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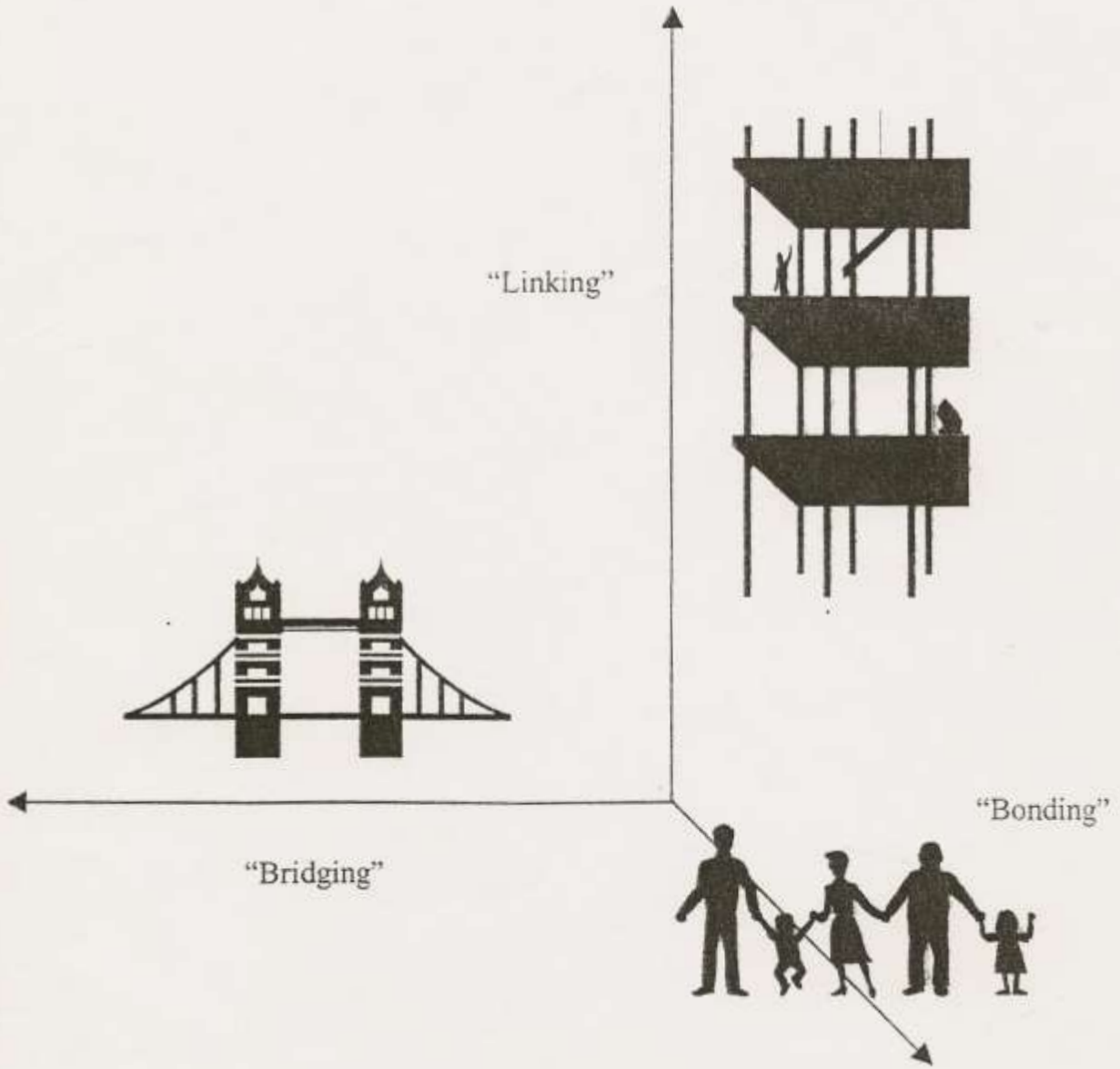
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‘Long-term historical perspectives on civic activism, social capital,
local and central government in Britain c.1500-2000’

History and Policy/Strategy Unit seminar on ‘The Big Society’

