

AGEING AND OLDAGE in HISTORY

WHAT HAS CHANGED ?

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Themes

1. Did people live to old age in ‘the past’?
2. If so, did their families care for them more than today?
3. How is ‘now’ different from ‘then’?
4. What can the contrast suggest for current policy?

Did people in the past grow old?

Estimated average numbers aged 60 and over:

Ancient Rome: 6-8%

Medieval Europe: 5-8%

England 17th century: 6-8%

France, Spain, England 18th century: 10%

Stages of Life



Life expectancy at birth, UK

Year of birth	males	females
1841	39	42
1871	44	49
1901	51	58
1941	69.6	75.4
1961	73.3	79.1
1991	76	80.8
2001	78	82

Panic about ageing population

- 1920s-1940s, falling birth-rates, rising life expectancy.
Fear of ageing populations.
- 1950s-1970s, higher birth-rates, rising life expectancy.
- 1970s- 2001 falling birth-rates, rising life expectancy.
Fear of ageing populations.
- 2001- rising birth rate.

Thane 'The debate on the declining birth-rate in Britain: the 'menace of an ageing population, 1920s-50s' *Continuity and Change* 5, (2) 1990, 283-305.

Beveridge Report, 1942

- Concerned about ageing society
- Wanted to encourage delayed retirement
- Proposed flexible pension/retirement age.
Higher pension for later retirement
- Not adopted after the war
- Bismarck ,first state pensions, 1880s,
payable when unfit for work, not at fixed
age.

Healthy Life Expectancy (HLE)

		Averages				
Males		LE	HLE	Fem.	LE	HLE
At birth	1981	71	64.4		77	61
	2006	77	68.5		81.5	64
At 65	1981	13	10		17	12
	2006	17	13		20	14.5

Source: ONS 2010.

Marmot 2010

Fair Society, Healthy Lives

20% retire before state pension age due to ill-health

Life expectancy, Males

Tottenham: 71 years

Kensington and Chelsea; 88 years.

www.marmotreview.org.

Older people and their families

- Older people in N.W Europe preferred independence for as long as possible.
- Families supportive but did not normally share households.
- Exchange of support between generations
- But, in past many older people had no surviving children
- Or children might have migrated away
- Older people high proportion on poor relief

Older people and families 2

- More older people have surviving children in late 20th/early 21st century
- Welfare states have not displaced family support.

Health

- Ill-health and death, and associated costs, increasingly ‘compressed’ into later life
- Ageing accounts for 1.5% annual increase in NHS costs. Technology, drugs, salaries more significant.
- Age discrimination in health care.

Active Ageing: Live Longer and Prosper.

Jennifer Gill & David Taylor

UCL School of Pharmacy, 2012.

Benefits of an ageing population

- 1 in 3 working mothers rely on grandparents' child care
- 31% grandparents help grandchildren buy a home + other financial help (WRVS 2011)
- Unpaid care for family and others
- 30% over 60s volunteer regularly
- 28% VSO volunteers over 50 2008.

Benefits 2

- More working past state pension age
- Over 65s net contribution to economy (tax, spending, charity, unpaid care) £40bn ??
- (WRVS 2011)

OLD AGE IN 21ST CENTURY

