

When the Village Took Responsibility for Poverty: The Elizabethan Poor Law

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In British historical dramas, you often see scenes of poor people gathering in front of a village church to receive bread. That bread was not provided only out of someone's goodwill; it was paid for with taxes that the villagers contributed under the law. The starting point of this system is the "Elizabethan Poor Law." The Elizabethan Poor Law was a law passed by the English Parliament in 1601 that, instead of leaving help for the poor to church charity alone, made each parish collect taxes and take responsibility for its poor. In this article, we will look in turn at the background to the Eli