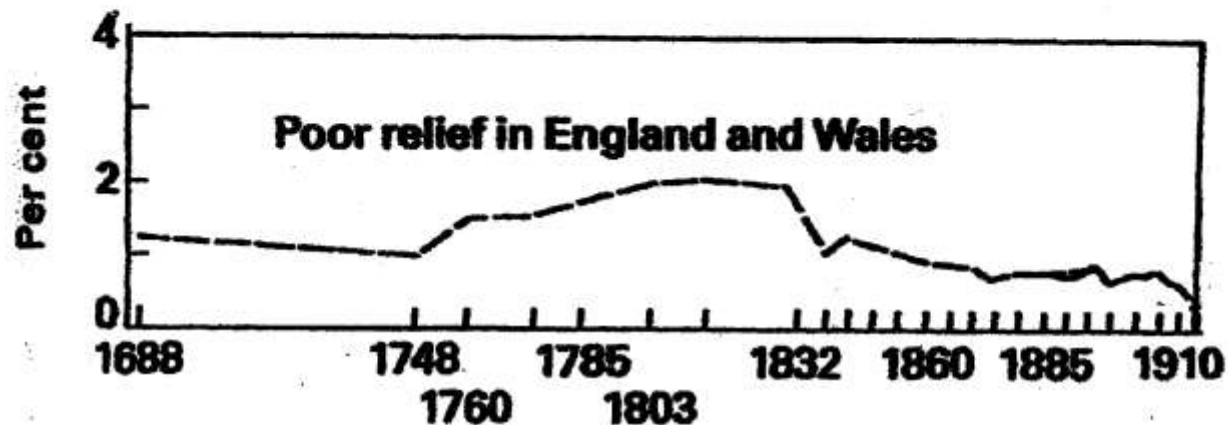
15 June 2010

Professor Simon Szreter (St John’s College, Cambridge)



Bonding, Bridging and Linking Social Capital

- Bonding social capital** trusting and co-operative relations between members of a network who see themselves as being similar, in terms of their shared social identity.
- Bridging social capital** relations of respect and mutuality between persons who know that they are not alike in social identity terms (e.g. differing by age, ethnic group, class, etc)
- Linking social capital** norms of respect and networks of trusting relationships between persons who are interacting across explicit, formal or institutionalised power or authority gradients in society



Source: P.H.Lindert, 'Un Equal Living Standards', in R.Floud & D. McCloskey (eds) *The Economic History of Britain 1700-1860* (Cambridge 1994).

Figure 14.5 Poor relief and pension spending as a share of national product, England/Wales and the UK, 1688-1910

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
- 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 all covered in principle.

'The Poor Law' c.1660-1834

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

English Levels of Poor Law Relief

- 1696 (Board of Trade returns) : Poor Law funds sufficient for 6 months support for 10% of whole population
- 1783-5 (Parl. Enquiry) 10% of whole population for one year
- 1802-3: 1 million (11% total population) on Poor Law (93% 'outdoor relief')
- Source: Richard Smith (Brooks World Poverty Institute Working Paper 56)

Evidence for Poor Law effectiveness for Population Health

- Cambridge Group for the History of Population 4% sample (404 parishes) found no evidence of national or regional famine crisis mortality after 1623/4, over 150 years before any other countries of Western Europe were free from famines

Abram De Swaan, A. (1988). *In Care of the State, pp.21-36*

- By **requiring** the parish to levy an adequate poor rate from its property owners, an unstable pre-Reformation arrangement of voluntary collective charity, dependent on wealthy individuals' sense of religious obligation and so subject to the free rider problem, was superseded by a system of obligatory taxation for all wealth-holders in the parish and for every parish in the land

Did the Poor Law 'crowd-out' civil society and philanthropy?

- Fiscal incentives for local elites to minimise welfare liabilities for the poor by enabling them to achieve independence:
- Apprenticeships for orphans
- Schools for Poor Scholars
- Almshouses for the elderly
- Cottages for the poor
- Support for single mothers with cost recovery from fathers

Paul Slack, *From Reformation to Improvement: Public Welfare in Early Modern England*, Oxford (1988)

- The Old Poor Law: ‘the most striking example of the state and the community interacting creatively without one crowding out the other’.
- ‘England seems to have been able more easily than other countries to enjoy the benefits of both a flourishing corporate and voluntary sector and a powerful central authority and legal system, without the second smothering the first’. (p.161)

Tom Nutt, 'The Child Support Agency and the Poor Law' Historyandpolicy.org website

- Study of Sowerby, West Yorkshire; and Chelmsford, Essex, surviving Poor Law records 1818-29 show:
- 25-38% gross PL expenditure Sowerby; 10-15% Chelmsford for unmarried mothers (similar amount per child as for an elderly claimant)
- 84% cost recovery rates from non-resident fathers in West Yorkshire; 34% in Essex
- CSA recovery rates 2004-5: 40-70%



SANATORY MEASURES.

