrants and idele persons."³⁴ Finally, in 1557, Ipswich followed the lead of London and ordered compulsory poor rates which stipulated punishment "if any inhabitant shall refuse to pay suche money as shall be allotted him to pay for the uses of the poore."³⁵

The private sector was not idle while municipal leaders attempted to deal with poverty. Typical of many wealthy sixteenth-century English business people, Henry Tooley, the richest merchant in Ipswich, left most of his fortune to the town's poor upon his death in 1551. The Tooley Foundation was administered by four men, two aldermen and two councillors, chosen yearly by the town governors. One of the four was appointed as "renter-warden" to supervise revenues received from rents, fines, and other profits of houses and land owned by the Foundation. The Foundation's initial purpose was to maintain an almshouse, probably built in the late 1550s, which provided separate lodgings for five people.³⁶

Tooley Foundation financial records are available and almost unbroken in sequence from 1566 to 1600. They reveal that in 1577-8 the Foundation not only made poor relief payments to residents and non-residents, but also provided other services. It frequently paid women seamstresses to make clothing for poor residents, such as the 15s. paid to Mrs. Gylberd to "make hosen" for men and women and the 30s. received by Thomas Borow for providing shoes. Sometimes, as was the case with John Cage, the Foundation hired carpenters in "consyderacion of a howse built at Holbroke." Other typical payments include burial expenses (20s. for the "funeral charges of Isabel Huntycke"), doctor's fees (13s. to "Peter, a surgian, towards the healing of Judyth Whyte's legge"), and purchases of firewood (L10 for "fifty lodes of woode").³⁷ Account records for the year 1588-9 define the types of people receiving poor relief. They included the aged, sick, impotent married couples, widows, and men. For example, there was Elizabethan Arian, "a poore, impotent, and aged wentche of this town," Thomasyn Julian, "in consideration of her age and poore state," and John Wiesman and "Agnes his wiefe, beyng too olde, aged and ympotente." The Foundation also hired individuals to take care of others, usually unhealthy people. Such a case arose when Margaret Moore was paid 10d. weekly for nursing two elderly sick women. The usual payment for women so employed ranged from 6d. to 10d., while some men received as much as 18d. Wages frequently increased as employment continued. Interesting ledger enteries include Margaret Coppyn, a foundation resident, who was released to friends who "will provide a sufficiency for her mayntenance duringe her naturall lyefe." Coppyn's place was taken by "poore, olde, and ympotent" Allice Starlinge, who "shall have her predecessor's gowne (and) bedding." The Foundation didn't forget its own either for two former wardens are listed on its recipient rolls during the years under consideration. They were Robert Sallowes, who was paid 12d. a week in "resspecte of his age and extreme payne and povertie," and Richard Kynge, an "auncient inhabitante of this towne and sometyme one of the number of the aldermen of the same whom God now hathe visited, shall in respecte of hys poverties have a weekly reliefe of too shillinges a weeke." Kynge was, it should be noted, a perfect example of the marginal poor, for in 1577 he had donated a pound to the Foundation!³⁸

The economic crisis years of 1597-98 witnessed an increase in payments to the poor. Many recipients were on temporary relief which varied from eight to fifty-three weeks duration. This was obviously a time of sickness and death, as the Foundation gave relief to many of the ill in addition to paying for twelve burials. There were also disbursements for making sheets, shirts, smocks, britches, and shoes. However, even during such times of sickness and stress, the Foundation kept up repairs and maintenance on its property. John Redgrave received L46s.8d. for taking down and replacing an old chimney, while

Stevenson, a carpenter, was hired for 32 days at 14d. per day to make doors, windows, and stairs.³⁹

An important step was taken toward cooperation between public and private charity in 1568 when the town burgesses established a municipal poorhouse to complement the work of the Tooley Foundation. The former priory of Blackfriars was chosen as a suitable site. The new institution was granted a charter by Queen Elizabeth and became officially known as Christ's Hospital by 1572. The burgesses were clearly influenced by London's Bridewell, as records reveal that in 1567-8 city officials sent for a copy of that facility's order and charges. Through the establishment of such an institution, town authorities hoped to give the community a place where the aged, sick, and orphaned could be provided for while vagrants and idlers were "disciplined." Four annually elected governors administered Christ's Hospital. Tooley Foundation resources were used to underwrite some of its initial expenses, and it also received a share of the poor rate from the general collection.⁴⁰

