Discourses on the twin problems of poverty and crime are now put into historical context, beginning in the nineteenth century. The general consensus in the social sciences literature is that there are continuities between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. As one writer put it at the beginning of the final decade of the last millennium there was a return to the nineteenth century:

The stigmatisation of poverty, the battle over public and private control over essential utilities, the hope that voluntary services can provide from charity what the state will not provide by right, the battle over centralisation. Though the context has changed, there are many lessons to be learned from studying nineteenth century controversies. Some of the lessons are in danger of being forgotten (Jones, 1991: xi).

By reviewing some of these controversies several constant and novel themes are excavated, especially the interaction of behavioural and structural perspectives on poverty and crime. A recurring motif is that due to characterlogical deficiencies some disreputable individuals refuse to work and that this choice leads to dishonest, delinquent and disorderly behaviour. This perspective is of limited usefulness, though, because it overlooks the structural constraints on social action. However, it should be noted that what we now recognise as a structural perspective was much more difficult to conceive before the incremental growth of the social sciences during the nineteenth century.

The general thrust of the argument is that throughout history ideas about poverty and crime have been used by policy-makers to determine the general form and content of social policies. To illustrate this the
chapter is split up into three parts. Firstly, the main representations of poverty in nineteenth century British society are introduced. In the second section the discussion focuses on the issues of vagrancy, the Poor Laws and the ideologies supporting them. Finally, thinking about crime and the creation of the New Police in 1829 in London by the then Home Secretary Sir Robert Peel is examined. Originally this bureaucratic and professional organisation was established to prevent crime and maintain public order only in London, but similar units were set up throughout the rest of England and Wales in 1856.

**Nineteenth-century conceptions of the poor**

This chapter analyses the main conceptions of poverty, property crime and disorder in currency in nineteenth century British society, which were a response to socio-economic and political changes, especially the growth of industrial capitalism and urbanisation. The labels used to classify the poor at that time included the ‘residuum’, the ‘destructive’ and ‘dangerous classes’, the ‘lumpenproletariat’ and ‘vagrants’. It is argued in Chapter 3, that although the terminology may differ, these ideas would appear to be of universal relevance and are frequently reference points to aid the comprehension of social phenomena in other modern societies, namely the USA. For example, Macnicol has observed that:

> The concept of an intergenerational underclass displaying a high concentration of social problems has been reconstructed periodically over at least the past one hundred years, and while there have been important shifts of emphasis between each of these reconstructions there have also been striking continuities. Underclass stereotypes have always been a part of the discourse on poverty in advanced industrial societies (Macnicol, 1987: 296).

There are undoubtedly continuities but the perspectives underpinning these reconstructions change over time and space, and poverty and crime are represented in terms of an ongoing interaction between behavioural and structural factors.

One legacy of the nineteenth century is the distinction between the ‘worthy’ or ‘deserving’ and ‘unworthy’ or ‘undeserving’ poor and the ‘respectable’ and ‘rough’ working class (Graham and Clarke, 1996: 145–53; Morris, 1994: 2; Stedman-Jones, 1971: 151). The ‘worthy’, ‘deserving’ and ‘respectable’ include those who were poor through no fault of their own. Respectability is closely bound up with the work ethic, religious