LORD MORPETH THROWING PEARLS BEFORE ——— ALDERMEN.

Source: *Punch* (June 1848)

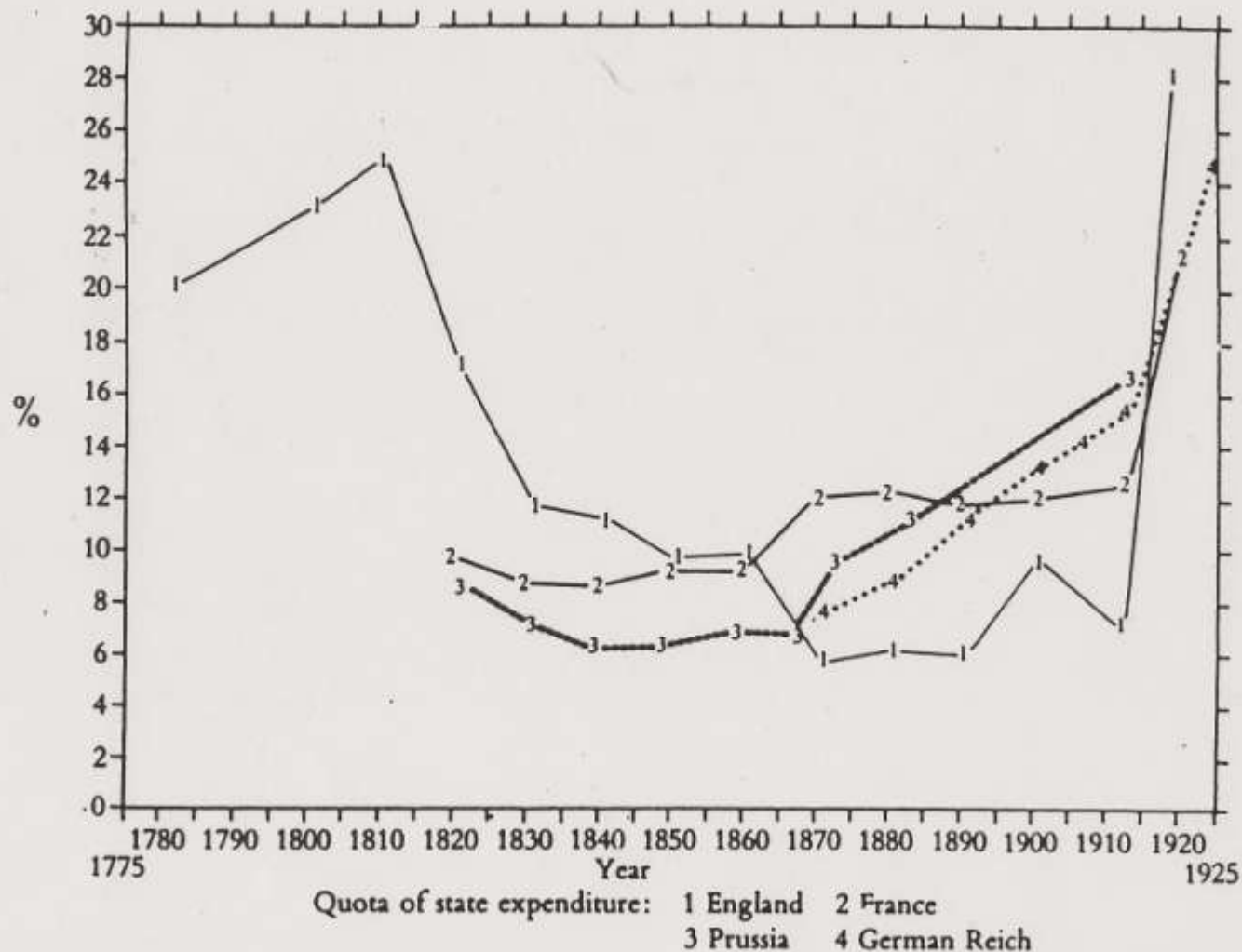
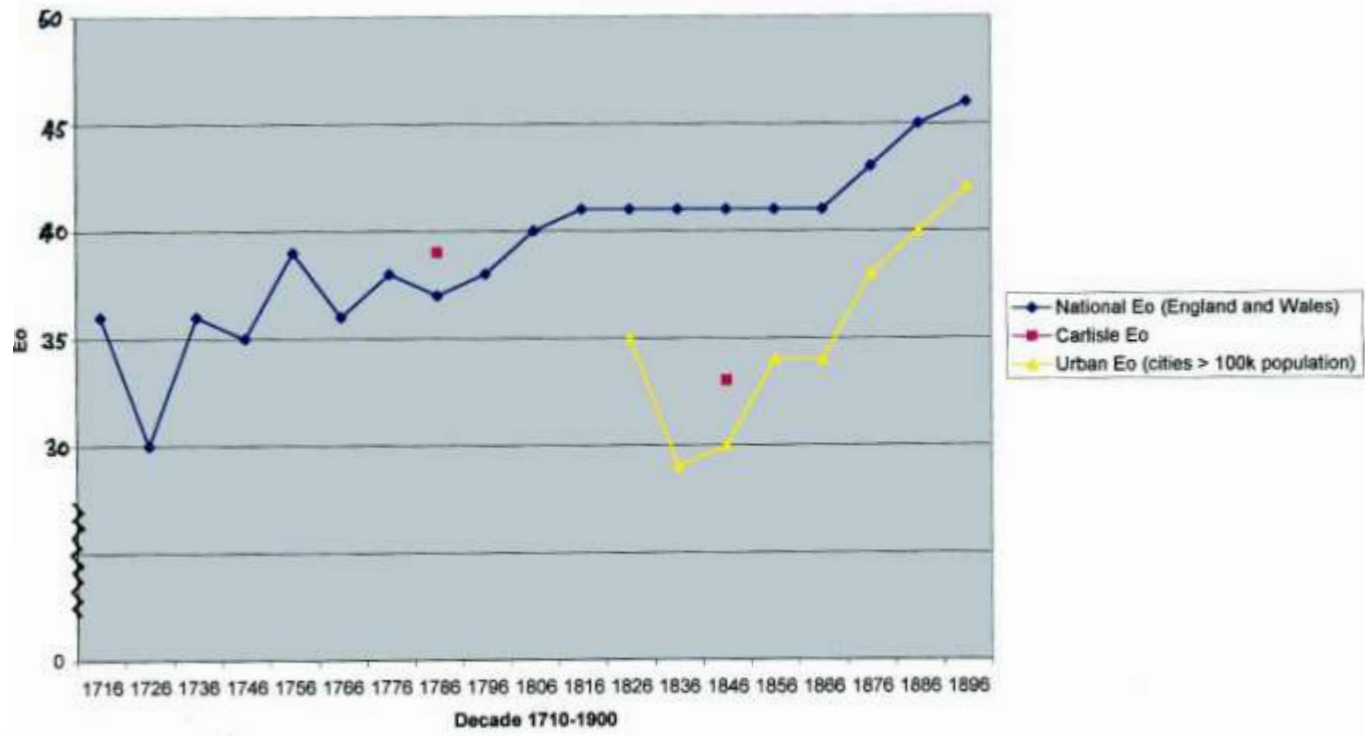