Demands on the Tooley house increased after the establishment of Christ's Hospital. Tooley's wardens soon decided to move their facility to the hospital premises, paying 100 pounds to the city for this privilege. Thus, the activities of two financially and administratively separate organizations, one public and one private, became closely linked and provided Ipswich with a single location for indoor poor relief. John Webb states that those admitted to the Tooley Foundation usually were poor Ipswich residents unable to live without help. They resided free either in the almshouse or Tooley wing of the Blackfriars, receiving an allotment of fuel and new clothing every other year. Each resident wore a red and blue badge. The sick received medical attention while a weekly pension was given to each person for food. (In 1562 the average rate was 6d., but by 1574 it had increased to a shilling.)⁴¹

Webb states that at Christ's Hospital a resident "guider" supervised the old, young, and sick, and provided them with food, clothing, and other relief. At first, like the Tooley inmates, adult residents were granted a weekly allowance out of the general collection to buy and prepare their own food, but as the number of elderly poor began to decline, the guider received payments on behalf of children and the sick. The other class of residents, the vagrants and idlers, were installed in the workhouse of the Hospital. Ipswich was diligent about bringing in vagrants, collecting 95 in 1574. They performed basic household tasks and learned to card, spin, and weave. Those who refused to work received no food. Elderly men and women in the hospital were frequently transferred to the Foundation as vacancies appeared. During its early years, the Hospital contained approximately a dozen residents, but the number rose to 36 by 1578-9. Towards the end of the Elizabethan period, the largest single group at the institution consisted of children.

They were apprenticed at the right age, thus freeing the Hospital from financial responsibility.⁴²

Two record books are available for Christ's Hospital. One is a description of weekly payments to the poor from 1578-9, and the other is a list of accounts payable and receivable for the years 1569-1597. The book of disbursements is the only survivor of its kind for Ipswich. Payments from the general collection ranged from 4d. to 16d. and were based on individual need. Significantly, out of 36 recipients, there were 23 women, one married couple, and at least three children, one "at nurse." Webb believes that the accounts shed light on various aspects of the Hospital's finances and administration, and illustrate that the poor were provided with the necessities of life. Not surprisingly, there were many similarities between the operation of the Hospital and Foundation. The governors of the former paid for burials and health services, purchased canvas and fabric for seamstresses to make clothing (a 1580 table of clothing allocations indicates that 19 out of 30 residents of the Hospital were women), bought firewood and coal, and made payments for building repairs, renovation, and maintenance. A purchase in 1597 of wool cards was used to set the able-bodied poor to work and train the young. It was illustrative of the growing nationwide commitment to the education and rehabilitation of the poor.⁴³

A register of Blackfriars' poor residents was recorded between 1569-83. Because it lists inmates who obtained relief from the Tooley Foundation and those dependent on Christ's Hospital, it provides further evidence of the close cooperation between the two "sister" institutions. Furthermore, its case histories reveal the nature of poverty in Ipswich and illustrate the flexibility of the town's system. For example, some people entered Christ's Hospital and then transferred to the Tooley Foundation. Others resided at Christ's Hospital, but were paid by the Tooley Foundation. Most of those in the register fell into the category of widowed elderly men and women. There were, however, younger inmates such as Margret Gyldersleve and Robert Heard, both 30 years of age, and 36-year-old Edmund Taylor, who was admitted for a "sore legge" and stayed five months. All inmates were not ill or lame. Some were admitted to the hospital to rest, but received no relief. Many elderly married couples entered the hospital, sometimes together, sometimes separately, later transferring to the Tooley Foundation. Their average length of stay was two to five years, usually ceasing at their deaths. A few married women were admitted without their husbands, such as "poore and impotent" Marye Owlawe, 60 years old, who stayed for eight months, then went home to her husband. Women with children were also received, such Johan Wylson and her son Nathanyell, who was subsequently apprenticed for nine years to Robert Patten, a weaver. Adults were also apprenticed as in the case of 46-year-old Elyzabeth Adryan, who was bound to

Mathew Walton for four years. The town paid 6s.8d. yearly for this arrangement. Some had to work for a living, like Bryget Hylle, who had a sore leg, but is "sett on worke," and received a "relefe weklye of 6d."44

The register's compassionate remarks, such as "God hellpe her," regarding a poor woman, and the evidence of compassionate treatment for strangers and travelers seems to refute the common idea that poor relief was solely for social control and that vagrants and travelers were harshly treated. Rather, it reveals that many transients were helped at Blackfriars, ranging from Daniell Gylberd, a sick 18-year-old, to a 21-year-old sailor, "weake and feble," to 60-year-old Hew Crow from Essex. The most interesting case history involving a traveler, however, was that of blind Marye Weste, forty years old with three children, who remained in Ipswich about a year (five months at Christ's Hospital and seven months with "coler maker" Wylliam Paken) before being returned to her native town of Winchester.45

On the other hand, all were not treated gently at Blackfriars since it was supposed to be a "house of correction," as well as a hospital. Cornwall native, nineteen year old Christopher Long, who had run away from his master in London, was admitted to the hospital for one day, where he was "havying the whypping almoste" and returned to London by passport. Nevertheless, one had to commit a grave offence to be kicked out of Blackfriars. This was the case with 56-year-old Richard Sexten who was guilty of "whoredome." Yet even he was merely transferred to another almshouse a few blocks away, along with his blankets, coverlets, and his clothes.46

The Tooley Foundation and Christ's Hospital primarily provided indoor relief for the Ipswich poor. However, there still remained the problem of the town's marginal and able-bodied destitute who could support themselves in their own homes with some help from the authorities. The Tooley Foundation assisted with outdoor relief when surplus funds were available, but the most important source of such support was the general collection. Like London, and unlike Norwich, Ipswich continued to allow street beggars without detriment to the poor relief system. Even though an 1583 order prohibited from settling in the town newcomers who might become a burden to the poor rates, travelers frequently received assistance.

Supplementary measures were instituted during particularly stressful years. During plague outbreaks, with entire streets often quarantined, the town provided victims and their families with food, candles, firewood, medicine, and other necessities. The city also hired women "keepers" as nurses and a physician to care for the sick. During years when food prices rose as the result of harvest failures, efforts were made to keep the poor

from starving by watching grain transportation closely and making available cheap bread baked locally.⁴⁷

Ipswich officials undertook a poor census in 1597 to discover the full extent of poverty and the needs of their outdoor relief program. The survey concluded that 186 adults and 225 children in nine of the town's twelve parishes needed assistance. Webb assumes the census was taken in anticipation of pending legislation in Parliament, where Francis Bacon was the Ipswich representative. Authorities hoped the census would give a "viewe . . . within this towne of all impotent and lame persons not hable to worke, and of all other pore people that are hable to worke, and the same to be certified."⁴⁸ Thus, Ipswich had expanded the early sixteenth-century view of the deserving poor to include those able-bodied individuals who needed assistance.

One can see that exactly fifty percent of Ipswich's men and women were employed by looking at Tables 1 and 2. The largest single occupation for women was spinning, while men's primary occupation was designated as "laborer." Like Norwich, however, many individuals had two occupations. The census also reveals that many children were in school or employed picking wool, knitting, sewing, or spinning. Most were from homes where at least one parent was employed.

Table 1
Occupations of Women Aged 21 and Over

<u>Occupation</u>	<u>Employed</u>	<u>Unemployed</u>	<u>Total</u>
Unspecified		17	17
Rush Gatherer		1	1
Seamstress	2	3	5
Picks Wool	3	3	6
Keeper of Women		2	2
Spinner	33	24	57
Daily Labor		2	2
Knitter	7	2	9
Button Maker	1		1
Spinner & Knitter	1		1
Sewer & Knitter	1	1	2
Work Drudge	1		1
Weaver	1		1
Gardener	1		1
Mends Clothes	1		1
Tailor	1	1	2
Lacemaker	1		1
Picker	5		5
Dresses Hemp		1	1