Fig. 9. Secular changes in the quotas of state expenditure in Great Britain, France, Prussia, and the German Reich (% GNP)

Trends in life expectancy at birth in Britain c.1700-1900





'Boulevard de Chamberlain'. From *The Dart*,
23 December 1876.

From *The Dart*, 26 October
1878. 'The Battle of the Wards'.



'I sometimes think that municipalities can do more for the people than Parliament. Their powers will probably be enlarged; but under the powers which they possess already they can greatly diminish the amount of sickness in the community, and can prolong human life. They can prevent—they have prevented—tens of thousands of children from becoming orphans. They can do very much to improve those miserable homes which are fatal not only to health, but to decency and morality. They can give to the poor the enjoyment of pleasant parks and gardens, and the intellectual cultivation and refinement of public libraries and galleries of art. They can redress in many ways the inequalities of human conditions.

The gracious words of Christ, 'Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of these my brethren, even these least, ye did it unto Me.' will be addressed not only to those who with their own hands fed the hungry, and clothed the naked, and cared for the sick, but to those who supported a municipal policy which lessened the miseries of the wretched, and added brightness to the lives of the desolate. And the terrible rebuke, "Inasmuch as ye did it not unto one of these least, ye did it not unto Me." will condemn the selfishness of those who refused to make municipal government the instrument of a policy of justice and humanity.