Washer		1	1
Beggar		1	1
TOTALS	59	59	118

Table 2
Occupations of Men Aged 21 and Over

<u>Occupation</u>	<u>Employed</u>	<u>Unemployed</u>	<u>Total</u>
Unspecified		6	6
Shearman	1	3	4
Weaver	3	1	4
Knacker		1	1
Laborer	12	7	19
Tailor	3	4	7
Brewer		1	1
Carpenter	3	1	4
Cobbler	3	2	5
Sawer	2		2
Lies In Jail	1		1
Butcher	1	1	2
Smith		2	2
Painter	1	1	2
Vitualer	1		1
Ironer	1		1
Porter	1		1
Picker	1		1
Cooper		2	2
Ropemaker		1	1
Bricklayer		1	1
TOTALS	34	34	68

Table 3 indicates parish employment distribution. By comparing it to Webb's analysis of poor rate assessments for 1577-8 (see Appendix A), some interesting conclusions can be drawn. St. Matthews, the parish with the largest number of poor also registered the greatest number of employed individuals (69). Its four unemployed persons were impotent and lame. These parishioners must have been the marginal poor. Twenty years earlier, according to Webb, St. Matthews' contained a significant number of contributors (37) to the poor rate. Thus, the standard of living in the parish had declined. The people of St. Clements parish experienced a similar problem. In 1577-8, they accounted for more contributors (65) and paid more to the poor rate than any other parish-12s.10d.. But by 1597, 31 out of St. Clements' 36 poor were unemployed, many of them able. St. Nicholas parish

was similar, with 30 out of 31 poor unemployed. According to the census, many of the unemployed received relief.

Table 3
Numbers and Employment of Poor Adults by Parish

<u>Parish</u>	<u>Employed</u>	<u>Unemployed</u>	<u>Total</u>
St. Nicholas	1	30	31
St. Matthew	69	4	73
St. Marie Elm	8	4	12
St. Mary Tower	2	3	5
St. Lawrence	2	1	3
St. Stephen	3	2	5
St. Clement	7	31	36
St. Mary-at-the-Keye		5	5
St. Mary Stoke	1	15	16
TOTALS	93	95	188

By examining Table 3 and the parish map (Appendix B), it is clear that Ipswich was a typical pre-industrial town, for the poor were distributed throughout the city. St. Matthew and St. Clement parishes contained the largest numbers of indigents (73 and 36 respectively) and were located on the fringes of the town. This represented a typical demographic pattern for the time and place. St. Nicholas, next to the river, contained the third largest group (31) of poor in the census. It was probably a typically congested and dirty dock/shipyard area.

Table 4 reveals the poor's age, sex, and marital structure. The single largest age group for the 68 men and 118 women was 31 to 60. Married couples comprised the largest numerical category at 122, with widows and single women coming in second. Widows and single women aged 41-50 and married women aged 31-40 represented the largest groups of individuals and were tied at 20 people each. Another interesting statistic to note is that the women were almost divided equally between married (61) and single (57) individuals. The census also reveals that in 13 instances married women were older than their husbands by anywhere from 2 to 20 years, except for one case where the wife was 100 and the husband 40!

Table 4
Age, Sex and Marital Structure

	16- 20	21- 30	31- 40	41- 50	51- 60	61- 70	71- 80	81- 90	91- 100	Unspec.	Total
<u>MEN</u>											
Married	0	4	16	12	12	8	5	1	0	3	61
Others	0	1	0	1	2	2	1	0	0	0	7
TOTAL	0	5	16	13	14	10	6	1	0	3	Total Men 68
<u>WOMEN</u>											
Married	1	3	20	13	14	4	1	0	1	4	61
Widowed, Deserted or Single	1	4	9	20	9	10	2	0	0	2	57
TOTAL	2	7	29	33	23	14	3	0	1	6	Total Women 188
GRAND TOTAL	2	12	45	46	37	24	9	1	1	9	Total Adults 186

Like Norwich, the number of Ipswich children in a family did not seem a deciding factor in a household receiving relief. Table 5 showing the distribution of poor children again indicates that married couples were in the majority. Of 90 families with children, 50 were married having 146 children out of the 226 total. Also, among all the families (married couples and single parents) the majority had one or two children.

Table 5
Distribution Of Children Among The Poor*

Category	Number of Children								No. of Families with Children	Total Children
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8		
Married Couples	12	15	11	12	3	1	1	0	50	146
Widows and Deserted Wives or Single Women	14	14	7	3	0	0	0	0	39	78
Others	1**								1	
TOTALS	26	30	28	25	3	1	1	0	90	226

*The total number of "households" in the census, with and without children, is 119. This can be misleading, because many households often consisted of two widows or a widow, son, and daughter-in-law. In the above chart, however, each widow is counted as a household.

**A single man, probably a widower, with two children.

There are interesting differences and similarities between the Norwich census, analyzed by Pound, and that of Ipswich. The majority of the Norwich poor were employed (sixty-six percent of the men and eighty-five percent of the women), compared to Ipswich's fifty percent rate. In both cities, however, the majority of employed males worked as laborers, while women were primarily spinners.⁴⁹ (See tables 1 and 2.) The percentages of elderly poor over age 60 were also similar for both cities, although Ipswich (as shown in Table 4) had more elderly men (twenty-nine percent of the men and twenty percent of the women).⁵⁰ Apparently, a majority of those over age 50 in Norwich were "able" and employed, while a majority of the "unable" were elderly.⁵¹ The largest single age group for Norwich men and women was between 31 and 40 (twenty-nine percent men and twenty-six percent women), which was only slightly higher than the elderly age group mentioned above.⁵² In contrast, the largest single age group for men and women in Ipswich was between 31 and 60, and constituted a much larger percentage of the census (sixty-three percent of the men and sixty-eight percent of the women, as in Table 4). There also were similarities between the two towns regarding the child distribution. As mentioned above, in each the number of children bore little relationship to receiving relief and more married couples had children than any other group.⁵³

There are endless questions which could be posed concerning sixteenth-century life among the poor in Ipswich and numerous charts and analyses one could make to answer them, utilizing the census of the poor and other town records. What was the reason Ipswich women failed to live longer than men (see Table 4)? Did they have children at a later age than present-day women, as the census seems to indicate? What were the common ages of their children, and how far apart were they? At least we can be sure that the majority of the poor in Ipswich did not consist of single-parent households (see Table 4). Parish statistics could also tell us a lot. For instance, which one had the most children or got the most relief? We know the distribution of children among the poor (see Table 5), but what was the age grouping of each parish? Did any of them have a significantly higher percentage of elderly, middle-aged, young adults, or children than the others, or were they a "mixed bag" of all ages?

Ipswich serves well as a microcosmic study of poverty and poor relief in Elizabethan England. Along with other English towns like Norwich, London, Exeter, Salisbury, and Warwick,

Ipswich's civic conviction that the poor deserved assistance and its creative and innovative response to the problem of poverty probably played a significant role in the development of national poor relief laws. In some ways Ipswich was typical, and in some ways it was not. As in other towns, municipal leaders broadened their concept of the deserving poor to include the able-bodied employed and unemployed, attempted to "get at" the roots of deprivation through social rehabilitation and education, and founded hospitals and almshouses for the sick and needy.⁵⁴ Nevertheless, its 412 indigent adults and children out of an approximate population of 5,000 do not comprise fifty to sixty percent of the total population as Pound believes was the common percentage of poor in Elizabethan England. Nor does it come close to the twenty percent in 1556 Worcester, the twenty-five percent in 1570 Norwich, or the thirty percent in 1582 Warwick.⁵⁵ Instead, it is a mere eight percent and, of those 412 poor individuals, only eleven percent (48) received relief.⁵⁶ Although the 1597 Ipswich census was not comprehensive, it nevertheless suggests that the city's poverty problem was not as severe as that in other towns. Regardless of this, the difficulty became great enough for private donors and municipal authorities to develop a comprehensive, efficient, and consistent system of poor relief. Were they motivated by compassion and a sense of social responsibilities or by fears of an uprising from the discontented poor? Most likely, Ipswich's poor relief system sprang from a combination of both, along with the impetus of a generous endowment. The town was fortunate, indeed, to have such a benefactor as Henry Tooley, whose contribution proved significant. But, contrary to W. K. Jordan's work, philanthropy could not carry the burden alone in Ipswich. It was only through amiable cooperation between private and public charity that the city filled its obligation to the needy.