'If years ago, the Christian people of the metropolis had insisted on having an effective system of municipal government and had worked its powers vigorously, the "Bitter Cry of Outcast London" need never have been heard. Now that the cry has come to them the churches will never be able to remedy the evil apart from the action of municipal authorities. Medicine, and not the gospel only, is necessary to cure the sick. Municipal action, not the gospel only, is necessary to improve the homes of the poor.'²³

'Civil authority—this is the main point I want to assert—is a Divine institution. The man who holds municipal or political office is a "minister of God". One man may, therefore, have just as real a Divine vocation to become a town councillor or a Member of Parliament, as another to become a missionary to the heathen. In either case it is a man's peril that he is "disobedient to the heavenly vision".

²³ 'Political and Municipal Duty', R. W. Dale, *The Laws of Christ for Common Life* (1884), pp. 198-200.

'If we are to do anything radical in the way of sanitary reform, it must be by means of our local governing bodies. It is only through them that we can act upon the population in this matter. It seems to me therefore suicidal to bring into contempt, and to depreciate the only machinery by which we can efficiently secure our needs.'⁸

⁸ Opening Address to the Sanitary Conference called in Birmingham, 13 January 1875, C. W. Boyd, ed., *Speeches*, I, 59.

'There is no nobler sphere for those who have not the opportunity of engaging in imperial politics than to take part in municipal work, to the wise conduct of which they owe the welfare, the health, the comfort, and the lives of 400,000 people.'⁹

⁹ Proposing the Toast of the Corporation, 17 October 1874, C. W. Boyd, ed., *Speeches*, I, 49.

'Private charity is powerless, religious organisation can do nothing to remedy the evils which are so deep-seated in our social system . . .'
'I venture to say that it is only the community acting as a whole that can possibly deal with evils so deep-seated as those to which I have referred . . . It is our business to extend its functions and to see in what way its operations can be usefully enlarged.'

For my part I am convinced that the most fruitful field before reformers at the present time is to be found in an extension of the functions and authority of local government. Local government is near the people. Local government will bring you into contact with the masses. By its means you will be able to increase their comforts, to secure their health, to multiply the luxuries which they may enjoy in common, to carry out a vast co-operative system for mutual aid and support, to lessen the inequalities of our social system, and to raise the standard of all classes in the community.

¹⁰ 'State Socialism and the Moderate Liberals', 28 April 1885, C. W. Boyd, ed., *Speeches*, I, 163-5.

A.S. Wohl, *Endangered Lives. Public Health in Victorian Britain* (Methuen 1983)

Between 1848 and 1872 over £11,000,000 had been loaned to local authorities for sanitary purposes, but over the next eight years the Local Government Board sanctioned over twice that amount.⁶⁷ The importance of the work of the Local Government Board as an investigative and supervisory body for the sanction of government loans to local sanitary authorities, and its influence upon the steadily improving sanitary state of the nation, can be grasped by the picture presented by the following table:

Loans sanctioned by the Local Government Board for public health purposes: 1871-97
£

1871	267,562	1884	2,460,246
1872	602,271	1885	2,836,109
1873	980,153	1886	2,318,594
1874	1,457,496	1887	2,103,026
1875	1,973,105	1888	2,289,897
1876	2,757,323	1889	2,820,267
1877	4,380,369	1890	2,827,296
1878	3,097,857	1891	3,281,037
1879	3,308,032	1892	4,340,577
1880	2,932,899	1893	7,266,516
1881	2,526,190	1894	5,322,331
1882	2,458,288	1895	6,129,017
1883	2,338,573	1896	5,545,403
		1897	5,886,562

Local government expenditure a) as % of Total govt expenditure b) as % G.N.P.:

<u>Date</u>	<u>% of Total govt expenditure</u>	<u>% G.N.P</u>
1820	12.5	2.7
1870/71	32.0	3.0
1905	51.1	6.3
1918	5.7	3.0
1925	34.6	8.4
1935	38.8	9.6
1945	9.4	6.2
1950	23.4	9.1
1979	27.9	11.6

Sources:

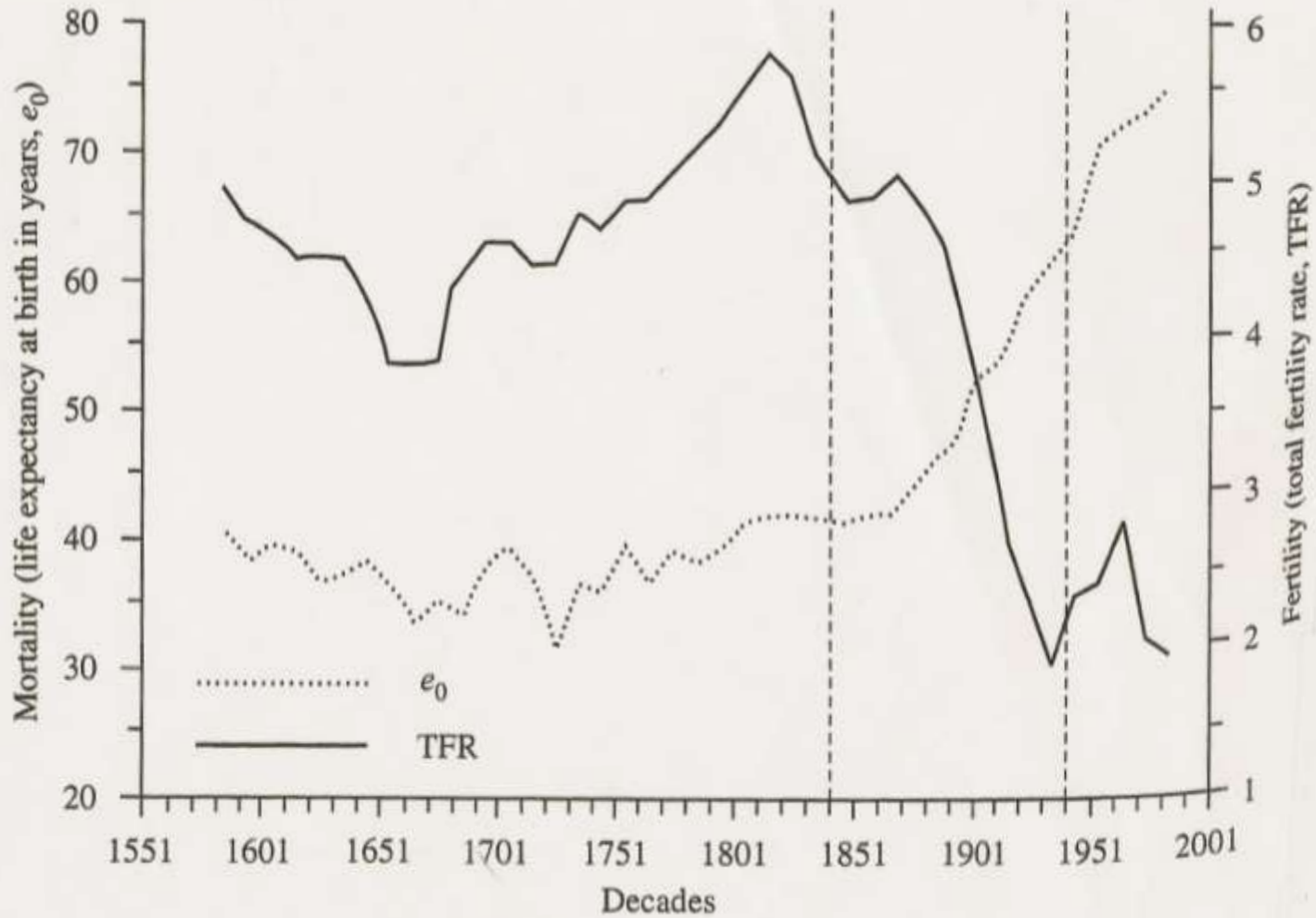
1820-1955: Peacock and Wiseman, *The growth of public expenditure in the United Kingdom* (2nd edition 1967), ch.3, esp Table 1 and p.39; and Appendi.: Table A-20.
1979: *Government expenditure plans* (HMSO)



Figure 14.5 Poor relief and pension spending as a share of national product, England/Wales and the UK, 1688-1987

SOURCE: P. LINDERT in Floud & McCloskey Economic History of Britain since 1700, Vol I (2nd Edn 1994) p. 383.

Source: D. Baines and R. Woods, 'Population and Regional Development', ch.2 in R. Floud and P. Johnson, eds, *The Cambridge Economic History of Modern Britain 1850-1939* (Cambridge 2003), p.28.



Health and Wealth

Studies in History and Policy



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