APPENDIX A

ANALYSIS OF POOR RATE ASSESSMENTS, IPSWICH 1577-8

Parish	Number of contributors in each tax category																Total number of contributors	Total receipts £ s. d.	
	1d.	1d.	2d.	3d.	4d.	5d.	6d.	7d.	8d.	9d.	10d.	11d.	12d.	13d.	14d.	15d.			16d.
Jlement	-	31	16	4	6	1	2	2	3	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	65	12 10
Helen	-	3	4	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	8	1 2
Lawrence	-	19	8	7	3	2	2	-	-	-	1 ^a	-	-	-	-	-	-	42	8 4
Margaret	-	24	6	1	6	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1 ^a	39	7 1
Mary Elms	-	6	2	1	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	11	1 9
Mary Quay	-	20	8	7	4	-	1	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	41	7 3
Mary Stoke	9	8	4	2	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	24	2 6 ¹
Mary Tower	-	27	8	5	4	1	2	-	1	-	1 ^a	-	1 ^a	-	-	-	-	50	10 1
Matthew	-	20	7	4	5	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1 ^a	-	-	-	-	37	6 6
Nicholas	-	19	9	5	-	-	1	1	1	-	1 ^a	-	-	-	-	-	-	37	6 11
Peter	-	20	5	3	1	1	2	-	-	-	-	-	1 ^a	-	-	-	-	33	6 0
Stephen	-	9	4	1	1	2	1	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	19	4 0
TOTALS	9	206	81	41	33	7	12	3	7	-	3	-	3	-	-	-	1	406	3 14 5 ^t

and corresponding relief payments for the same year:

OUTDOOR RELIEF PAYMENTS: TOTAL WEEKLY EXPENDITURE, 1577-8

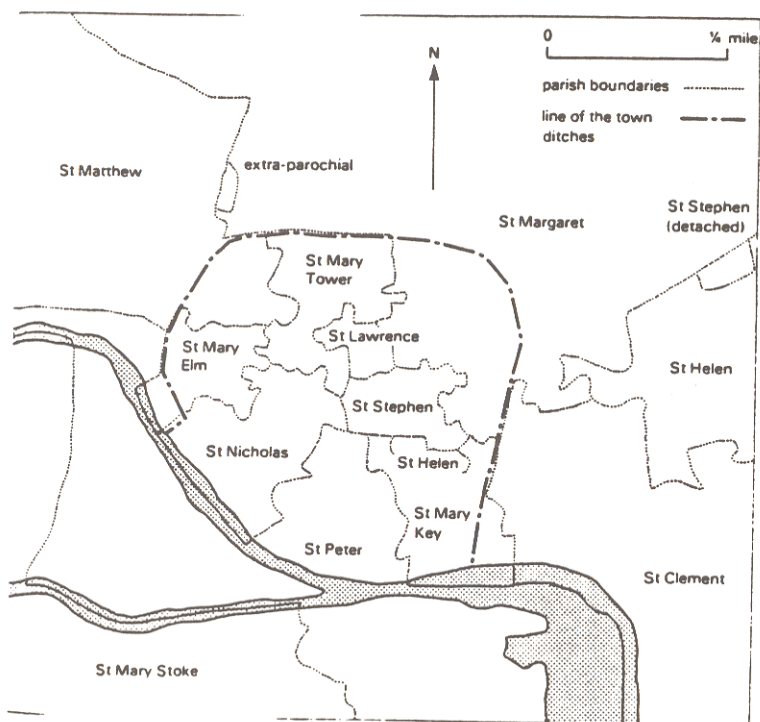
Week ending	£ s. d.	Week ending	£ s. d.
30 Aug. '77	1 8 4	7 Mar. '78	1 9 1
6 Sep. '77	1 8 4	14 Mar. '78	1 8 11
13 Sep. '77	1 8 4	21 Mar. '78	1 8 11
20 Sep. '77	1 8 4	28 Mar. '78	1 7 7
27 Sep. '77	1 8 4	4 Apr. '78	1 7 5
4 Oct. '77	1 8 4	11 Apr. '78	1 7 1
11 Oct. '77	1 8 4	18 Apr. '78	1 7 1
18 Oct. '77	1 8 4	25 Apr. '78	1 7 1
25 Oct. '77	1 8 4	2 May '78	1 7 1
1 Nov. '77	1 8 3	9 May '78	1 7 1
8 Nov. '77	1 8 0	16 May '78	1 7 1
15 Nov. '77	1 8 0	23 May '78	1 7 1
22 Nov. '77	1 8 0	30 May '78	1 6 6
29 Nov. '77	1 8 0	6 June '78	1 6 6
6 Dec. '77	1 8 4	13 June '78	1 6 6
13 Dec. '77	1 8 10	20 June '78	1 6 6
20 Dec. '77	1 9 1	27 June '78	1 6 6
27 Dec. '77	1 9 1	4 July '78	1 6 6
3 Jan. '78	1 9 1	11 July '78	1 6 6
10 Jan. '78	1 9 1	18 July '78	1 6 6
17 Jan. '78	1 9 1	25 July '78	1 6 6
24 Jan. '78	1 9 1	1 Aug. '78	1 6 6
31 Jan. '78	1 9 1	8 Aug. '78	1 6 2
7 Feb. '78	1 9 1	15 Aug. '78	1 5 8
14 Feb. '78	1 9 1	22 Aug. '78	1 5 8
21 Feb. '78	1 9 1	29 Aug. '78	1 5 8
28 Feb. '78	1 9 1		

Total (for 53 weeks): £78 13s. 5d.

From: John Webb, Poor Relief in Elizabethan England.

APPENDIX B

Parish Map of Ipswich



From: Michael Reed, "Seventeenth-Century Ipswich," Country Towns in Pre-Industrial England,

NOTES

*This paper was a prize winner in the annual Historical Research and Writing Competition, sponsored by the Federal Archives, Atlanta Branch, the GAH, and WSB Radio 750 AM, Atlanta.

1For example: A. L. Bier, "The Social Problems of an Elizabethan Country Town: Warwick 1580-90," Country Towns in Pre-Industrial England, ed. Peter Clark (New York, 1981) and "Vagrants and the Social Order in Elizabethan England," Past and Present, 64 (1974), p. 3; Peter Clark, ed., The Early Modern Town (London, 1976) and "Introduction: English Country Towns, 1500-1800," Country Towns; Peter Clark and Paul Slack, ed., Crisis and Order in English Towns: 1500-1700 (London, 1973) and English Towns in Transition: 1500-1700 (London, 1976); Ronald Herlan, "Poor Relief in London during the English Revolution," Journal of British Studies, 18 (Spring 1979), p. 47; Valerie Pearl, "Social Policy in Early Modern London," in History and Imagination: Essays in Honor of H. R. Trevor-Roper, eds. Hugh Lloyd-Jones, Valerie Pearl and Blair Worden (New York, 1982); John Pound, Poverty and Vagrancy in Tudor England (London, 1971); Paul Slack, "Poverty and Politics in Salisbury, 1597-1666," Crisis and Order, "Social Problems and Social Policies," The Traditional Community Under Stress (London, 1977), "Vagrants and Vagrancy in England: 1598-1664," Economic History Review, 2nd Series, 27 (1974), p. 360.

2Historians see certain years during this century as more critical than others. Clark argues in the "Introduction" to Country Towns. (p. 14) that a depression in early Tudor England was precipitated by a combination of pressures such as heavy royal taxation, trade disruption, bad harvests, and epidemics. He thinks all these factors were prolonged and exacerbated by the Reformation in the 1530s. The next great urban crisis occurred for similar reasons toward the end of the sixteenth century; from the mid 1580s until about 1604. Slack, in "Social Problems," (p. 91) supports Clark's assessment and describes the decades of the 1520s, 1550s, and 1590s as a time when real wages reached their lowest point and food prices climbed to an all-time high, plague affected many towns (including Norwich, London and Exeter), and commercial depression caused unemployment in cloth-making centers. London, Ipswich, and Exeter experienced slumps in the 1520s, while Bristol and Southampton were similarly affected circa 1550. Clark and Slack both agree in English Towns (p. 90) that the period of the 1590s was the worst. Grain shortages produced food riots in London and Basingstoke during 1595 and Canterbury in 1596. Epidemics were also a severe problem. In Barnstaple, Tamworth, and other towns the mortality rates for 1597 doubled, while in four suburban parishes of Bristol where the poor were concentrated the rate tripled.

- 3Pound, p. 5 and Clark and Slack, English Towns, p. 83.
- 4Clark and Slack, English Towns, p. 83.
- 5Ibid., p. 107.
- 6Pound, pp. 79, 84. Cf. Herlan, pp. 41-42.
- 7Clark, "Introduction," p. 10.
- 8Slack, "Social Problems," p. 86.
- 9W.K. Jordan, Philanthropy in England: 1480-1660 (London, 1959), pp. 140-141.
- 10Pound, p. 3.
- 11Bier, "Social Problems," p. 71.
- 12Slack, "Poverty and Politics," p. 179.
- 13Clark, "Introduction," p. 11 and Clark and Slack, "Introduction," Crisis and Order, p. 20.
- 14Wallace T. MacCaffrey, Exeter: 1540-1640 (Cambridge, 1958), p. 117.
- 15John Webb, Poor Relief in Elizabethan Ipswich (Ipswich, 1966), p. 20.
- 16F.G. Emmison, "Poor Relief Accounts of Two Rural Parishes in Bedfordshire, 1563-1598," Economic History Review, III (1931-2), pp. 102-16.
- 17Bier, "Social Problems," p. 73.
- 18Adrienne Rosen, "Winchester in Transition," Country Towns (New York, 1981), p. 158.
- 19 Slack, "Poverty and Politics," p. 180.
- 20MacCaffrey, pp. 111, 114, 116.
- 21Pound, p. 58.
- 22E.M. Leonard, The Early History of English Poor Relief (Cambridge, 1900), p. 24.
- 23Pound, p. 59.
- 24Leonard, p. 26.
- 25Ibid., p. 29.

26Ibid., p. 39.

27Pound, p. 59.

28John F. Pound, The Norwich Census of the Poor (Norwich, 1971), p. 7.

29William Hudson and John C. Tingey, eds., The Records of the City of Norwich, 2 vols. (Norwich, 1910), pp. 344-58 and Pound, Poverty and Vagrancy, pp. 63, 66.

30Hudson and Tingey, p. 344.

31As quoted in Slack, "Social Problems," p. 99. For other views, compare Herlan, "Poor Relief in London"; Pearl, "Social Policy in Early Modern London."

32Michael Reed, "Economic Structure and Change in Seventeenth-Century Ipswich," Country Towns, pp. 89, 126-7.

33Nathaniel Bacon, as quoted in The Victoria History of the County of Suffolk, Vol. 1 (London, 1975), p. 676.

34Nathaniel Bacon, as quoted in Leonard, p. 43.

35Ibid.

36Webb, p. 11.

37Ibid., pp. 37-38.

38Ibid., pp. 24-31, 41, 47-50.

39Ibid., p. 50.

40Ibid., pp. 12-13.

41Ibid., pp. 13-15.

42Ibid., pp. 15-16.

43Ibid.

44Ibid., pp. 75-95.

45Ibid.

46Ibid.

47Ibid., p. 19.

48Ibid., p. 120.

49Pound, Norwich, pp. 7 and 16.

50There is a slight discrepancy between the two towns because Pound includes age 60 in his calculations, Norwich, p. 12.

51Margaret Pelling, in her analysis of those over age fifty in the Norwich census, finds that although the percentage of those age 16 and above and unable to work was only 1 1/2%, most of that 1 1/2% was comprised of the elderly. "Old People and Poverty in Early Modern Towns," The Society for the Social History of Medicine, Bulletin 34 (June, 1984), p. 43.

52Pound, Norwich, p. 12.

53Ibid., p. 13.

54There were several other minor almshouses and hospitals in Ipswich. Webb, p. 15.

55The Worcester, Norwich, and Warwick figures are derived from contemporary censuses of the poor. See Clark and Slack, English Towns, p. 121.

56Paul Slack, in a recent analysis, suggests slightly different figures, but he does not make clear the base population figure he uses for Ipswich. "Poverty and Social Regulation in Elizabethan England," in The Reign of Elizabeth I, ed. Christopher Haigh (Athens, 1985), pp. 231-232.